



Conservation News

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Cover Crops- An old Friend, or...New State of the Art Technology



The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District encourages you to think about your personal responsibility to be a good steward of natural resources during its annual Stewardship Week celebration. The National Assn. of Conservation Districts has proclaimed April 24th-May 1 Stewardship Week marking the 56th year of the national event. The 2011 Stewardship Week is themed "Forests for People...More Than You Can Imagine" encouraging citizens, schools and communities to discover the importance of trees for agriculture, economic development, recreation, wildlife, and for healthy communities. Materials are available at www.nacdnet.org/stewardship/2011. Children in grades k-12 are invited to participate in the annual poster contest using the current theme. If you or someone you know would like to participate please call for more information.

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Barry Fisher

State Agronomist-Indiana NRCS

Many of us remember our parents or grandparents planting cover crops. It may have been clover, frost seeded into wheat, or wheat or rye planted on an erosive field after soybeans. For most of us, the blooming clover in late summer or the green field in the winter is an imprinted memory of well being and stewardship of the soil. But that alone won't pay the bills. As wheat yield improved or was dropped from the rotation and conservation tillage and CRP became the weapons of choice against soil erosion, cover crops were put on the shelf and by 1990 were practically nonexistent.

After a couple of decades of some of the greatest technological advancements in genetics, chemistry, bio-engineering, space age precision guidance systems and equipment developments, we are producing crops yields that were never before heard of, even at the most popular coffee shops.

All the while, a few dedicated conservation farmers continued a relentless pursuit of: continuous no-till, increasing organic matter, reducing soil compaction, zero erosion, improving water infiltration and drainage, improved nutrient cycling and yes experimenting with cover crops. Cover crops can take each of these goals further. What these individuals were

really achieving was a very high level of soil health and soil function. This change in the capacity of soil to function, when combined with the above technological advancements, has given these farmers the ability to reach far beyond sustainability. These fields have a greater ability to withstand our recent extreme weather cycles with consistently higher yields. A healthy soil can provide even greater yield potential to these advanced hybrids.

So... why cover crops? As scientists began to look at things like nitrate leaching, eutrophication of lakes, carbon sequestration, and renewable energy, an "old friend" began to emerge as one of the most effective technologies to hold nitrogen and phosphorus in the soil, capture CO2 from the atmosphere and store that carbon in the soil, and to harvest the suns energy continuously. Cover crops do all of these things, with the side benefit of feeding the vast array of organism that live, and work for us in the soil.

Many farm fields, which lay fallow from late summer to mid spring, have no mechanism to hold on to the nitrate nitrogen left over from the previous crop or released from soil organic matter through natural cycling. Conservatively, 40-60 lbs/ac of N can be lost each and every year

during these months. Various cover crops can save up to 90% of these losses. Then, much of this scavenged N is released the following summer for the next crop. Any that isn't released becomes food for soil organisms and building blocks for increased organic matter and organic Nitrogen. This becomes a soil bank account.

As the cover crops die in the late winter or spring, and roots begin to decay, they leave behind, a network of pores that are nutrient rich, highly organic, enhanced with air and water movement that are the path of least resistance, where we are sure the next crops roots will grow and flourish. This benefits compound each season in which the network of pores are left undisturbed. This is why a continuous no-till system with cover crops is such a great match.

By implementing this Conservation Cropping System, each season will raise these fields to a higher step on the ladder to soil health, increased soil function and overall improved productivity

The benefit to the rest of us is cleaner water and air, improved wildlife habitat, a greener winter landscape and yes a feeling of well being and stewardship of the soil.

SWCD Welcomes Ben Reinhart



Ben Reinhart has recently been hired by the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District as a Resource Conservation

Specialist.

Mr. Reinhart's responsibilities include coordination and implementation of a county natural resource program which includes providing technical and educational assistance to citizens and local government on soil, water, and natural resource

issues. In addition, he will continue work on the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Management Planning Project. Ben can be reached by email at benjamin.reinhart@in.nacdnet.net

Ben is a graduate of Purdue University.

