



# Grass Roots for Conservation



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www.elkcoswcd.org

## Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN 46517 ~ Phone: (574) 523-2030 – [jhess@elkhartcounty.com](mailto:jhess@elkhartcounty.com)



### ***LOOKING FORWARD***

Welcome everyone to the New Year 2024. We sure had fun during 2023, introducing our event PAY DIRT with Ray Archuleta, Rick Clark, and Steve Groff. What an educational event it was! We had lots of conservation activities like rain barrel / rain garden workshops, school events, tree sale, community events, and many more conservation-related activities. We are constantly looking at how we move forward and build even bigger and better programs. Well, we are moving forward, and we are building bigger and better programs with your help. You, as a community, have reached out to us, filled out a survey form, attended one of our focus group meetings.

As they say, “there is a reason why the windshield is larger than the rear-view mirror”. A new year helps us to reflect, but also allows us to look forward to the start of something new and make some adjustments or improvements.

As I am writing this I look down and see mud on my shoes and on my pants is something, I believe, to be from the farrowing house. I suddenly remember the article written by Courtney Schafer (Courtney’s Chronicles) “Call Out to God, even in a Pig Barn” the December 22, 2023, The Farmers Exchange.

I relate to that article Courtney wrote because I was in that same spot and she summed it up best as being resilient. I was taught to be resilient, I am sure my girls, and probably staff, have gotten tired of hearing those words “Use Your Surroundings”. Until we get out of our comfort zone and do our own improvement to whatever it may be in life, we do not know what it feels like. Thank you, Courtney, for that article.

I have a couple challenges for you as we start our 2024 venture. I want you to look at your yield monitor maps and not just look but also study them. See where the colors change, look at the entire field and, yes, maybe the surroundings. Now if you do not have a yield monitor on your combine you are not off the hook, you have something better, your memory. I would almost guarantee you could remember the row where your yields improved or dropped significantly. I do. I cannot remember where I put my glasses or set my phone down or what I ate for lunch, but I can remember the row where yields dropped off. That row had the same seeding rate, same fertilizer amounts, and same herbicide program on almost nothing in return. How many times have you heard either me, or hopefully someone else, say it is all about the return on investment.

Well, the SWCD received a Clean Water Indiana grant for 2024 to help with those less than marginal areas in your field. We like to call it an “Enhanced Field Border”. Let us get creative, take some of those low producing areas, and put them into something that just does not figure into your yield average. Like Courtney said, “it’s OK”, it is, and the SWCD is here to help figure out why it’s okay to do something different.

My next challenge for you is to come to our PAY DIRT 2024 event, we gathered up some top-notch speakers and again we listened to what you had to say, and we put 3 days of it together. As you open this “Grass Roots”, you will see a variety of educational topics. We have set it up so that you can choose to come for one day or all three days. Please do not forget the evening of the third day is our annual meeting, to wrap up all the conservation festivities.

I hope my challenges are not too difficult, I tried to keep them simple but remember it’s okay to do something different. Let your conservation practices help you build a more resilient 2024.

Elkhart County

# PAY DIRT

## 2024

*Where cultivation & construction meet*



**MACHINERY  
PETE**

**Greg Peterson  
(Machinery Pete)**  
Greg will be  
speaking on  
**Tuesday, March 5**



## March 5, 6 & 7 FEATURING

- Jennifer Tank - PhD Notre Dame  
*New drainage technology for agricultural landscapes.*
- Jason Mauck - Constant Canopy  
*Managing sunlight and water, creating a healthy and more profitable farm.*
- Julia Wickard - FSA Exec. Director  
*Empowering the great stewards of this land.*
- Gene Schmidt - NACD  
*Do it right and do it big!*

**AND MANY MORE !!**



**Luke Owen (NPDES  
Training Institute)**  
Luke will be  
speaking  
**Wednesday, March 6**

**Elkhart County  
4H Fairgrounds  
17746 CR 34  
Goshen, IN 46528**



# The Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership and NPDES Institute invite you to become an Erosion & Sediment Control Certified Inspector!



