



Winter 2022

# Conservation Quarterly

CLARK COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## Busting the Myths of EQIP for Urban Agriculture

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) flagship conservation program that helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners integrate conservation into working lands. Through EQIP, NRCS works one-on-one with producers to develop a conservation plan that outlines conservation practices and activities to help solve on-farm resource issues. Producers implement practices and activities in their conservation plan that can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving their agricultural operations. EQIP helps producers make conservation work for them. Financial assistance for practices may be available through EQIP, and some producers may also qualify for advance payment.

Recently, NRCS “busted” some myths revolving around EQIP for folks involved in urban agriculture, specialty crops, small acreage, and subsistence operations. The truth about these myths are farm size and location neutral, meaning they apply to all requests for EQIP assistance, regardless of location (urban or rural) or size (large or very small).

**Myth 1:** The farm must produce at least \$1,000 of agricultural products to be designated as an agricultural operation and eligible for EQIP.

**Truth 1:** There’s no minimum agricultural income requirement or product value requirement.

**Myth 2:** Subsistence growers are not agricultural producers and subsistence lands are not eligible lands.

**Truth 2:** Lands managed for subsistence activities such as gardening, hunting, fishing, gathering, and managing indigenous food sources may be agricultural lands and may be eligible.

**Myth 3:** Gardening/horticulture is not farming/agriculture.

**Truth 3:** The size and location of the production is irrelevant for program eligibility. This may include products like cut flowers, nursery stock, and culturally significant plants.

**Myth 4:** Community agriculture and backyard or small plot gardens are not an eligible form of agricultural production.

**Truth 4:** They may be eligible after evaluating all three tiers of EQIP eligibility—producer, land, and resource concern.



These are just a few of the myths that have surrounded NRCS’s EQIP program in the aforementioned circumstances; there are many more that need to be dispelled than we have space for here. For that reason the Clark County SWCD, and partners

### Dates to Note

- 11/24 & 25/22—Thanksgiving Holiday, SWCD office closed
- 12/1/22—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 8:30 a.m.
- 12/23 & 26/22—Christmas Holiday, SWCD office closed
- 1/5/23—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 8:30 a.m.

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NRCS, and Purdue Extension, plan to host a series of workshops in early 2023 to provide more details on the EQIP program and eligibility requirements.

If you’re interested in attending these workshops, please contact the SWCD office at (812) 256-2330, ext. 3, and we’ll put you on our mailing list. You’ll be the first to know all the details!

Don’t have time in your busy schedule to accommodate one more thing? If so, please contact Bryan “Drew” McCutchan, NRCS Conservationist for Clark County, at (812) 256-2330, ext. 3463, or bryan.mccutchan@usda.gov, for how your operation may fit into EQIP. NRCS’s web site also has a wealth of information on the program. Visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/eqip-environmental-quality-incentives>.

## “New” Winter Weather and Pastures

*Victor Shelton, Retired NRCS Agronomist/Grazing Specialist*

I've enjoyed several good autumn days and quirked, "it can just stay this way and then turn nice," but, winter is coming. My wife often refers to and compares winters to the "winter of '78." A noteworthy one weather wise, and certainly not one I've forgotten. Mountains of snow that had to be dug through, not plowed, and multiple tractors gelling up, creating the need to feed silage completely by hand. No other winter since has dared to compare – that's a good thing.

Winter weather has continued to change since then. I'll leave it up to you to decide if it is a trend or a direction. Either way, winter is still challenging. Winters in the past almost always blessed us with extended frozen soil conditions. The past couple of winters though, I could count the length of frozen soil in days, not weeks. There is a lot of benefit to having some of that free concrete. You could graze or move hay around and even place hay on fields where you might want to feed it, with no or little worries about rutting or excessive compaction.

When winters are mild and especially when they are also wet, soil conditions are not as compatible for a lot of winter use. If you want to graze under these types of winter conditions, then you're going to have to be very careful how you do it.

One of the first things to pay attention to is the amount of forage that is available in that pasture. If you don't have enough cover, residual or a decent heavy stand of forage, then your potential to cause damage grazing on the site increases.

