



Stephenson SWCD \$500 Scholarship Available

The Stephenson Soil and Water Conservation District is offering a scholarship to help outstanding students of soil, water, and related natural resources to complete their education at any accredited college or university.

To be eligible for this scholarship you must: be a resident of Stephenson County and at least a junior in college, attend an accredited college or university, major in soil and/or water conservation or a related natural resource field, and be a full-time student who is carrying at least 12 credit hours.

Application forms can be picked up at our office, 1620 S. Galena Ave. Freeport, IL. They are also available on our website www.stephensonswcd.org

Return the completed application form along with a copy of your most recent transcript to our office by 3:00 p.m., June 7, 2019



The Soil Doctor – Lawn & Garden Soil Diagnosis

Free Kits are available at the SWCD Office!

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The Soil Doctor checks your lawn or garden for: Soil pH; Potassium; Phosphorus and Lime requirements and prescribes fertilizer to match your needs for lime, phosphorus, potassium and nitrogen.

Follow the sampling instructions included in the kit and send it into The Soil Doctor for laboratory soil analysis. Cost is \$18 per sample; (special testing is available for extra charge). A detailed report will be mailed directly to your home.

Agriculture Poster Contest Winners

The Stephenson County Soil & Water Conservation District Board and the Stephenson County Ag in the Classroom program are excited to announce the winners of this year's conservation poster contest. Each year students from Kindergarten through 6th grade are invited to participate in the event. Ag in the Classroom teaches students about the poster topic in their own classroom and explains the rules for the contest. This year's topic was "Life in the Soil: Dig Deeper."

Soil is a dirty topic but everyone needs to learn more about it! Soil is the foundation for many of the items we use in our daily life, such as food, clothing, clean water, homes and more. Healthy soil equals healthy food, which equals a healthy you. Don't treat your soil like dirt! In the classroom lesson students learned about the layers of the soil through the use of soil sediment jars in addition to the animals that live in the soil that contribute to its overall quality. Students were then given the task of creating a poster with the theme of "Life in the Soil." The poster content could include anything about soil conservation or soil health and students were encouraged to think creatively. This year there were over 260 students who participated in the contest from five different schools. Congratulations to everyone who participated and especially to this year's winners!



Luke Schrader; Tri County Christian 1st grade 1st place
Keaton Tennant; Tri County Christian 1st grade 3rd place

Kindergarten/1st grade category

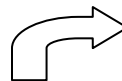
1. Luke Schrader; Tri County Christian
2. Taya Marini Kindergarten; Tri County Christian
3. Keaton Tennant 1st grade; Tri County Christian

2nd and 3rd grade category

1. Brixen Dale; Tri-County Christian School
2. Kassidy Dorty; Pearl City
3. Deaken Hofmaster; Pearl City

4th, 5th and 6th grade category

1. Marley Joseph; Pearl City
2. Tristan Simpson; Orangeville
3. Abigail Hazzard; Orangeville



Brixen Dale; Tri-County Christian 3rd grade
1st place with his teacher Jill Swannstrom



Agriculture Poster Contest Winners (continued from page 2)



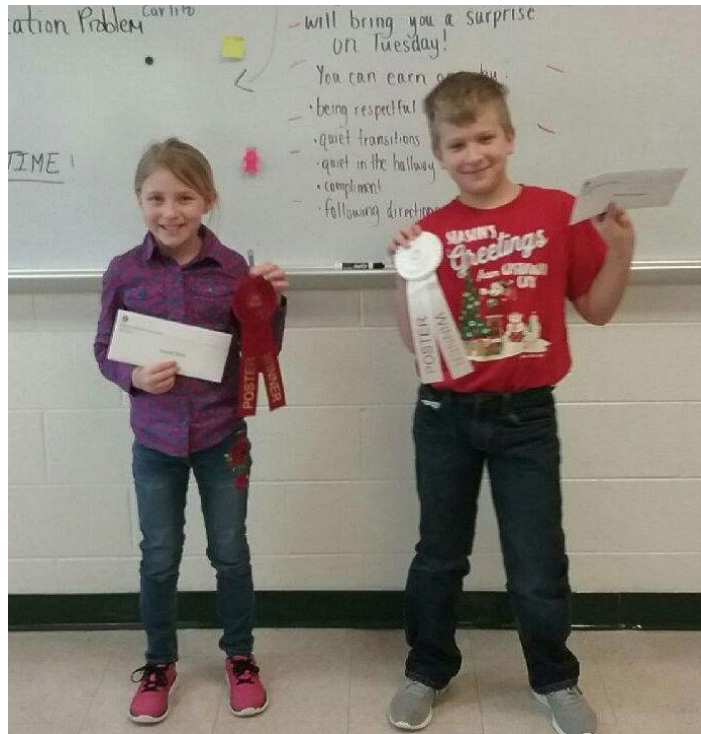
Marley Joseph; Pearl City 6th grade
1st place



Orangeville Poster Winners:
Abigail Hazzard; 4th grade 3rd place with teacher Julie Maurer
Tristan Simpson; 4th grade 2nd place with teacher Stacy Brown



Taya Marini; Tri-County Kindergarten
2nd place



Pearl City Poster Winners:
Kassidy Dorty; 3rd grade; 2nd place
Deaken Hofmaster; 3rd grade; 3rd place

Farewell Jim!