Water Quality Sampling Under Way for the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Management Planning Project

Water quality testing has begun in the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed. The testing is part of a 319 Clean Water Act Grant to create a comprehensive watershed management plan (WMP) for the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed. The plan will address the water quality impairments currently documented in the stream and those that are found during the testing to preserve the South Fork's current diversity and beauty.

Testing is being conducted by Commonwealth Biomonitoring and the Clinton County SWCD. Sampling for various parameters is occurring at sixteen different sites along the South Fork Wildcat Creek and its tributaries (see map below). Parameters being checked include: Atrazine, Chemistry

(such as nitrate+nitrite and total phosphorus), Flow, Biological Monitoring, Habitat Assessments, and *E. coli*. All water quality sampling sites are located at bridges with easy access and where entering private land is minimal. So, please do not be alarmed if you see us out sampling!

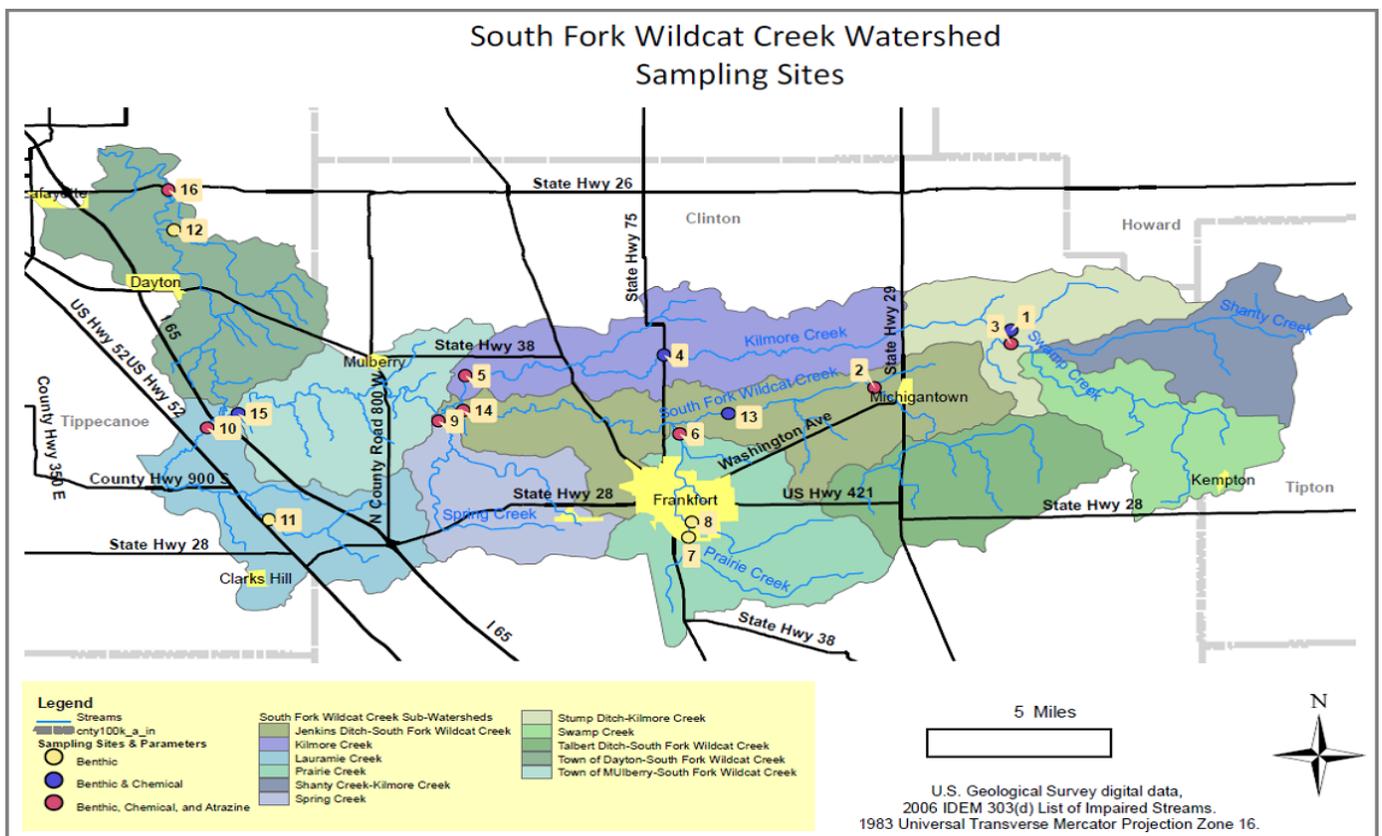
By conducting water quality sampling before the watershed management plan is implemented, we will be able to target the types of conservation practices that are needed to get the most improvement in water quality and select areas that require more extensive restoration. This also allows us the ability to estimate the financial amount required to install the most effective conservation practices; in turn allowing us to be more