Ideally, you need a total of about 3,000 pounds of dry matter per acre to be able to graze under wet soil conditions and not cause potentially long-lasting damage to the forage stand and the soil. That sounds like a lot, but that amounts to ten inches of dense forage. A good healthy grass/legume stand can easily produce 250 to 300 pounds of dry matter per acre inch.

When forages have been allowed to regrow and are stockpiled for later use, not only has the above ground biomass

increased, but also the below ground system. It provides some resiliency over pastures or systems that have been continuously grazed closer than ideal and thus lack the additional underground supportive structure.

That said, there are also benefits to having that much growth on the surface. First, it is winter feed that can be utilized and allocated in such a manner to be very efficient without the need to get a tractor out or worry about relocating manure the next season. Second, what isn't consumed is usually laid down upon the soil surface to become litter or residue to protect the soil surface, provide some nutrients for the next seasons growth, improve infiltration of winter precipitation and buffer some of the hoof action under wet conditions.

If you don't have this cover and the associated root mass created from the good cover, then the pasture will not fair nearly as well if grazed under wet conditions – expect excessive pugging, soil disturbance, forage stand reduction and potentially long-lasting compaction. None of that is good, and depending on site conditions, the winter weather and a few other factors, it's a toss up of which one will be worse.

Quite often the one that is noticed the most is increased weed presence and pressure the following season. That is primarily due to soil disturbance, then loss of forage stand integrity, and lastly cover. Early successional annual weed species are expected, especially foxtails and crabgrass, but more aggravating species such as spiny pigweed and cockleburrs like to bounce back from old seed banks to try and reestablish themselves with some vengeance. These seedbanks are only held hostage from persistent maintenance of cover and competition or mechanical and/or chemical treatment after the fact.

Feeding hay on pasture can reduce time in winter feeding areas and can also boost organic matter and nutrients to sites that need it. Rolling out those bales to feed them helps to more evenly distribute hay and livestock waste across a larger area. It also reduces the impact and time spent on any specific area. A large round bale fed within a ring or on a wet site can quickly turn the area around the bale to a soupy mess. Soil structure is heavily damaged. This is a good reason to try and feed either on frozen or dry soils or on a feed pad.



*Unrolling hay on pasture. A good option if soil conditions are good.*

Feed pads can be built of rock or concrete. They should be placed a good distance from waterbodies, but convenient for access; ideally where wind protection is available for the livestock. Rows of large hay bales, a solid fence, a building, trees or topography can all provide a decent wind-break.

Occasionally, a pasture is damaged from hoof action on wet soils no matter how much we try to prevent it. An unexpected rain during the grazing allocation or, more likely, more rain than expected for any given time frame can quickly compromise the integrity of the stand. The light drizzle that was predicted can turn into two or more inches of hard rain and the perfect allocation quickly was not enough.

If this happens, make sure you assess pastures, paddocks, or areas of either, as they might be good candidates for some winter dormant overseeding. Assess the damage. How much bare ground do you see? If you have 80 percent or more live plant cover, don't get concerned because most of the spaces will be filled in by spring. If the live plants cover 60 percent or more of the stand, then the addition of some more legumes such as clover will quickly fill in the void areas. If there is over 40 percent bare ground, then additional seed is normally needed.

Broadcasting some seed during the dormant period on these thin areas will increase the chances of better stands and perhaps some more control of spontaneous weeds the next spring. Clovers, or smooth, small-seeded grasses usually do best for overseeding. I don't recommend doing an entire replanting at this time, but I'd rather risk a little seed to fill in some gaps than wrestle with feisty weeds. Timothy, perennial ryegrass, Italian ryegrass, redtop and bluegrass are probably good choices for such purpose.



## Spotlight on Invasive Plants

### Mile-a-Minute Vine (*Persicaria perfoliata*)



Mile-a-minute vine is native to East Asia. It was likely introduced to North America accidentally on imported nursery stock through a landscaping nursery in central Pennsylvania in the mid- to late 1930s. Mile-a-minute is a member of the buckwheat family. Although its common name exaggerates its growth potential, this annual vine can grow as much as 6 inches a day, and can reach heights of more than 25 feet within the growing season. It forms very dense, tangled mats, growing over shrubs, small trees and up the sides of forest edges.

Leaves: simple, alternate, light green and a nearly perfect triangle shape.

