

The Dust Bowl Re-visited



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CLARK COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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The Dust Bowl, a new documentary by Ken Burns, premiered on television last month. If you haven't seen it, you should, and if you did see it, you were probably reminded of this past summer as extreme heat and drought caused widespread devastation and loss throughout Indiana. Although farming operations suffered, we were much better prepared this time compared to the Dust Bowl of the 1930's.

With Indiana's farmers still recovering from the recent drought, Burns documentary is timely. It chronicles the human stories behind the cataclysmic events of the 1930s in the very words of those who lived through it, and reminds us why protecting our soil resource is so important.

In response to the devastation of the dust bowl, Hugh Hammond Bennett, considered to be the father of conservation in America, founded the Soil Erosion Service in 1933, as a temporary agency in the Department of the Interior to demonstrate practical conservation methods to farmers. A year later, a fierce dust storm swept across the Great Plains toward the east coast with such ferocity that the dust was found aboard ships in the Atlantic Ocean.

Following that event, the Soil Conservation Service (now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service or NRCS) was established in 1934 to help landowners utilize conservation practices to stop soil erosion. The agency was much needed since "black blizzards" had stripped topsoil from more than 100 million acres of cropland by December 1935. Soil scientists have determined that it takes,

on average about 500 years for an inch of topsoil to form, so losing that much soil from the central part of the U.S. was like watching thousands of years of productivity being lost forever.

Today, NRCS still works one on one with private landowners to implement conservation practices that help protect natural resources like soil, water, air, plants and animals.

Bennett said "Take care of the land and the land will take care of you." This statement is truer today than ever, as NRCS works to address modern issues like climate change and develops methods for feeding an ever-growing population. Soil conservation remains a priority, as it helps producers increase their yields while ensuring the land becomes more resilient to erosion, drought and other natural resource threats. Many conservation practices help improve soil quality—because healthy soils are the foundation for healthy working lands. USDA studies show that soil erosion is reduced by 43 percent on lands that use conservation practices.

They call the Dust Bowl the greatest man made ecological disaster in U.S. history. By creating this documentary, Burns gives viewers a chance to look back at our history and learn important lessons from it.

Visit your local NRCS office to learn more about how you can take care of the land and improve your soil's health.

Dates to Note

- 12/24-25—Christmas Holiday, SWCD office closed
- 1/1-1/2/2013—New Year's Holiday, SWCD office closed.
- 1/3/2013—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 1/31/2013—SWCD Annual Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- 1/13/2013—Martin Luther King Holiday, SWCD office closed

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SWCD Projects Recognized at State Level

The Clark County SWCD was recently chosen by the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) to receive a District Showcase Award for 2012. This award recognizes outstanding conservation projects and achievements of SWCDs throughout the state. Only four projects are chosen for the award each year.

Clark County submitted two projects for consideration. The first was its **READING RAIN GARDENS FOR WATER QUALITY** project. Funded through an Indiana American Water Company Environmental Grant, this project was a means to complement the District's existing Silver Creek Watershed Improvement project.



Visitors view the garden at the 4H Fairgrounds.

"Reading" Rain Gardens are visual educational tools installed at locations having libraries. Each has a bench for people to sit and read or to enjoy the beauty of the garden, and a sign explaining how rain gardens work. Books are available for loan at each site on the topics of nonpoint source pollution and rain gardens. Currently there are gardens established at: Riverside Elementary School, the Clark County 4-H Fairgrounds, and the Clark County Public Library – Sellersburg branch.

The second project the District submitted was the **QUALIFIED PROFESSIONAL INSPECTOR TRAINING PROGRAM**. Initially handled by a commercial firm, the Clark and Floyd County SWCDs were handed the program in 2011.

The goal of the Qualified Professional Inspector (QPI) program is to provide consistent training for construction site inspectors. These are the individuals responsible for examining stormwater BMPs installed at active construction sites.

The QPI program consists of four major elements: the training course; resource materials; exam; and, at the discretion of the MS4 community, registration or licensing of inspectors.

Representatives from the IASWCD, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Indiana State Department of Agriculture, and the National Association of Conservation Districts visited Clark County on October 11th. Presentations on each of the projects were given, as well as a tour of each of the rain gardens. The Clark County SWCD will have the opportunity to attend the 2013 Annual Conference for Indiana SWCDs in January to showcase its' projects, and will receive special recognition at the Conference's Awards Banquet.

Tree Seedling Order Forms Now Available

Tree seedlings will once more be available to Indiana landowners this year through the IDNR Division of Forestry nursery in Vallonia, IN. These trees may be used for reforestation, erosion control, wildlife habitat development, watershed improvement, wetlands enhancement, windbreak, or other conservation purposes. Plant materials cannot be redistributed or resold for profit.

Order forms are now available in the Clark County SWCD office for the 2012-2013 season. Forms may also be obtained on the internet by visiting www.dnr.IN.gov/forestry.

There is a \$10 non-refundable processing fee for each order.

Help in deciding which species to plant may be obtained from Clark County's District Forester, Don Stump. He may be contacted at the Clark State Forest office, (812) 294-4306, or by email at dstump@dnr.IN.gov.

