



CONSERVATION CONNECTION

The Montgomery County Soil & Water
Conservation District Newsletter

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New Grant Projects Starting Soon!

Happy Holidays from the Montgomery County Soil & Water Conservation District! What a busy year we have had! With a new director and a new program coordinator, the district has seen a lot of changes. We are very excited about the coming year and have a lot of new things in store! Megan is busy planning new events for next year so keep an eye on our website and social media channels for the most up-to-date list of upcoming programs.

The new year also brings us two new grants. We start work on an IDEM 319 grant that will examine water quality in the Upper Sugar Creek Watershed. This project covers Montgomery, Boone, Clinton, and Tippecanoe counties. We have many wonderful partners and through this grant, and we will be able to create a Watershed Management Plan (WMP) that will guide best management practices for water quality for years to come! There will also be water quality testing and habitat, fish, and macroinvertebrate assessments completed through this project as well as education events over 2022 and 2023. We will have updates for you every quarter on our progress!

We also have a new Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) Grant. This grant offers funding to install conservation practices in Montgomery and Boone Counties. Installed practices will improve water quality for our county. Please see the last section for more information. For inquiries or questions please contact Kristen at klatzke@montgomerycoswcd.com or call 765-362-0405 extension 101.

New Urban Working Group

In the last newsletter, we discussed how our Program Coordinator was creating an Urban Initiatives program here at the district to reach a larger audience than in years past. Since then the working group has been formed with a total of three organizations currently involved with the hope of bringing in more organizations and individuals. The organizations and individuals currently involved include The Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District, Sustainable Initiatives of Montgomery County, and Larencia Williams one of the Soil Conservationists with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The working group will also often be partnering with Marian Rodriguez-Soto the Regional Urban Soil Health Specialist for the Northwest Area from the Urban Soil Health Program with the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD). In fact, one of the large reasons the Montgomery County SWCD decided to begin an Urban Working Group was due to the formation of the Urban Soil Health Program just over a year ago.

Our main goals for the working group include addressing soil and water concerns through educational materials and events about gardening, lawn care conservation, and local foods. The only requirements involved individuals and entities need to meet in order to stay actively involved are attending or sending a representative to each of the quarterly meetings and helping to plan at least one event a year. If you are intrigued by the mission of the working group and would like to learn more feel free to email or call our Program Coordinator Megan Sweeney at msweeney@montgomerycoswcd.com or (765) 362-0405 ext. 3.

We will be holding an Urban Working Group call-out meeting for everyone in the county on January 19th at 7:00 pm. The meeting will be held in the basement of the Crawfordsville District Public Library in Meeting Room A (Donnelly Room). At this meeting, the details of the working group will be discussed and any questions can be answered. We will also have light refreshments. If you have any interest in joining our urban working group please stop by!

Urban Working Group Call Out Meeting

Where: Crawfordsville District Public
Library Basement - Room A

When: January 19th at 7 pm

Who: Anyone interested in joining!



Thank you 2021 sponsors!

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Upcoming Events & Important Dates

- January 6th: SWCD board meeting
- January 15th: Community Booth at the Winter Market
- January 17th: office closed
- January 19th: Urban working group call-out
- February 3rd: SWCD board meeting
- February 21st: office closed
- February 24th: CISMA call out
- March 8th: SWCD Annual Meeting
- March 22nd: Backyard and Lawn Conservation Techniques

New Guest Articles!

We will be bringing you new articles written by guest authors! If you are interested in being a guest author for our newsletter contact Megan at msweeney@montgomerycoswcd.com or 765-362-0405 ext. 121.

Check out our first guest author below from Dr. Helen Hudson. Helen Hudson is a former professor and teacher. Dr. Hudson is active with the Local Food Summit Team in Crawfordsville Indiana along with the creator and writer of the Real Food Column in the Crawfordsville *Journal Review* that has since ended.



Support for Local Food is Support for Healthy Soils and Water

Dr. Helen Hudson

Having lived now in Montgomery County for over 30 years and for over 25 years on the same patch of ground at the south end of Crawfordsville, it seems to be a good time to take stock of changes I've seen across the years, small and large. I'd say, despite the heavy toll taken by 60+ years of intense tillage and intense chemical soil applications nationwide, and that certainly includes us here in Indiana and in Montgomery County, we have reason to look forward cautiously with some optimism. I suppose Wendell Berry gave the first farmer outcry that reached the nation's ears in 1977 with the publication of *The Unsettling of America*. As we're all too aware here in the 21st century, on a large scale, our country has lost vast amounts of topsoil and significantly harmed our irreplaceable waterways with chemical and topsoil runoff.

