



# THE STEWARD

## Bartholomew County Soil and Water Conservation District

Volume 9, Issue 4

December 2015

### SWCD Supervisors:

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### District Coordinator:

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### Watershed Coordinator:

Jenny Whiteside

### District Conservationist:

Clint Harrison

### ISDA Resource Specialist:

Kevin Kreuzman

### Points of Interest:

- ♦ Annual Meeting
- ♦ Newsletter Sponsors
- ♦ 5 Questions to Ask Your Renter
- ♦ Monarch Butterflies
- ♦ 2016 Acreage Reporting Dates
- ♦ Avoid Wetland Violations

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## 2015 Annual Meeting



PURDUE  
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Elections will be held for both organizations, SWCD Board supervisor and Extension Board members

### Guest Speaker

#### Comedian Jeff Hendren

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The annual reports from the SWCD, NRCS, and the Extension Office will be presented.

February 4, 2016

Doors open at 6:00 pm

Meal served at 6:30 pm

Meeting at 7:00 pm

Bartholomew County

4-H Fairgrounds

Community Building

Meal will be

catered by

The Flying Pig

Tickets are \$10.00 in advance and are available at the

SWCD Office or the Purdue Extension Office between the hours of

8:00 am - 4:30 pm



For further information please contact the SWCD Office at 812-378-1280 ext. 3  
Or the Purdue/Bartholomew County Cooperative Extension Office at 812-379-1665

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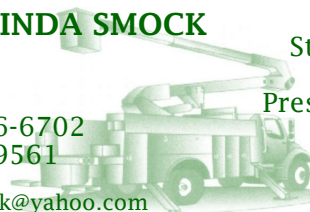
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# 5 Soil Health Questions Landowners Should Ask Potential Renters

By: Agronomy Insider 11/10/2015

The year's cash rent or crop share is often the focal point of farmland owner-tenant talk. The importance of soil health, though, is a growing point in talks for some landowners and tenants.

In this article by Elisa O'Halloran, a Webmaster and writer for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, are questions and answers revolving around soil health. Barry Fisher, an Indiana farmer and nationally recognized soil health specialist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, recommends farmland owners ask potential renters these five soil-health questions.

## 1. Do you build organic matter in the soil?

Organic matter (carbon) may be the most important indicator of a farm's productivity. The amount of soil organic matter often determines the price farmers will pay to rent or buy land. Finding a farmer who is interested in building organic matter by using practices like no-till and cover crops is like finding a bank with a better rate on a Certificate of Deposit, Fisher says.

**2. Do you test the soil at least once every 4 years?** Fisher says maintaining fertility and pH levels are important to your farm's productivity. Regular soil testing can give an indication of trends in soil fertility, pH and organic matter levels in each field. These tests will determine the amount of fertilizer each field needs. If a field has a history of manure application and very high fertility, a farmer could save money by planting cover crops to keep those nutrients in place rather than applying more nutrients that may not be needed.

**3. Do you use no-till practices?** Some landowners like the look of a clean-tilled field in the springtime. That "nice look" is short lived, though. "The reality is a field that has bare soil is subject to erosion and loss of organic matter, since it no longer has the protective cover from the crop residue on the surface," Fisher says. "No-till farming utilizes the crop residue to blanket the soil surface to protect it from the forces of intense rainfall and summer heat. This protective blanket will conserve moisture for the crop and prevent loss of soil from wind erosion, water erosion and carbon that could be burned off by summer heat."

**4. Do you use cover crops?** "Like no-till, cover crops provide a green, protective blanket through the winter months or fallow times. The green-growing cover is collecting solar energy, putting down roots and providing habitat when the soil would otherwise be lifeless and barren," says Fisher.

This habitat provides food and shelter for a broad population of wildlife above ground and beneficial organisms below ground. As the new life emerges, cover crops hold onto the nutrients left from the previous crop and in turn releases them to the next crop. The solar rays these plants collect are powering photosynthesis, taking in carbon from the atmosphere to produce food for the plant and the organisms living in the root zone. This same process also releases clean oxygen to the air and builds nutrient rich organic matter in the soil.

## 5. What can we do together to improve soil health on my land?

To improve soil health, think long-term. According to Fisher, the duration of the lease agreement is perhaps the most critical matter in encouraging the adoption of these soil health management systems.

