

The Conservator

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Steuben County, Indiana Soil & Water Conservation District
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**Providing leadership and assistance in the proper use and management
of soil, water, and related natural resources in Steuben County.**



Conservation Transect Survey Shows Positive Tillage and Cover Crop Trends on Steuben County Farms

Conservation agencies in Indiana have been collecting tillage and cover crop data from farm fields statewide for decades. The data is collected by individual groups, county by county, in a transect survey. In Steuben County, staff from Soil & Water, the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) typically perform the transect, driving on a pre-determined route across the county, recording data at each "point" on the transect survey. There are over 280 points in the Steuben County transect that include individual farm fields on either or both sides of the road. At each stop, staff determine the current growing crop (corn, soybeans, wheat, etc.) and the previous crop. This is determined by looking at the crop residue on the ground. Staff record data regarding cover crop use and determine the field tillage system at the time the transect is conducted (i.e., no-till, reduced tillage systems such as vertical tillage or mulch tillage, or conventional tillage, which includes chisel or moldboard plowing).

The use of cover crops appears to be increasing slowly every year on average in the county, which is a positive sign for the county's natural resources. Cover

crops, such as overwintering cereal rye, have extensive root systems that hold the topsoil together in strong rainstorms, reducing soil erosion and sedimentation into our streams and lakes. Cover crops can also improve the infiltration rate of rainfall into the soil, resulting in less runoff that can carry unfiltered pollutants to nearby waterbodies. Finally, cover crops can be very beneficial to farmers as well, holding nutrients such as nitrogen in the field that might otherwise leach out over the winter, reducing overwintering weed pressure and increasing soil organic matter levels in farm fields.

During the tillage transect, the presence or lack of a cover crop on the field is documented and the species of cover crops present are noted. For example, the results of the 2019 transect survey show over 10% of cropland acres included in the survey had a growing cover crop. However, 2019 was an exceptionally wet year and thousands of acres in the county were left unplanted due to the extreme spring and early summer rains. Many farmers planted cover crops on prevented plant acres to provide their soil with

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Visit steubenswcd.org for details on the **2022 Steuben County Self-Guided Conservation Tour** ending August 15th!

Conservation Transect Survey *(continued from page 1)*

temporary vegetative protection to keep weed populations down. Data from the 2016 to 2018 crop years shows approximately 3.5% of Steuben County cropland had a cover crop planted each year. In the spring 2021 transect data, 4% of acres in the county being planted to corn had cover crops growing on them while 7% of crop acres being planted to soybeans had a cover crop growing. However, cover crop plantings were down for the winter of 2021 to 2022. Only an estimated 2.2% of acres being planted to soybeans in the spring of 2022 had cover crops and approximately 3.2% of acres being planted to corn had cover crops growing on them. We attribute this decline to the wet fall of 2021 in which timely planting of cover crops was very difficult due to extensive rainfall.

Tillage trends are also moving in a positive direction for conservation in Steuben County. The use of no-till farming can result in reduced soil erosion, reduced fuel usage for farmers, and through the careful use of cover crop management, nutrient management, modern crop hybrid use, and integrated pest management, no-till fields can provide equivalent or better grain yields than conventionally farmed fields that utilize extensive tillage. In the spring of 2021, the Steuben County transect survey showed approximately 80% of soybean and 26% of corn acres were planted into a no-till system. In the 2022 transect survey (conducted in March), about 93% of soybean acres

appeared to be no-till, with full residue cover on the fields. Over 78% of corn fields during this time were noted as no-till, having full residue cover. Those are great numbers for conservation efforts in the county; however, we feel they are atypical because the 2021 fall harvest season was very wet. Farmers that intended to do fall tillage could not get into the fields because conditions were not favorable. Many producers struggled to get crops harvested in between all the rain we received last fall. A follow-up transect survey completed in July 2022 found that acres planted to soybeans had a no-till rate of 87% and acres planted to corn had a no-till rate of 22%. Most fields planted to corn this spring were noted as having a reduced tillage pass before planting.

Overall, conservation trends on cropland in Steuben County are moving in a positive direction. Cover crop and no-till percentages change year by year depending on weather, and the partner agencies will continue to track these trends during future tillage transects. Increased adoption of conservation practices such as cover crops and no-till farming, along with nutrient management, filter strips, and other practices on cropland is important both for on and off farm sustainability and for water quality.



SWCD - NRCS - ISDA CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

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Indiana State Department of Agriculture Staff:

Kate Sanders, *Resource Specialist*



Scan this symbol with
your smartphone
to link to our website.

steubenswcd@gmail.com

www.steubenswcd.org

www.facebook.com/SteubenIndianaSWCD

Farm Service Agency Updates

Please call the office, (260-665-3211, ext. 2) for more details

1. Small Grains Certification Deadlines

Producers who have fall-seeded **wheat, rye, or other small grains** for harvest or **cover crops** need to certify this acreage in our office by December 15, 2022. Michigan has a November 15, 2022 deadline, so please keep this in mind if you farm any Michigan ground.

2. 2022 Organic Cost-Share Programs

If you would like to enroll in the **2022 Organic Cost-Share** Programs, please contact our office before October 31st. There are two programs offering total assistance of up to \$750 per scope to help with inspection and certification fees.

3. If you have questions about any of our programs or would like more information about the Farm Service Agency and what we offer, please search [Farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov) for a variety of valuable information.
4. If you have changed banks or are not signed up for direct deposit, please contact us to update your information.



