

- ▶ FISH SALE.....2
- ▶ ELECTION & ANNUAL MEETING ..2
- ▶ GRAZING.....4
- ▶ NRCS PROGRAMS ..5
- ▶ FIELD DAY SERIES. 6
- ▶ STAR7-9
- ▶ CONSERVATION CROPPING SEMINAR (CCS). 10



○ DECEMBER | ○ 2022 |

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Champaign County
Soil & Water
Conservation District

SOIL & WATER *focus*

WORKING TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL RESOURCES
BUILDING ON THE PAST - PRESERVING FOR THE FUTURE

Photos by Erin Gundy, Aidan Walton, and Renee Weitekamp

ANNUAL MEETING AND DIRECTOR ELECTION—FEBRUARY 3RD

Please join us on **February 3, 2023**, at **12:00 pm** for Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District’s **80th Annual Meeting!** We are excited to host this event at the **Lake of the Woods Pavilion, 1702 East Prairie View Road, in Mahomet.** Along with a catered lunch, an overview of District accomplishments, and a keynote presentation, the Annual Meeting will include a short business meeting and the election of 2 CCSWCD directors. All persons, firms, or corporations who hold a legal title or are in legal possession of any land lying within the boundaries of Champaign County are eligible to vote.



This year’s theme is **“Good Habits for Planet & Profit.”** Our featured presentation will discuss striving to optimize land and water resources for both business and environment. The key to advancing conservation is understanding the link between protecting natural resources while aiming to increase profit, so we look forward to exploring this idea. Read more about the Annual Meeting on page 3.

To attend, please **RSVP** to (217) 352-3536 ext. 3 or info@ccswcd.com by **January 27th!**

SWCD Board Members:

Steve Stierwalt, Chairman
Joe Rothermel, Vice-Chairman
Eric Suits, Secretary-Treasurer
Eleanor Blackmon, Director
Lennie Heiser, Director
Kenneth Kesler, Associate Director

SWCD Staff:

Clay Bess, PCM Ops. Manager
Morgan Cauble, C.C.
Ivan A. Dozier, R.C.
Erin Gundy, STAR Ops. Manager
Bruce Henrikson, STAR Asst. Coord.
Aidan Walton, PCM Spec.
Renee Weitekamp, A.C.

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www.facebook.com/champaigncswcd

SPRING FISH SALE

The Fall 2022 Fish Sale was a success! We appreciate all of those who placed an order. Plans are underway to hold a Spring 2023 Fish Sale with Andry's Fish Farm once again. We expect the sale to take place in March or April. More information and the order form will be posted on our website and mailed to customers once the dates are finalized.



PHEASANTS FOREVER UPDATE

It can be confusing to understand some of the Conservation Reserve Program's rules and regulations at times. There are changes and decisions being made behind the scenes to better tailor all the different practices into their own objectives. Take CP42, better known by its buzz name of Pollinator, for an example. When this program started, it was very popular! From 2015-2017, there were 102,427.43ac enrolled that greatly increased wildlife populations such as pheasants, deer, turkeys, and pollinating insects here in East Central IL. It was so popular that in order to keep funds available, there was an acreage cap put in place at no more than 10ac or 10% of a tract. This came with a negative side for contracts about to come up for re-enrollment, any field larger than 10ac no longer fits the requirements of CP42. This would affect 62% (63,358.91ac) of the pollinator acres in the state.

However, these acres won't be lost! On October 1st of this year, the State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE/CP38) program was opened up to be statewide. Historically this program was selective to small areas such as the Grand Prairie region or the Southern Glacial Till regions of the state. The Illinois USDA decided to expand these regions to allow for full state access of this program. This is a huge leap for habitat because the CP38s have a wide variety of sub-practices. Within this program, a landowner can have a prairie, an oak savannah, or even a wetland all on the same field. The diversity and possibilities open up a wide range of wildlife habitat and management. I really foresee SAFE taking over as the new Buzz Word for CRP and thanks to smart decisions within the USDA, everyone across the State can enjoy this practice. — Dallas Glazik, Senior Farm Bill Biologist, Pheasants Forever