SWCD Annual Meeting

The 69th Annual Meeting of the Clark County Soil & Water Conservation District will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 31, 2013, in the Community Building on the Clark County 4-H Fairgrounds.

Following a catered meal there will be a brief presentation and an election of one member on the Board of Supervisors. Elected supervisors serve in staggered three-year terms with one supervisor being elected at each annual meeting. Candidates for this year's election include Sam Hagest.

Ticket cost and more information will be announced as the event nears.

Funds Available to Assist With Pasture and Hay Re-Seedings

With the summer of 2012 behind us, thankfully, producers may want to evaluate their hay and pasture stands at this time. While the drought of the past summer nearly wiped-out many stands of grain crops, forage stands were severely impacted as well.

However, late fall rains have caused these fields to "green-up" but, only after walking those fields can we determine if this "green-up" is desirable forage plants or just weeds.



This is a good time to check hay and pasture fields, evaluate stands, pull soil samples for testing and determine if stand improvements are needed. If stands are primarily grass species with a scattering of weeds, then renovation may be the answer to your forage concerns. Just as the name suggests, "renovation" means to renew and improve stands. Hay and pasture renovation usually involves suppressing the current stand (something the drought already did for us), applying lime and fertilizer as needed based on a current soil test, and planting a good forage legume like red or ladino clover. Some of the benefits of renovation include: higher forage

ields, improved forage feeding values, nitrogen fixation by the legumes (thus reducing fertilizer costs), and providing more summer forage growth. After inspecting current forage stands it may be decided that these are so weak that a completely new forage seeding is more appropriate. Again, the benefits of adding legumes to the seeding mix will far out-weigh the actual costs.

Either way, now is an excellent time to evaluate stands, make lime and perhaps fertilizer applications, control troublesome weeds and make plans for the 2013 growing season. If property is in the Silver Creek Watershed, there are cost-share funds available through a federal water quality improvement grant that can assist you with up to 60% of the costs of re-seeding or renovating existing fields or establishing new fields.

Contact David Trotter at 812-256-2330 ext 110, or at david.trotter@in.nacdn.net to learn more about these funds and practices. Producers can check-out the watershed improvement website at mysilvercreekwatershed.weebly.com for new posts about pasture renovation, pasture and hay seedings, forage management, cover crops, and upcoming educational/informational sessions about forages.

Federal Programs Update

The federal fiscal year for 2012 ended on September 30, 2012. As you may be aware, there is currently no farm bill (at the time of this writing). Despite this, field offices are still servicing existing contracts, doing conservation planning, and accepting applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Conservation Security Program (CSP). Due to the expiration of the Farm Bill, NRCS cannot currently accept applications for the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP), Health Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), although we are servicing existing contracts signed in prior years.

If you had a prior year program application for EQIP or WHIP that was not funded, please contact the office to let us know if you wish to continue that application on into fiscal year 2013.

Applications are taken on a continuous basis with certain cut-off periods for funding rounds. January 18, 2013 and March 15, 2013 are the application deadlines for EQIP and WHIP to be considered for funding.

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to help producers with voluntary conservation practices to improve their natural resources. Funding and technical assistance is provided for a variety of practices to maintain or improve resource concerns such as water quality, soil erosion and soil quality, grazing land health and productivity and wildlife habitat development.

Contact: NRCS District Conservationist, Jennifer Kipper, 812-256-2330, ext. 108. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Record the trees you plant at the Plant A Tree For You And Me website at www.clarkswcd.org/PAT/openpage.htm. Help green Southern Indiana!



9608 Highway 62
Charlestown, IN 47111
812-256-2330, ext. 3
Fax: 812-256-0362

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Ottis Wright—dba Wright Brothers*

Multi-County Project To Offer Incentives to Producers

Better Soil. Cleaner Water. More profit.

Those are the goals of a five-county project that was recently awarded \$75,000 in Clean Water Indiana grant funds by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture's State Soil Conservation Board. The Clark County SWCD is one of the partners in this project, along with Jackson, Jennings, Jefferson, and Scott County SWCDs.

This project is designed to reduce sediment and nutrients from non-point sources in an effort to improve water quality. Producers will be encouraged to utilize soil testing, no-till, cover crops and buffer practices. The combination of these best management practices can have a significant impact on farming practices both in the present and future years.

Participants will be required to: 1) complete a soil test, 2) consult with an industry professional on the soil test recommendations, 3) utilize no-till planting methods, 4) seed cover crops and install buffer practices as needed. (Cover crops may be seeded utilizing no-till, aerial or broadcast seeding practices.)

Once these tasks have been completed according to Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) specifications, participants will be eligible for an incentive payment of \$25/acre for one cover crop species, \$30/acre for two or more species and \$35 per acre if the mix includes a legume. Participants can receive payments for up to 100 acres upon completion and verification of the practice.

This incentive program will give preference to those producers that are not qualified for Federal programs due to cropping history or other prerequisites that might deem the land ineligible.

Contact the Clark County SWCD office at 256-2330, ext. 3, for more information. Scheduled start date of this project is January 2013.



District activities and programs will be made available to all citizens, regardless of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, marital status or disability.