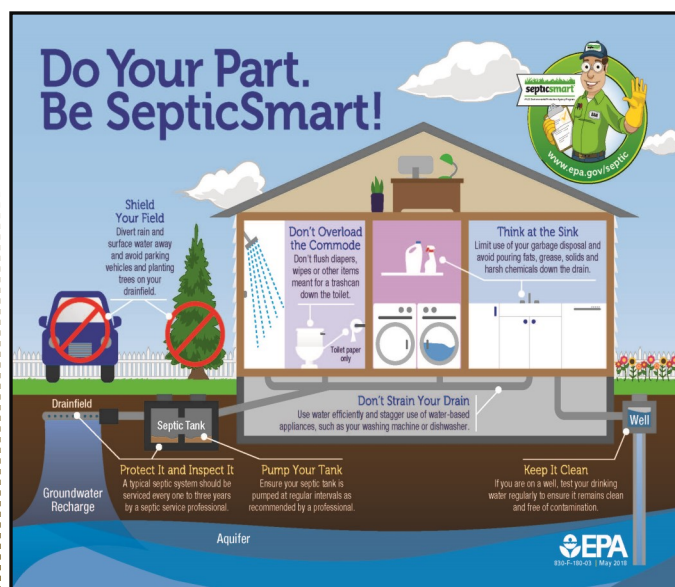
SepticSmart Week: September 19 - 23, 2022

Each year, SepticSmart Week is held to help inform homeowners and communities on proper septic system care and maintenance. So why should you care about the proper use and maintenance of a septic system?

If your home is not part of a city water and sewer system, your septic system is crucial because it treats all the wastewater that comes from your house, including the water from bathrooms, kitchen and laundry room. Maintaining your septic system saves you money, protects your property value, keeps you and your neighbors healthy, and protects the land around you. Household wastewater contains disease causing bacteria and viruses and high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. A properly working septic system removes most of these pollutants. Insufficiently treated sewage from septic systems can cause groundwater contamination, which can spread disease in humans and animals. Improperly treated sewage also poses the risk of contaminating nearby surface waters.

A series of SepticSmart Week Quick Tip videos are available for viewing on the EPA's website at www.epa.gov/septic/septicsmart-week-quick-tip-videos. These short videos are designed to help teach the importance of properly using and maintaining a septic system, such as how a septic system works, what not to put down the drain, the importance of getting your well water tested, and more. The Steuben County Health Department & Steuben County SWCD will also be offering a Septic Workshop on September 22, 2022 (5:30 - 7:00 p.m.; location TBD) to help property owners with a septic system gain a better understanding of how it functions and how to ensure it is functioning properly. Additional details will be announced shortly on our website and Facebook page.

SAVE THE DATE!





Steuben County Soil & Water Conservation District

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www.steubenswcd.org



facebook.com/SteubenIndianaSWCD

Providing Leadership and Assistance in the Proper Use and Management
of Soil, Water, and Related Natural Resources in Steuben County.

Please help us **go green** by subscribing to the newsletter via **e-mail**. Visit our website and click on the Newsletter tab, or call the office to change your subscription to *The Conservator* at any time.

All programs and activities of the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District and its Partnership Agencies are offered on a non-discriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Upcoming Events

July 29 - August 21 st	Indiana State Fair indianastatefair.com/p/state-fair
August 13 th	Steuben Lakes Council Annual Meeting 8:00 AM @ Lake James Retreat
August 13 th	Steuben Lakes Council 50th Anniversary 2:00 PM (Selman Pavilion, Angola, IN)
September 5 th	County Offices Closed Labor Day Holiday
September 7 th	Roemke Field Day 7:30 - 2:00 PM (Allen County)
September 13 - October 18 th	Steuben County Life Program Tuesdays 6 - 8:15 PM
September 14 th	Steuben SWCD Board Meeting 5:00 PM @ Community Center
September 19 - September 23 rd	EPA SepticSmart Week www.epa.gov/septic
September 24 th	Free Fishing Day for Indiana Residents Fishing license or trout/salmon stamp not required to fish Indiana's public waters
October 10 th	County Offices Closed Columbus Day

****For more events and updates please check our website****

2022 Affiliate Members

Bronze Level

Bill & Diana Clingan (Hudson)
Crowe Forest Management LLC
Daft Erosion Control LLC
Hoham Feed & Seed
Deloris Howarth (Fremont)
Lake of the Woods/McClish
Lake Association
Niann Lautzenhiser (Hamilton)
Peter Mountz (Garrett)
Stroh Farm Supply

Silver Level

Booth Farms—William Booth
Carper Farm Supply
City of Angola/Trine U. MS4
Clear Lake Township Land
Conservancy
Franklin Paul Group, LLC
Beverly Holse (Ashley)
Kenn-Feld Group
Kevin Northup Excavating
Ken Shelton (Angola)
John Williamson, Jr. (Angola)

Gold Level

Aquatic Enhancement &
Survey, Inc.
Holman Excavating
Raymond Lauer (Fremont)
S & P Earthwork

Platinum Level

Angola American Legion
Post #31
Angola Seed & Supply, LLC
Cameron Memorial Hospital
Dailey Farms
Edon Farmers Co-Op
Farm Credit Mid-America
Mary Jo Fitzenrider (Fremont)
Tom Green Engineering
Chuck & Nila Howard (Hamilton)
Lake George Conservancy, Inc.
Lake James Lake Association
Steuben County Lakes Council
Stoy Farms
Lynn Wernet (Angola)
The Wilson Farm