BONEYARD CREEK COMMUNITY DAY—APRIL 22ND

The 16th annual Boneyard Creek Community Day is scheduled for Saturday, April 22nd, 2023. All are invited to participate in this event and celebrate Earth Day in an impactful way! This event allows local residents to join forces and protect the waterways of Champaign County and beyond. Volunteers will remove litter and naturalize streams while learning that healthy streams are vital for a healthy community. Litter not only looks bad; it clogs storm drains, which causes local flooding. It also travels into receiving streams and harms aquatic life. This event serves as a reminder to be a responsible citizen and take pride in the natural resources of our community. Following the event, volunteers regroup at Scott Park in Champaign for food, fun, and educational activities. Sign up for the Boneyard Creek Community Day and help put trash in its place!

For more information, please visit boneyardcreek.org. In the event of rain, the event will be held on Saturday, April 29th, 2023.



RAINFALL SIMULATOR UNIT

Over the past year, CCSWCD staff have been busy traveling with the Rainfall Simulator Unit (RSU) to various events. Presentations were given to elementary students at the IEPA Earth Stewardship Day in Springfield and the Livingston County Ag Expo in Pontiac. The RSU was also demonstrated to teachers at the Ag Literacy Event in Danville. The goal of the presentations is to explain how water falls on soil and dislodges it, causing soil erosion. Bare soil is compared with various levels of residue to show that farming practices that emphasize residue management can truly reduce soil erosion and impact wildlife habitat. This is also compared to urban runoff so all audiences can relate to the presentation.

We can develop a program to fit various groups and bring the RSU to do the demonstration, including to schools, field days, meetings, etc. If you would like to schedule the unit for use with a group, please contact our office!



*IEPA Earth Stewardship Day at the Illinois State Fairgrounds.
Left to right: Brian Rennecker, IDOA; Morgan Cauble, CCSWCD; Erin Gundy, CCSWCD; and Kristi Jones, IDOA.*



ANNUAL MEETING—CONTINUED

Our upcoming Annual Meeting's keynote presentation will feature a representative of **HabiTerre**, an exciting spin-out of the University of Illinois created to overcome the limitations of agriculture by providing key insights about natural resources and crop production. Through the use of remote sensing and artificial intelligence at the field level, HabiTerre offers valuable information to producers. In line with this year's theme of "Good Habits for Planet & Profit," our esteemed speaker will share data-driven insights on how to optimize land and water management while striving toward financial success.



The CCSWCD board and staff are excited to present the following awards: Champaign County Board Member, **Chris Stohr, Friend of Conservation**; **Rademacher Farms, Conservation Innovator**; and NRCS State Conservationist, **Ivan N. Dozier, Conservation Legacy**. Mr. Stohr has supported conservation at the local government level as well as individually as a geologist and agronomist. The Rademacher family has acted as strong advocates of conservation and has helped educate peers through various District projects. Mr. Dozier is retiring after many years of service with NRCS, and his dedication to conservation has made positive impacts statewide. We hope you will join us to honor the award recipients and recognize their outstanding work.

COST SHARE WITH PARTNERS FOR CONSERVATION

Contact us if you are interested in up to 75% Cost-Share
for Cover Crops, Strip-till, No-till, Pollinators, & More!

REGENERATIVE GRAZING EDUCATION—RECAP & UPCOMING EVENTS

Since 2020, the CCSWCD, the Land Connection, U of I Extension, IL Soy, Terra Elossa, and Pasture Project have been working together to educate local conservation professionals, landowners, and farmers about regenerative grazing in East Central IL, focused primarily on the Embarras River Watershed. This group of organizations, known as the Embarras Grazing Partnership (EGP), was awarded a North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Professional Development Program grant to support 2022-2023 work. In June 2022, 35 individuals attended on-site presentations about forage health, paddock design, multi-species grazing, watering, and fencing at Burnt Hill Cattle Co. near Dahlgren, IL. During the field days, the EGP worked with a videographer to create educational videos about the topics covered. Keep an eye out for links to those videos on the EGP page of our website: ccswcd.com/egp.