competitive when applying for future grant funding.

The WMP that is created as a result of our Partnerships and community input will belong to those who create it.

We are grateful for the talents and experience that our community provides, and would appreciate any assistance or participation. Contact Ben Reinhart at the CCSWCD today to learn more about this unique project or to provide feedback on what your concerns are for the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed!

The vision of the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Steering Committee is a clear, natural and inviting stream highly regarded for recreation and wildlife opportunities.



South Fork Wildcat Creek & Kilmore Creek Cost-Share Program: Nearing Completion

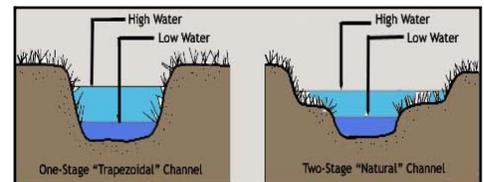
The South Fork Wildcat Creek & Kilmore Creek Cost-Share Program began in October 2008 and is scheduled to wrap up this summer. This program has offered technical and financial assistance to area landowners and operators on the installation of conservation practices within the South Fork Wildcat and Kilmore Creek watersheds.

One example of this will be the installation of what is called a two-stage ditch. This practice mimics the natural processes of larger streams and rivers that results in a ditch that is good for both agriculture and the environment while also requiring less maintenance. A two-stage ditch

differs from a traditional trapezoidal ditch by introducing low lying benches along the waterway that act as a floodplain for the channel. When the water levels in a two-stage ditch begin to raise the flood water spills out over the benches. This type of modification effectively increases the potential storage capacity of the ditch reducing the amount of time that the ditch is out of its banks. Also when flood waters occupy the wide, low lying benches the velocity of the water in that ditch is reduced limiting bank erosion and channel instability. This all adds up to a ditch that is more stable (i.e. less maintenance), can help reduce flooding issues, and is

environmentally friendly.

While little financial assistance as part of the SFK Cost-Share Program is remaining there are opportunities to receive technical and financial assistance as part of USDA programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). If you are interested in learning more about two-stage ditches call us at 765-659-1223 ext. 3.



Water Conserving Rain Barrels

A rain barrel is a container used to collect and store rainwater from your roof that can then be used later to water plants, wash your car, or add to a swimming pool. Ordinarily the water would simply be diverted to a storm drain or out onto your property. This "soft water" contains no chlorine, lime or calcium, so your plants will love it. Other benefits include protecting the environment from driveway and yard run-off, saving money by lowering your household water bill, and reducing the amount of water possibly flowing into storm sewers.

The SWCD is currently taking orders for rain barrels. The 55 gallon barrels come in Blue, Black, Terra-Cotta and Gray. Each one comes with a hose shutoff on the front which accepts a standard garden hose thread. A fitting with a cap towards the bottom is for linking multiple barrels together, if you wish. Towards the top is an overflow fitting and cap where the homeowner can install a short section of an old garden hose to direct the water to a more acceptable location after the barrel is full. This overflow eventually lowers

the water back below the screen on top of the lid. Plastic fittings are used because brass and steel do not interface well with plastic barrels, which could leak.