By Abby Mielke, Soil Conservationist

After 39 years of service with USDA, Jim Ritterbusch has finally hung up his soil probe. Jim started his career in 1980 with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). His first duty station was in Calhoun County as a Soil Scientist. From there he moved to Macoupin, St. Claire, and Mason Counties. In 1985, Jim accepted the position of District Conservationist in the Freeport Field Office. I have often heard Jim say that when he accepted this position, he did not think he would finish his career here. I personally am glad that he chose to stay.



Jim has impacted so many lives. We have roughly 1650 owners and operators in Stephenson County. Almost every one of those producers has had some type of interaction with Jim at some time. Jim was also very enthusiastic about education. He taught presentations to both young and old about soil science, conservation, wildlife and habitat.

Many don't know me well enough to know that I am originally from Stephenson County. Born and raised just outside of the big metropolis of

Ridott. Growing up, I was very active in 4-H. Jim Ritterbusch, Craig Schroeder, John Pinkowski, and John Giuffre (I bet those names bring back some memories) always judged the natural resources project areas. These guys were so passionate and knowledgeable about natural resources that their spark rubbed off on me. During my freshman year of college, I got a phone call from Mr. Jim Ritterbusch himself, asking me if I would like to apply for a summer internship with NRCS. I was 19 and probably had nothing better going so I jumped at the opportunity. That began my career with NRCS thanks to Jim and I will be forever grateful.

Jim has been a great mentor and teacher and he will be greatly missed by many. Jim, thanks for a wonderful career opportunity and some amazing memories.



Welcome Josh!

Josh Franks based out of the Rockford Office will be taking over as District Conservationist covering Stephenson, Winnebago, and Boone counties with Jim Ritterbusch's retirement. Josh has been with NRCS for 15 years and began his career in Lincoln, IL and various other central IL counties before moving to Winnebago County in 2011. Josh currently resides in Byron, IL with his wife Maggie and 2 kids Declan – 3, and Briella – 8 mos old. Josh is an avid runner and loves to garden in his free time.



Josh Franks, Soil Conservationist

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Going Green in Your Home

by HomeAdvisor

Modern society offers humanity many benefits, such as longer lifespan and unprecedented levels of comfort and leisure. However it also has a downside, in the form of pollution. Factories and power plants are major causes of pollution, but people's homes also contribute to the problem. When homeowners and residents take action to reduce their own pollution footprint, this has far-reaching and positive consequences. For instance, reducing one's energy usage means power plants don't have to produce as much energy, which means a reduction in pollution. Adopting a green lifestyle at home is thus an important part of the global drive to protect the environment.

Heating & Cooling

HVAC systems account for almost half the energy usage in the home. Placing trees to provide shade over air conditioners installed outside will help them to run cooler and use less energy, plus it will help them last longer. Proper maintenance will keep them running at peak efficiency as well. Weather stripping windows and doors will provide insulation and reduce the need for heating or air conditioning. Wearing thicker socks and clothes during the winter, as well as using house fans and ceiling fans in the summer, may also save electricity by reducing the need to turn on climate control systems. Tall trees can cool the home during the summer by providing shade. Programmable thermostats are highly effective in conserving electricity because they can be used to run air conditioning and heating systems only when they are truly needed.

Appliances

Appliances can be some of the greatest culprits when it comes to energy consumption, especially the refrigerator, which is considered the largest consumer of energy in the home. One sure way to go green when it comes to appliances is to purchase Energy Star qualified items. These are appliances that meet energy savings standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy. They have been third-party tested and certified to ensure that they are providing the energy savings that they claim. In addition to choosing Energy Star products, it is also necessary to make the right choices before purchasing a product. For example, people should consider choosing refrigerators that have freezers on top or replacing conventional stoves with electric-induction cook tops, which use half the energy. Tankless water heaters are more energy-efficient than traditional water heaters.

Flooring

The flooring in one's home can be anything but "green," particularly when it comes to carpeting. The padding of a carpet can be made using petroleum, which is not renewable and consumes a significant amount of energy. In addition, old carpeting that is no longer in use ends up in the nation's landfills. When installing new flooring, people can make wise decisions on the type of flooring materials that they use. Popular green flooring solutions include bamboo, cork, stone, hardwood, ceramic tile, and linoleum. If carpeting is one's preference, there are some options that can help make it more eco-friendly. Look for carpeting that carries the Green Label or the Green Label Plus from the Carpet and Rug Institute. This is meant to signal consumers that they are considering carpeting with the lowest possible emissions at the time of purchase. Another option is to purchase recycled tile.

Lighting & Electricity

The vast majority of electricity production is achieved by the use of fossil fuels such as coal and oil, which are major sources of pollution. Because of this, conserving electricity also means reducing the amount of air and water pollution that power plants must generate. One of the simplest and most effective ways to save energy is to turn off lights in unoccupied rooms, and to let the sun light the room during the day. Turning off televisions and computers that aren't being used is another way to use less electricity. Because one of the single biggest users of electricity is the refrigerator, cleaning its coils and fixing faulty refrigerator seals is an important part of a household's plan for saving energy. How a person uses his or her appliances also makes a difference. For example, using microwaves instead of ovens can result in an 80 percent reduction in energy usage.