All field day attendees received many resources, one of which is the Regenerative Grazing Guide from the field day that is open access. Visit the following link to view the resources: <https://thelandconnection.org/resource/regenerative-grazing-guide/>.

Upcoming Online Office Hours: Beginning in December of 2022, the EGP is hosting a series of online Office Hours to educate conservation professionals, farmers, and landowners on a variety of regenerative grazing topics. This format allows attendees to virtually join for a casual, yet informative conversation with experienced peers. These Office Hours will continue through April of 2023. Visit our website to register for the series or an individual session.

Upcoming Winter Regenerative Grazing Field Days: A spin-off from the June field days, the EGP will host a two-day event covering winter-focused regenerative grazing topics in Montgomery County, IL in February 2023. Sessions will cover winter herd health management, winter forage management and cover crop grazing, winter infrastructure, and more. Visit our website as February approaches for more information and to register for the event.

Contact Erin at Erin.Bush@il.nacdnet.net if you would like to be added to EGP's outreach list or have any questions about upcoming events.

Check out the following websites to join regenerative grazing communities to keep learning!

Midwest Grazing Exchange: <https://www.midwestgrazingexchange.com/>

Regenerative Ag Idea Network (REGAIN): <https://regenerativeagideanetwork.org/>



Visit our website to register for upcoming events and view grazing resources.



Photos: Erin Gundy and Mallory Krieger

NRCS CAN HELP YOU WITH YOUR FARMING OPERATION

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides cost-share for projects, practices or the development of comprehensive activity plans associated with row crops, specialty crops, grazing operations, confined livestock facilities, forest lands and more! Some common practices around Champaign include Forest Management Plans and Implementation, Pollinator Habitat, High Tunnels, Nutrient Management, Cover Crops, Waterways, Terraces, Grade Stabilization, Livestock Pipeline, Heavy Use Areas, and much more! **The application deadline is January 6th, 2023.**

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides cost incentives to agricultural producers to adopt new strategies, make temporary changes to their operation, or enhance existing conservation cover that could improve their environmental footprint. The program is a 5-year commitment and provides annual payments each year up to \$200,000 over the life of the contract. Practices include multispecies cover crops, precision nutrient application technology, modifications to nutrient management, pollinator habitat, reduced tillage, soil health modifications, filter strips, pollinator plantings and numerous other practices. **The application deadline is February 3rd, 2023.**

Submitting an application does not commit you!

Contact Champaign County NRCS for one-on-one assistance or to complete an application.

Nick Schneider, Soil Conservationist
(217) 352-3536 ext. 123 - Nicholas.Schneider@usda.gov

Jason O'Brien, Soil Conservationist
(217) 352-3536 ext. 3 - Jason.OBrien@usda.gov

John Bell, District Conservationist
217-352-3536 ext. 114 - John.Bell@usda.gov

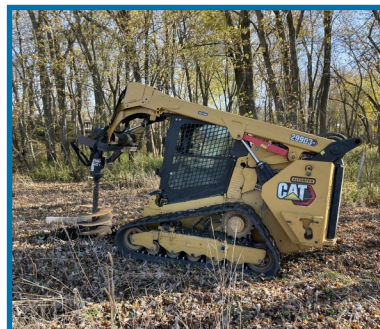


As a cooperator of NRCS, SWCD must provide reasonable accommodation to USDA customers with disabilities, where appropriate. Individuals requiring reasonable accommodations for any NRCS or SWCD programs or services should contact Carzella Pritchett, Illinois NRCS' Disability Emphasis Program Manager at (217) 353-6651 directly. Determinations on requests for reasonable accommodations will be made on a case-by-case basis.