The hole(s) in the top is/are covered with residential grade aluminum screening which is strong enough to keep shingle grit, leaves, debris, small animals and mosquitoes from getting into the barrel.

The homeowner has a couple options to redirect the water from the downspout. Both involve cutting the downspout off a few inches above the height of the rain barrel. One can then add an inexpensive flexible tube available from a hardware store or reattach the bottom angle piece off of the cut off downspout so that it points towards the top of the barrel.

Homeowners should place their barrel on a pedestal approximately 12 inches high, which allows easy use of a watering can without unscrewing the top and it also increases water pressure. This pedestal can be made out of treated

wood or concrete blocks.

The cost of the rain barrel is \$70.00 (including tax). If you are interested in ordering one, please send an e-mail message to leah.harden@in.nacdn.net or call the office at 765-659-1223 ext. 3. Please indicate the number you would like to have and the color, if there is a preference. When they are available, we will contact you to arrange a pick up time and for payment. Orders will be taken until May 15, 2011.



Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) Funded in the Wildcat Creek

The Mississippi River basin is a critical ecosystem in the U.S. - equaling 41% of the country. The basin drains to the Mississippi River which carries an average of 436,000 tons of sediment each day to the Gulf of Mexico. Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, are carried down-stream with the sediment and cause water quality issues both locally and within the hypoxic zone of the Gulf.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed the MRBI to address these water quality problems. The goal is to encourage producers to voluntarily implement conservation systems that avoid, control, and trap field runoff; protect, restore, and enhance wetlands; maintain agricultural productivity; and improve wildlife habitat.

Nationally, \$50 million was available in financial assistance through the MRBI-CCPI (Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative) to eligible partnership projects in 41 focus areas. The Greater Wabash River Resource Conservation & Development Council (GWRRC&D) partnered with the Carroll, Clinton, Howard, Tipton, and Tippecanoe County SWCDs and a host of others to submit an application to bring **2.25 million dollars** to our counties over three years. Through the Environmental

Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), producers will be able to apply for funding to install conservation practices that will benefit both them and the environment.

In fiscal year 2011, \$618,906 will be available to landowners in the Wildcat Creek watershed through the EQIP program to install practices such as: Residue and Tillage Management, Waste Utilization, Cover Crops, Grassed Waterways, and Nutrient Management. Through the WHIP program, \$90,879 will be available in 2011 to install practices to enhance wildlife habitat such as wetland creation and restoration and wildlife plantings.

What makes the MRBI-CCPI EQIP and WHIP different? The planning committee worked hard to make the MRBI-CCPI attractive so that as many conservation practices as possible could be installed by our producers at a low cost. Instead of applications competing against others in the state, you'll only be competing against others in the Wildcat Creek focus area (making the likelihood that you'll receive funding higher). Additionally, the partners involved in the initiative are committed to making the application process easier for you by assisting participants in meeting

local, state, and federal regulatory requirements; assisting with conservation planning; and even assisting you, the producer, during the application process.

When you look out across the bountiful fields of Clinton County each morning as you prepare to begin an honest day's work, it's difficult to imagine that the management activities you're doing here impact other people's livelihoods in the Gulf. But, the fact is that it does. And, the MRBI-CCPI is a great opportunity to make a change to your management practices that will help preserve your land for future generations, maintain and improve your productivity, and be economical to you while lessening our impact downstream.

For more information please contact the
USDA Service Center at 659-1223
extension 3.

Don't miss out on this great opportunity! The 2011 sign-up period ends February 25th. Call your local USDA Service Center to make an appointment.

NRCS Notes

Program Decision Support System

RFF recently completed an online tool to help landowners find appropriate federal programs for their property and conservation goals. The Conservation Programs Decision Support System (DSS) was built with support from a Conservation Innovation Grant from USDA, NRCS. Check it out at www.icaer.com.