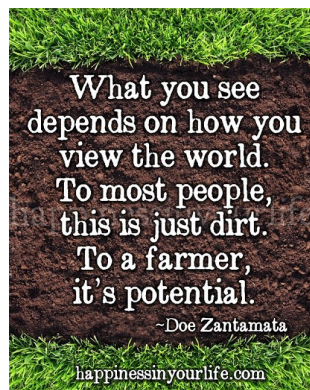
"Farmers can actually build the production capacity and resiliency of their landowner's soil, but it may take several years to realize the full benefits of doing so," Fisher says. He

suggests that landowners consider multiple-year leases that provide tenure security for the tenant. Longer tenures give both landowners and tenants more opportunities to improve soil health and realize the resulting longer-term production and profitability gains through sustainable conservation practices.

"Improving soil health can provide long-term, stable dividends for you, your family and your farming partner," Fisher says. "Improving soil health also can decrease the effects of flooding, make food production more resilient to weather extremes, and improve the health of water and wildlife, as well," he adds.

Fisher encourages landowners to learn more about the basics and benefits of soil health management systems and to begin the soil health discussion with their farming partner right away.

"Even if you're not a farmer or landowner, everyone has a great stake in improving the health of our soil," he says.







## NRCS Launches New Conservation Effort To Aid Monarch Butterflies

*Effort makes available \$4 million to help producers establish habitat in Midwest, southern Great Plains*

Indianapolis, {December 1, 2015} – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced a new conservation effort to help farmers in Indiana and nine other states provide food and habitat for monarch butterflies. This targeted effort in the Midwest and southern Great Plains by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will invest \$4 million in 2016 to help combat the decline of this iconic species.

"These beautiful and once-common butterflies are growing less familiar, and we know private landowners, especially farmers can play a crucial role in aiding their recovery," said Jane Hardisty, NRCS state conservationist in Indiana. "Indiana's farmers are good stewards of the land, and this effort helps them make improvements that benefit all natural resources and wildlife, including pollinators such as the monarch."

The orange-and-black butterflies are known for their annual, multi-generational migration from central Mexico to as far north as Canada. Monarch populations have decreased significantly over the past two decades, in part because of the decrease in native plants like milkweed – the sole source of food for monarch caterpillars.

Indiana is at the heart of the monarch migration so NRCS will focus on integrating milkweed and high-nectar plants along field borders, in buffers along waterways or around wetlands, in pastures and other suitable locations in the state.

NRCS will provide technical and financial assistance to help producers and conservation partners make pollinator and butterfly-friendly improvements to farms using funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and remaining funds from the former Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Cost share funds are also available through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to establish monarch habitat.

Examples of conservation improvements include buffer habitats, cover crops and better pasture management practices which help reduce erosion, increase soil health, inhibit the expansion of invasive species and provide food and habitat for insects and wildlife.

This effort by NRCS contributes to a multi-agency, international strategy to reverse the monarch's population decline in North America, estimated to have decreased from one billion butterflies in 1995 down to about 34 million today. *The National Strategy to Protect Pollinators and Their Habitat* has a goal of increasing the eastern population of monarchs back up to 225 million by 2020.

To learn more about the Monarch butterfly, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/monarchs](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/monarchs).

For more information about NRCS and other technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or contact your District Conservationist <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.





## 2016 Acreage Reporting Dates

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable for Indiana:

**January 2:** Honey

**January 15:** Apples

**July 15:** Cucumbers (Planted 5/10-6/15 in all counties), all other crops

**September 30:** Value Loss and Controlled Environment Crop (for the coming program year)

**December 15:** Fall-Seeded Small Grains, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO: WHEAT, OATS, BARLEY

## Clearing Wooded Areas or Bringing New Land Into Production



Agricultural producers are reminded to consult with FSA and NRCS before breaking out new ground for production as doing so without prior authorization may put a producer's federal farm program benefits in jeopardy. This is especially true for land that must meet Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions.

Producers with HEL determined soils must apply tillage, crop residue and rotation requirements as specified in their conservation plan. Land determined to be a wetland has significant use restrictions.

Participants should ensure they are aware of any existing technical determinations for acreage they own or operate.

Producers should notify FSA prior to conducting land clearing or drainage projects to ensure compliance. If you intend to clear any trees, woody vegetation, or improve drainage to create new cropland, these areas will need to be reviewed to ensure any work will not risk your eligibility for benefits.

Landowners and operators can complete form AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification to determine whether a referral to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is necessary.



## Bartholomew County Soil and Water Conservation District

We are committed to providing our customers with quality service through effective communication, professional integrity, and mutual respect.

## Contact Us!

Bartholomew County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Heather Shireman & Jennifer Whiteside  
812-378-1280 ext. 3  
heather.shireman@in.nacdnet.net  
jennifer.whiteside@in.nacdnet.net

The district holds its monthly meeting on the second Wednesday of each month at 5pm at the district office located at 1040 2nd Street in Columbus, Indiana. The meeting is open to the public.



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