ST. JOSEPH WETLAND

New Amenities: Through support from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation and Magnolia Land Partners, LLC, the CCSWCD was able to establish a new informational sign at the St. Joseph Wetland. It details the history of the site and the environmental importance of wetlands across Illinois. The sign dedicates the wetland site to Kenneth Kesler, a longtime conservationist and CCSWCD Director, whose passion is education and the protection of natural resources. There have also been a set of viewing binoculars recently installed at the site. They are available for the public to view the various flora and fauna in their natural habitat. Also newly installed are commemorative pavers to acknowledge supporters of the wetland restoration efforts. We hope you get the opportunity to visit the wetland, see the new amenities, and enjoy the beauty of the landscape.

Tree Planting: In 2018, a variety of trees and shrubs were planted on the southern 27 acres to restore the area back to a forested wetland. This autumn, an additional 100 trees were replanted in the area. This work was done in partnership with Magnolia Land Partners, LLC, and Bruce Stickers, former CCSWCD Resource Conservationist and member of Lincoln Heritage Resource Conservation & Development.

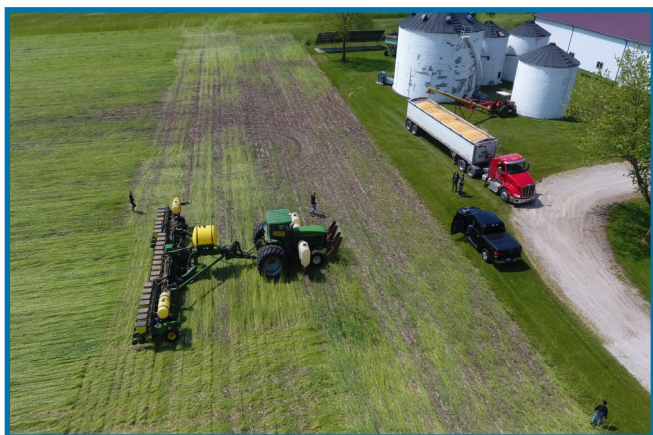


FARMER-LED CONSERVATION & WATERSHED PROTECTION MINI-GRANT FIELD DAY SERIES

Funded by a mini-grant from Mississippi State University (MSU), the CCSWCD hosted a series of field days throughout the spring of 2022. The first event was held at Rohl Farms near Homer, IL in March. Dr. Shalamar Armstrong, Associate Professor in the Department of Agronomy at Purdue University, gave a research presentation titled, “Next Generation Cover Crop Management to Increase Cash Crop Production, Water Quality, Soil Health, and Carbon Farming.” Dr. Richard Roth, a postdoc in Armstrong’s lab, also gave a presentation focused on cereal rye performance and nutrient concentration changes with biomass level.



The second event was a come-and-go field day held at Cornelius Farms near Penfield, IL. Eric and Frank Rademacher demonstrated cover crop termination and soybean planting with a roller-crimper attached to their planter. Attendees were invited to take a ride in the tractor to view the cereal rye termination firsthand and ask questions of experienced conservationists. While attendees were invited to arrive and leave at any time, CCSWCD staff stayed on site throughout the day to distribute informational materials and answer questions.



Join us for the 2023 Field Day Series!

We hope you enjoyed this field day series, and we look forward to hosting more events next year through another grant from MSU! We would appreciate your feedback on what events you would like to see. Scan the QR code to the right to take our 2023 Field Day Series Survey. The survey can also be accessed through this link: <https://forms.gle/uZ5nquRgPWZGHxpx6>



Thank you for your participation. We hope we see you at upcoming events!

SAVING TOMORROW'S AGRICULTURE RESOURCES (STAR) UPDATE

This past summer, STAR released the Crop Year 2021 STAR Annual Report. The report features a summary of conservation efforts, environmental impacts, and growth of the STAR initiative. Read the full report on the STAR website!

In July 2022, IL STAR launched Crop Year 2022. Farmers and landowners can complete conservation evaluations via the STAR Web App or by PDF from now until January 31, 2023.