Conservation Compliance

Do you intend to clear timber to create or

expand existing cropland?

- Are you converting a pasture field to cropland?
- Are you planning drainage projects such as installing new tile lines or grading wet spots in a field?
- Are you planning on clearing a fence row?

These are Highly Erodible and Wetland provision questions that need to be considered

each year by producers to assure that they remain eligible for USDA benefits.

If you have questions or concerns about something that you plan to do on your farm that may jeopardize your eligibility for benefits, please contact your local Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service representative BEFORE you begin any work.

Clinton County USDA Service Center can be reached at 659-1223 ext 3 (NRCS) or ext. 2 (FSA).

Soil Health and Productivity Workshop—March 17, 2011

On March 17, 2011 Soil and Water Conservation Districts from the West Central portion of the state will host a workshop on Soil Health and Productivity at the Beef House near Covington Indiana.

Ray Archuleta, Conservation Agronomist at the NRCS East National Technology Center in Greensboro, North Carolina will be the keynote speaker. Ray teaches soil quality and the principles of agro-ecology throughout the country. Joining him will be Barry Fisher, Agronomist, Indiana NRCS and Hans Kok, Ph.D, CCA, Indiana Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative.

Topics will include :

- Why Soil Quality is Important to a Farmer
- Managing Carbon in Nitrogen—Ratios in Cropping Systems
- The Importance of a Living Root
- Soil Compaction
- Practical Cover Crop Integration

Soil quality is the key to soil productivity. Conservation Cropping Systems are said to improve soil quality over time. We look at strategies to “jump start” the natural biological processes within the system by integrating cover crops into crop rotations and nutrient management systems. By using a focused approach

to improve the soil quality, we can increase overall production capabilities while enhancing the environment. Soil Quality is the foundation of any cropping system.

The cost to attend is \$10.00 and reservations are required and must be placed by March 14th. Please call the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District at 765-659-1223 extension 3 or email leah.harden@in.nacdnet.net to request a registration form.



Financial Assistance Available to Plug and Cap Abandoned Water Wells

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District has been awarded a Clean Water Indiana grant from the Indiana State Department of Agriculture to provide a cost-share incentive to rural landowners who have identified and would like to plug and cap abandoned water wells on their property. The SWCD may provide cost-share at a rate of 75% of

actual costs up to \$500.00 per well. Decommissioning of the well may not begin until an application has been received and approved by the SWCD Board of Supervisors.

Abandoned water wells provide a direct conduit to groundwater, which is the source of drinking water for virtually all homes in Clinton County. These wells present a potentially

serious threat to groundwater quality and some cases may present a physical safety hazard where a child or pet may fall into a well. Plugging an abandoned well can eliminate these risks on your property.

For more information about this cost-share program contact the SWCD office at 765-659-1223 ext. 3.

Cover Crop Cost-Share Program

The Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) recently announced a new cost-share program available to assist producers who are interested in incorporating cover crops into their cropping system. The funds are being made available through the Indiana State Department of Agriculture Clean Water Indiana grants program.

Eligible landowners may receive a 75% cost-share up to \$20.00 per

acre to establish an acceptable winter cover crop. The maximum number of acres per approved applicant is forty acres. If aerial seeding, a minimum acreage requirement of 40 acres has been established to allow for the aerial seeding. Cost-share funds are limited and will be allocated on a competitive basis. Seeding must occur in late summer/fall 2011 in accordance with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field guide standards for seeding of cover crops.

Applications for the Cover Crop cost-share program are currently being accepted and will continue through June 30, 2011. Applicants will be notified once all applications have been reviewed and approved by the SWCD Board of Supervisors. In June, the SWCD will host a breakfast for producers to learn more about cover cropping practices. Time and location have not yet been established.



IDEM's NEW Website Focuses on Helping Hoosiers Reduce Non-Point Source Pollution

One of the biggest challenges to Indiana's water quality occurs when storm water washes chemicals, soil erosion and bacteria into our lakes and rivers. The polluted run-off comes from construction sites, parking lots, farms, roads and even backyards.