Yet, as I said, there is reason to look forward with optimism as we meet such problems head-on in our own backyards. In addition to Montgomery County's investment in solar and other alternative powers and the presence of forest farming in our county, we see more and more low till, no-till, and cover-cropping being practiced. These large-scale efforts hold positive benefits for the soil and water's health and conservation in our county. Those who carry forth such practices are "big players" and we need more and more of them.

The growing strength of our community's local food movement is another way to increase understanding of how vital healthy soil and water are to everyone's life. In the late '90s when our young daughter wanted to sell her blackberries at the Crawfordsville Farmers' Market, that enterprise consisted of four or five pickups backed up in a row in a downtown parking lot. You can imagine the scene: a few jars of jam, some peppers and tomatoes, and, in season, a whole lot of sweet corn.

Today over 20 years later, we have a burgeoning Farmers' Market, complete with a manager, all sorts of local foods to buy, and foods to eat. It has become a hub of weekend activity in downtown Crawfordsville. During the early 21st century Sustainable Initiatives formed and they got our well-managed, well subscribed beautiful Community Garden started. The Community Garden has already celebrated more than a decade of success.

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During the 2010s a Local Food Summit Team formed, bringing together local food producers, citizens, Purdue Extension, a local foods caterer, the Visitors' Bureau, MainStreet, and the City of Crawfordsville. That group hosted two successful local food summits before the COVID pandemic. Growers and farmers who grow food to be eaten locally tend to be excellent stewards of their soil and water. Our county (and surrounding ones) supports vibrant CSAs. Both Sustainable Initiatives and the Local Food Summit Team have done vital work with our county's schools: we've given teachers herb kits to learn from and share with their students; we had a chef preparing local food recipes on-site for middle school students along with tasting and identifying less familiar vegetables. Middle schoolers sported veggie tattoos that day. We've had local food "carnivals" at two different elementary schools that included seed planting and celebration of local fruit and vegetables.

One summer we partnered with the public schools to serve free summer lunches at the Community Garden. Before eating, families (including infants and toddlers and pre-schoolers) had the opportunity to come to be in the gardens, see all the growing plants. The kids themselves planted a plot of broccoli and one of potatoes. They even learned to weed. Our local library has hosted workshops such as Cooking When You're Diabetic, Down to Earth Vegetarian Cooking, and Plant-Based Living and Cooking. They've given food tours at the Farmers' Market. Starting in 2007, our community has had a Real Food column (penned by a local writer) in our local newspaper. In 2018, both of our local newspapers ran local Green Minutes in April to remind all our citizens of sustainable practices already being done in our community.

At our first Local Food Summit, our keynote speaker Jonathan Lawler (who has since become a national phenom known as "the Punk Rock Farmer" for his transformational work here in Indiana) reminded us of what is at stake. As a former row-crop conventional farmer, Lawler had his life and farming practice changed when his youngest son told him that there was a food pantry at his elementary school (located in the midst of corn and soybean fields).

Lawler has since begun raising vegetables and advocating for bringing local foods and their benefits to soil and water to Indiana's urban places. His work links local food to local economies and to environmental justice as well. He has led a powerful effort known as Second Change Farmers that helps urban kids learn to farm. Several communities around our state, starting with Fishers, now have "urban farms" helping residents in urban environments see and know up close how soil, water, and food partner to feed us.

Meanwhile here at the south edge of town, rain barrels and birdbaths keep Marc and me aware of ways water moves without turning on a faucet. And in our vegetable, shade, and pollinator gardens the soil—untreated except with natural compost for 25+ years—becomes steadily loamier, i.e. healthier, more able to retain and percolate water. This soil "amendment" is particularly notable near the dozen or so native trees we've planted over the years. Maybe these changes are easiest to see on a summer night. When I walk home from the dark woods behind nearby Crawfordsville High School I see among the row of backyards that border school property, that one glows more brightly and appears to be in motion. That yard is ours. The bright motion comes from lightning bugs and moths, butterflies, and other night insects, all doing their good work to make our planet healthier, its soils more fertile, and its water cleaner again.

As we move forward with Sustainable Initiatives and Local Food Summit planning, the Soil and Water Conservation District of Montgomery County is a welcome new partner. As the citizenry at large begins to think about projects like "Sustainable Back Yards," we can all hope that soil and water are understood not just to be an issue for large-scale farmers but for us all.



SAVE THE DATE!
 OUR ANNUAL
 MEETING IS THE
 EVENING OF MARCH
 8TH!

Montgomery County SWCD
 2036 E. Lebanon Road
 Crawfordsville, Indiana 47933

Funding available! Apply by March 31st!

We have a limited amount of funds available to install conservation practices in Montgomery & Boone Counties. If you live within the colored sections of the map below you may qualify for funding. Installed practices must improve water quality such as heavy-use areas or a livestock stream crossing. Contact Kristen for questions or an application at klatzke@montgomerycoswcd.com or 765-362-0405 extension 101.