In preparation for Crop Year 2022, several updates were made to the STAR Web App to improve users' experience. For the farmer app, a 'split fields' function was created to allow farmers and landowners to adjust field boundaries with a few clicks. Additionally, adjustments to the Improvement Plan function were made for more accurate scoring predictions. For the admin/licensee app, the dashboard now displays total acres, fields, and participants enrolled in STAR as a live counter throughout the crop year. Verification and Outcomes summaries will be available by the end of the crop year for each county SWCD to easily access STAR estimated outcomes and promote their efforts. The STAR Web App offers farmers and landowners an efficient way to evaluate multiple fields seamlessly on their phones, desktops, or tablets. It allows users to create customized field improvement plans, connect with local resources and technical assistance, and share their STAR Ratings with their online communities with a few simple clicks.

STAR continues to work with partners on projects and find funding opportunities. In spring 2022, USDA opened the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities funding opportunity. Although CCSWCD's STAR-focused application was not accepted, STAR Affiliate Colorado Department of Agriculture's application was accepted. Their proposal includes a generous subaward for the CCSWCD to continue building a National STAR support system for STAR Affiliates and partners in and beyond Illinois. Additionally, the University of Missouri Center for Regenerative Agriculture proposal included funding for the Missouri Assoc. of SWCDs to lift Missouri STAR. STAR looks forward to working with partners to continue expanding STAR's impact!

Additionally, STAR is piloting a Pay-for-Performance model with a supply chain partner in Macon and Douglas counties that pays farmers for improved STAR Ratings, or consistent 5-STAR Ratings. We hope that such incentives will grow and be available for more geographic areas in the future as we develop additional partnerships. We hope all farmers participate in STAR now to establish a baseline for potential incentives in the future!



Keep up with the latest on STAR: starfreetool.com

Facebook and Twitter: @STARFreeTool

Contact info@starfreetool.com with questions and inquiries.

CONSERVATION CROPPING SEMINAR—JANUARY 18TH

Attention Illinois Farmers! Find ways to improve soil health, learn about cover crops, adopt new technologies, manage nutrients, and hear the latest agronomic research. Attend this year's event to learn from conservationists, researchers, and specialists. There will be a Q&A session and helpful resources to access. The 2023 CCS will be held on **Wednesday, January 18th, 2023 from 9 am - 3 pm** at the **Illinois Department of Ag Building in Springfield, IL**. Lunch is included with your registration price of just \$25. Want to join in from home? The event is also virtually accessible for just \$15. The planning committee is working to arrange soil & water CEUs. Register now at www.ccswcd.com!

CONSERVATION CROPPING
2023
SEMINARS
Managing your inputs for healthy soils...

JOIN US!
9AM - 3PM (CST)
Wednesday, January 18th
Online Registration &
Soil & Water CEUs only \$15!
(CEUs Applied for--stay tuned!)

SPEAKERS & TOPICS
Michael Woods - IL Bureau of Land & Water Resources
Philip Benfey - High Fidelity Technologies, NC
Dr. Shalamar Armstrong - Purdue Univ. Agronomy, IN
Betsy Bower - CERES Solutions, Agronomy, IN
Mitchell Hora - Farmer & CEP Continuum Ag, IA
Illinois Farmer Panel - Discussion, Sharing, Q&A

Only \$25 In-Person/Lunch
Only \$15 Online & CEUs

HYBRID EVENT

Register Today! Attend In-Person or Online
www.ccswcd.com

MIDWEST AG EXPO—JANUARY 25TH & 26TH

The CCSWCD staff will join 175 exhibitors in the 2023 Midwest Ag Expo, which showcases the agricultural industry, farming machinery and equipment, and related services. Come see us in at the event in Gordyville, IL from January 25th—26th to learn how we can provide technical and financial assistance to your farming operation. Visit GordyvilleUSA.com to learn more.

UPCOMING NON-GMO SOYBEAN PROJECT

Through a grant from the Illinois Soybean Association, CCSWCD will be providing assistance to non-GMO soybean growers across the state. Staff will provide technical assistance to interested producers and utilize the STAR tool to help non-GMO growers evaluate their current farm management strategies and conservation efforts. There will also be financial assistance available for non-GMO producers to implement cover crops to assist with weed management.