Because the correlation between human activity and effect on water quality can be confusing, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) launched the "Stop the Rubber Duckies" campaign to educate Hoosiers about this type of pollution—known as nonpoint source pollution—and how to prevent it.

The capstone of the "Stop the Rubber Duckies" campaign is the creation of a one-stop shop website, www.watersheds.IN.gov, which offers

a multi-faceted collection of information. Hoosiers who are new to watershed management can find details about what causes nonpoint source pollution, what is being done to address it, and ways they can be a part of the solution. Local officials, volunteer groups and individuals who are ready to get involved in local watershed management can link to numerous resources, including a toolkit for implementing local programs, data and reports on streams in their communities and information about grants. With over 350 pages of information on watersheds and nonpoint source pollution, this comprehensive site can answer basic questions as well as more specialized inquiries.

"The watersheds.IN.gov website is designed to help IDEM staff and Hoosiers access quality-assured data, assist one another in understanding the sources of problems, share information and experience in solving common problems, and build expertise for successful watershed management," said IDEM commissioner Thomas Easterly. "Our staff in the office of Water Quality have worked hard to compile the largest state website devoted to nonpoint source pollution, and we will continue working to make it a valuable resource for local officials, community groups and individuals involved in watershed management."

The website emphasizes education and guides all Hoosiers in positive steps to improve the quality of water in their own backyards.

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Hoosier Riverwatch Workshops Offered

The Clinton & Howard County Soil & Water Conservation Districts are partnering to host a Hoosier Riverwatch Workshop on Tuesday, June 14 & Thursday, June 16, 5:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Hoosier Riverwatch is a statewide program that supports volunteer water quality monitoring of local waterways. Workshop participants will learn about stream ecology and tools for assessing water quality through several fun activities both indoors and outdoors. Teachers and home school educators may be especially interested in this workshop as many of the activities can be adapted for

use with all grade levels and are cross-referenced with state teaching standards. Participants should plan to attend both sessions. The workshop is free of charge and open to individuals of high school age or older.

The workshop will be led by Riverwatch Instructors Leah Harden and Sarah Brichford. All activities will take place at the Kirkendall Nature Center in Kokomo's Jackson Morrow Park. There is no fee for the workshop however registration is required. To register, please call the Clinton County SWCD at (765) 659-1223 ext. 3.

A second workshop will be offered September 10, 2011 at Camp George C. Culloom.



Septic Care and Maintenance Workshop Planned

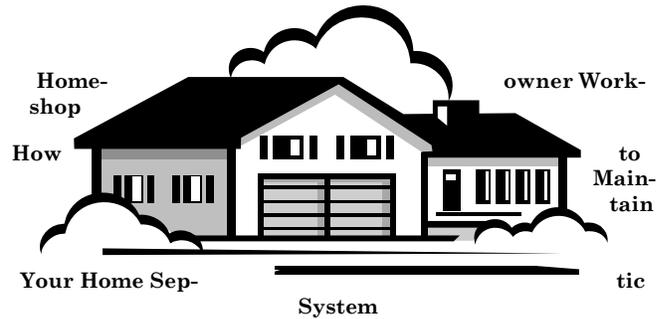
Did You Know?

- That the average home finger system should last 20-25 years
- That poor care and maintenance can reduce this to as little as 10 years

Your home septic system is an major investment. This workshop will help you:

- Develop a regular maintenance schedule
- Learn what materials can seriously damage your septic system if poured down the drain
- Learn the truth about septic system additives
- Troubleshoot septic system problems

Call to make a reservation to attend—765-659-1223 extension



March 16, 2011

6:30 PM

Kempton Community Center (National Guard Armory)