Stem: delicately narrow and green to red-tinted.

Bloom time: begins in early June with clusters of small white, rather inconspicuous, flowers emerging.

Flowers: develop into clusters of deep, iridescent blue berry-like fruits.

Seen this vine? Please report its location at <https://www.eddmaps.org/indiana/>.

## SWCD Plans Spring Tree and Plant Sale

The SWCD staff are busy planning the District's annual spring tree and plant sale for 2023. Trees offered in our sales are supplied by Woody Warehouse, Lizton, IN. They will be 3-gallon, Grade 1 (nursery stock) trees that can be easily removed from their containers and directly planted.

Our tentative list of species include: Allegheny Serviceberry, Redbud, Red Maple, Bald Cypress, Black Walnut, Buttonbush, New Jersey Tea, Pawpaw, Red Osier Dogwood, River Birch, Black Willow, Shumard Oak, and Tulip Poplar. Trees will remain reasonably priced as in past sales (at press time, we were unable to determine a final cost).

Native perennial plants will also be offered in the sale. We experienced supply issues during our last sale, selling well over what we could provide to our customers; we are working to remedy that situation. The following species will be offered: Anise Hyssop, Black-eyed Susan, Blue Lobelia, Butterfly Milkweed, Cardinal Flower, Columbine, Common Milkweed, Lance-leaf Coreopsis, Little Bluestem, New England Aster, Joe-pye Weed, Wild Bergamot, and Purple Coneflower. Plants are sold in small pots.

Order information will be available in late January 2023, orders will be due in April, with order pick-up in mid- to late- May. Past customers will automatically receive an order form and brochure when they become available. If you would like to be placed on our mailing list, or would like more information, contact the Clark County SWCD office at 256-2330, ext. 3, visit us at [www.clarkswcd.org](http://www.clarkswcd.org), or find us on Facebook (Clark County Soil & Water Conservation).



## Water Testing Service Available



The SWCD office gets calls from time to time from individuals who want to have their water tested. Until recently, we did not have a resource for this service. We are happy to announce that we have partnered with **Safehome®** to provide Do-It-Yourself Test Kits as well as In-Lab Test Kits for water testing.

Well-water and city-water kits are available. Well-water DIY kits test for 14 different parameters; city-water kits for 13. Individual DIY kits are available for lead and bacteria also. DIY kits are simple to use, give fast results, and are budget-friendly. They provide approximate values of parameters.

A wide variety of kits are offered for In-Lab testing, with free return shipping, and average turn-around-time of 7-10 business days. Safehome's certified laboratory is easy to use, affordable, and provides a detailed report of the exact values of parameters.

For pricing and more information on this service, visit [www.safehometestkits.com](http://www.safehometestkits.com). Enter code SWINCLARK10 for a 10% discount on your order. **Please note: Kits are only available directly from Safehome's online store.**

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**CLARK COUNTY  
SOIL AND WATER  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**

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## Meet Our New NRCS District Conservationist

Most of you know that for some time now, Clark and Scott counties have shared a District Conservationist, most recently this was Jennifer Kipper. Earlier this year, a decision was made by USDA-NRCS to dedicate a District Conservationist to each county. In August, this became a reality, and Bryan "Drew" McCutchan was stationed at the Charlestown Field Office.

Drew previously served as a Soil Conservationist on the NRCS Tech Team at the Salem field office, doing a great job in that role. Drew hales from Spencer County, and currently lives in the Salem area.

If you are a producer that enrolled in an USDA-NRCS program under Jennifer, please contact Drew with any questions or concerns you may have about your contracts in the future. Reach out to Drew by phone at (812) 256-2330, ext. 3463, or email at [bryan.mccutchan@usda.gov](mailto:bryan.mccutchan@usda.gov).



### SWCD Annual Meeting

The 78th Annual Meeting of the Clark County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, January 28, 2023, at 9 a.m. at the Clark County 4-H Fairgrounds. The meeting will be held in the USDA Service Center Conference Room. A full and due report of activities and financial affairs for 2022 will be given, and an election of a supervisor for the Clark County SWCD will be conducted.

Coffee and doughnuts will be provided. CDC guidelines with respect to the current pandemic will be followed. Contact the SWCD office at 812-256-2330, ext. 3, for more information.