In 2023, CCSWCD will partner with a non-GMO buyer to host a field day that provides valuable networking and educational experiences. Staff will be developing informational materials about cover crops in non-GMO soybean systems to distribute at the event and on a larger scale throughout the agricultural sector. With this project, we hope to provide strong foundational knowledge so that farmers can better prepare to enter niche markets such as non-GMO. Watch for more information from us at a later date!

2023 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND EROSION CONTROL CONFERENCE—OCTOBER 24TH

The biennial Green Infrastructure & Erosion Control Conference will be held on Tuesday, October 24, 2023, at the iHotel in Champaign. The CCSWCD is proud to present this event with our partners from the City of Champaign, the City of Urbana, the Village of Savoy, and the University of Illinois. Keep an eye on our website or visit ccstormwater.org for additional information as the conference date approaches!



SOIL HEALTH INCENTIVE PROGRAM (SHIP) PILOT RECAP

In the fall of 2021, the CCSWCD, Delta Institute, and The Conservation Fund successfully developed and executed a pilot program that offered incentives for Illinois farmers to implement soil health practices under a "pay-for-outcomes" model. The Soil Health Incentive Program (SHIP) provided framework, technical support, and financial incentives to farmers interested in mitigating climate change through implementation of conservation management practices.

The goal of SHIP was to develop and test a soil health-based incentive framework for Illinois, and this framework can be followed for other states as well. The project team examined how SHIP could

align with other programs and incentives in the agricultural sector, and special consideration was given to streamlining the application process. The information gathered from the program can be applied by other conservation districts across the country in the development of region-specific programs.

The CCSWCD and Delta Institute submitted a session proposal for the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Meeting and will be giving a presentation about the SHIP pilot at the meeting in New Orleans in February. More information about the project's considerations, structure, and success are on our website!

BIG DITCH PROJECT RECAP

From 2020 through 2022, the Champaign County Soil & Water Conservation District applied for and received an IEPA Section 319 grant in the Big Ditch watershed, located in northwest Champaign County. Financial and technical assistance was included for landowners and operators in the area to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) identified in the Big Ditch Implementation Plan that reduce sediment, phosphorus, and nitrogen loads, improving water quality.

The CCSWCD worked with IEPA to create outreach materials, attended and hosted meetings to encourage sign ups, and worked hard to generate interest and discussion. Through this project, staff helped implement over 500 acres of cover crops along with a grassed waterway. While we wrap up with project, farmers and landowners in the watershed were sent a project recap survey, where they indicated that they are interested in working with SWCDs to implement conservation practices. The CCSWCD looks forward to promoting BMPs in the watershed through other projects and programs in the future.

2022 SPONSORS

Capital Agricultural Property Services
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Fasprint
Franzen Construction Group
Gordon Farms Seed
Johnson Trailer Sales
Kitchen Seed Company

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WHAT'S NEW?

CCSWCD's 80th Annual Meeting

Spring Fish Sale

Funding Opportunities:
 Partners for Conservation
 NRCS EQIP & CSP

Cover Crop Field Days

STAR Updates

Project Recaps

& More!

ⓧ
⊕
⊖

Regenerative Grazing

Online Office Hours Series
 11:00 am - 12:00 pm CST | November 2022 - April 2023
 via Regenerative Ag Idea Network



December 6: Managing Animal Energy Levels Year-Round	🔍
December 13: Cover Crops & Residue	🔍
January 10: Cattle Breeds	🔍
February 14: Animal Health & Parasites	🔍
March 14: Real Scenarios & Case Studies	🔍
April 11: Value Chain Development	🔍

ccswcd.com/egp
➔



YOU'RE INVITED!

From cover crop field days to regenerative grazing webinars and erosion control conferences, the CCSWCD hosts events for all. Look inside for more information on our upcoming events beginning in January 2023!