Kempton, IN

Sponsored by the Clinton and Tipton SWCD's

Wildcat Creek Sites Added to the Spring Wabash Sampling Blitz

Volunteer to be part of the second annual Spring Wabash Sampling Blitz this April! Join 250 volunteers to collect a snapshot of the water quality of the Wabash River, **Wildcat Creek**, and their tributaries. Since the fall of 2009, volunteers throughout the Region of the Great Bend of the Wabash River watershed volunteered each spring and fall to complete a snapshot of water quality throughout the watershed. ***This spring, we're expanding to include sample sites within the Wildcat Creek watershed.***

Volunteers monitor temperature, water cloudiness (turbidity), nutrient levels, and pathogen concentrations. Volunteer with a friend, your family, scout troop, school group or alone and we'll assign you a partner. Volunteer to sample your local stream, your favorite canoe spot, or try a new stream within the Wabash River or Wildcat Creek watersheds.

How it works? Each volunteer is assigned to a staging or starting location. Staging locations are assigned as sampling slots are available on a first volunteer, first assigned basis. Arrive with your partners to be assigned a group of sampling sites—sites are assigned based on location, choice and selected access difficulty ranging from easy access (walk right in sites) to where you will need to channel your inner mountain goat (difficult). Our staging location volunteers will provide all sample collection equipment and instructions, maps, and driving directions. They will not provide you with waders, boots, dry clothes, bug spray, ivy off, or food.

What now? Don your waders or knee boots and spend approximately two hours wading through three to five stream sample sites. At each site, you will need to identify an appropriate access point. After

entering the stream, wade to the center and fill your provided sample bottles. Then, measure stream temperature and water cloudiness with the provided thermometer and turbidity tube. Once complete, photograph the stream and any unique or interesting features and travel to your next site. Once you have sampled all of your streams, return to your staging location to filter your samples for laboratory analysis, measure water quality with provided test strips and download your photos.

Want more information? Visit www.wabashriver.net/wabash-sampling-blitz to view videos that detail sampling, review previous results and read about past events. Volunteer to be part of the second annual Wabash (and Wildcat!) Sampling Blitz online at <http://tiny.cc/SpringBlitz2011>. OR call the Clinton County SWCD office to learn how you may become involved!!

**CLINTON COUNTY SOIL AND
WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

860 S. Prairie Ave., Suite 1
Frankfort, IN 46041
765-659-1223 extension 3

Would you like to receive future newsletters
in your inbox? Please email
leah.harden@in.nacdnet.net

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SWCD Annual Meeting—Wednesday, March 2nd
Keynote Speaker, Tom Bechman, Editor/Writer, Indiana Prairie Farmer

Please plan to attend the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation Districts' annual meeting and dinner on **Wednesday, March 2nd beginning at 6 PM** at the Clinton County Fairgrounds in the Community Building. A complimentary catered dinner prepared by the Extension Homemakers Council will be served. The public is invited to attend. There is no cost for attending, however, reservations are required and are being taken until February 25th, and may be placed by calling the SWCD office at 659-1223 extension 3. If the meeting is cancelled due to hazardous travel conditions the meeting will be held March 16th.

The District will be highlighting accomplishments from the past year, providing updates and

recognizing several individuals for their conservation accomplishments. USDA staff will be providing timely updates on current Farm Bill conservation programs.

Tom Bechman, editor/writer for *Indiana Prairie Farmer*

magazine will be the keynote speaker. Tom is nationally known for his coverage of Midwest agronomy, conservation, no-till farming, farm management, farm safety and high-tech farming. His byline appears monthly in many of the 18 state and regional farm magazines published by Farm Progress.



SWCD Supervisor Election

At the 2011 SWCD Annual Meeting one supervisor will be elected. Dustin Johnson who resides in Johnson Township is seeking election for his first term on the Board. Dustin received a B.S. in Agronomy from Purdue University and is seeking his M.S. in Soil Fertility. He and his wife Abby have a custom hay business and grow corn and soybeans.

SWCD Business Meetings are public meetings and are held the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Farm Bureau Insurance Building beginning at 6pm.

At the heart of Tom's stories is an appreciation for family farmers that stems from a childhood growing up on a small Midwestern tenant dairy farm.