2018 Farm Bill – What does it mean for Conservation?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):

The bill increases EQIP funding overall, from \$1.75 billion in 2019 up to \$2.025 billion in 2023. This is an increase in budget authority of \$1.5 billion over 10 years compared with the 2014 Farm Bill.

The bill also:

- Authorizes new conservation activity plans including conservation planning assessment, soil health planning, resource conserving crop rotation planning and precision conservation management planning.
- Authorizes soil testing and soil remediation as a practice.
- The bill cuts the livestock set-aside from 60 percent to 50 percent and increases the wildlife set aside from 5 percent to 10 percent annually.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):

The bill maintains CSP as a separate program moving forward, CSP will be authorized based on dollars, rather than acres. This is intended to give greater flexibility in administering the program to maximize the federal investment and achieve higher conservation benefits. The bill funds CSP at \$700 million in 2019 up to \$1 billion by 2023.

The bill also:

- Eliminates automatic renewals in the program. Renewals are now focused on new and improved conservation activities and demonstrating continued improvement.
- Authorizes special “initiatives” including a comprehensive conservation plan, cover crops, resource crop rotations, and advanced grazing management. These initiatives are given special payment rates.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):

The bill would slowly increase acreage in the program by 24 million acres to a 27 million acreage cap by the end of the farm bill.

The bill also:

- Caps rental rates for general sign up at 85 percent of county rental rate and rental rates for continuous at 90 percent of the county rental rate. Soil rental rates to be evaluated on an annual basis.
- Caps seed cost at 50 percent of the total cost of seed mixture. Limits cost share payment when combined with all other funding sources to 100 percent of the total cost of installing practices.
- Creates the opportunity for farmers to transition directly into EQIP or CSP at the end of the CRP contract.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP):

ACEP is provided a nearly \$2 billion increase in funding. The 2014 Farm Bill dramatically dropped funding for this program in its final year. This funding increase brings the program back in line with the funding level it received for most of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Going Green in Your Home (continued from page 6)

Water Conservation

While 75 percent of the earth's surface is water, only one percent of that water is drinkable. The best way to avoid shortages is to avoid wasting water in the first place. Repairing leaking pipes and faucets is one of the most effective ways to conserve water around the house. Using drip irrigation to water one's lawn is another major conservation tactic. Installing low-flow toilets, faucets and shower heads also saves water. Showers use less water than baths, and shorter showers offer an even greater savings. Front-loading clothes washers save up to half the water that is used by top-loading appliances, while Energy Star-rated dishwashers use less water than washing them by hand.

Recycling

When people recycle it benefits the environment in a number of ways. One of the most obvious ways is that it reduces the amount of trash that ends up sitting in landfills. In addition, materials that sit in landfills may also pollute the land and water by releasing gas into the atmosphere as it decomposes or leaching chemicals that make their way into the water. It also saves energy as recycling materials costs less than using new materials. To start recycling at home, people should familiarize themselves with what items can and cannot be recycled. For example, items made of paper and certain plastics are typically recyclable. Metals in the form of aluminum cans and aluminum foil may also be recycled. People should keep recycle bins in the kitchen and other areas where recyclable items may be thrown away. These containers are taken to the curbside on a designated day in which they are collected. These, and certain other items, such as batteries, and electronics can be taken to most recycling centers.

Composting

Composting, or the recycling of organic matter into soil and fertilizer products, offers a variety of environmental benefits. These include providing nutrients for plants to grow, increasing plants' resistance to disease, preventing soil erosion, and in some cases it is also a natural pesticide. In addition, composting reduces the need for commercial fertilizers that might leech into the water supply, and it also recycles materials that would otherwise end up in a landfill. One of the most important items to use for composting is a compost bin. This stores all of the materials that go into composting, such as plant matter. A compost bin should contain a mixture of green materials, such as leaves, vegetables and fruit scraps, and manure from animals like chickens or rabbits, and dead plants. Paper towels, coffee grounds, cardboard, sawdust, and even eggshells are useful for mixing into a compost heap. The combined material should be routinely turned and checked to ensure it is warmer than the temperature of the air. If it is not, then it will be necessary to add more plant matter and manure to the pile in order to aid the process of decomposition.

Solar Energy

With a lifespan measured in billions of years, the sun is an endless supplier of energy to the Earth. Every hour the sun bathes the planet's surface in more energy than all the world's power plants can produce in a year. Solar panels are human-made power plants that harness energy from the sun to turn into electricity without burning any fossil fuels to do so. Getting the most benefit out of solar panels, however, requires careful planning. When tree cover around the house is heavy, the best place to install panels is on the rooftop. In the northern hemisphere of Earth, rooftop solar panels collect the most energy when they are facing due south. In the southern hemisphere, they are the most efficient when they face due north. Solar panels in the yard can also be mounted on devices that move the panels to track the movement of the sun. These are called tracking panels.



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