## TOPICS COVERED

Topics covered in this course include:

- **Basics of Erosion & Sediment Control**  
Establish a strong foundation in the essentials of erosion and sediment control.
- **IDEM Construction Stormwater General Permit**  
Navigate Indiana’s regulatory landscape with confidence.
- **State Waters Impacts**  
Understand the environmental impact of your construction activities.
- **NPDES General Permit**  
Learn the ins and outs of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.
- **Vegetative BMPs**  
Master the use of vegetative solutions for erosion control.
- **Structural BMPs**  
Discover effective structural solutions to minimize sediment runoff.

## ABOUT ESCCI TRAINING

The Erosion & Sediment Control Certified Inspector (ESCCI) seminar is an intensive one-day classroom immersion rigorously designed for General Contractors, Builders, Subcontractors and other individuals to excel when overseeing on-site erosion and sediment control activities.

Learn to install, maintain, and inspect Best Management Practices (BMPs) effectively on construction sites. Gain a deep understanding of the resources, rules, and regulations governing erosion and sediment control activities on NPDES permitted construction sites.

## REGISTER NOW

### Erosion & Sediment Control Certified Inspector

March 7, 2024, 8am-5pm CT  
Goshen, IN  
\$279

Call : 678-469-5120

Visit : <https://qrco.de/escci-goshen>

Scan : Scan the QR code below with your phone camera

Get FREE admission to PayDirt 2024 with enrollment in the ESCCI training class!

Contact Todd Clark For details

tclark@elkhartcounty.com  
574-536-0932



Dear Walden,

What is the nutrient value of cover crops?  
Can I count on them and cut back on fertilizer?

Sincerely,  
Mr. Farmer



Send your questions to  
**Walden the Worm**

*The "Dear Abby" of Conservation Farming!*

Dear Mr. Farmer,

Walden here. There are books written on this topic to explain the benefits and many interrelated cause and effects of a covered soil, a growing cover crop and live roots. I spend my life pushing and burrowing through soil. YES covered soil and living roots will lessen fertilizer need. Consider this; soil with cover and/or growing cover crops will have a much better structure for root development resulting in greater nutrient uptake. I and fellow worms will feed on the surface residue, recycling it into plant food while improving soil structure. The exudates of living roots will also improve soil structure and increase soil organic matter.

The physical structure of soil and/or cow feed play a huge role in production. Will a field of clods produce well? Will cows fed whole dry shelled corn and long stalks produce well? Covered soil is protected from loss due to wind. Every farmer should melt a bucket of brown snow, the resulting muddy water will be a shock! How much fertile top soil blew over the snow, and into Michigan and Ohio? When mother nature uses her pressure washer (falling rain) on bare soil, the result is damage and loss. The turbid (muddy) water enters soil pores and in time plugs what few pores there are. There are times all worms struggle to avoid suffocation from mud closed burrows. The turbid water is unable to infiltrate, the soil runs off the field heavy with top soil, phosphorous, and nitrates.

A live cover sequesters crop nutrients in top growth. The living roots add soil organic matter, a negative anion, which helps bind positive cations of phosphorous and nitrogen reducing fertilizer loss. I hate rainy days under bare soil, the turbid, fertilizer rich water burns my nearly skinless body. On light ground much of this water/fertilizer moves deep into the soil profile, deeper than roots can recover. On heavy ground the water/fertilizer moves out of tile drains. In both scenarios fertilizer is lost, not to return. Think of soil as a boat and anchor, a boat needs a deck to protect from waves and rain (sinking). The anchor keeps the boat from washing down river. Soil contains a boat load of fertilizer, cover, living roots, and negative anions in soil. Soil organic matter provides an anchor. To maximize the soil improvement of cover crops and nutrient sequestering, remember legumes add nitrogen and plant into a green growing crop. Soil temps of 47 degrees will soon be here and I can work at top speed. Mr. Farmer remember, I will work for food.

Wishing you all the best soil health,

*Walden*

Send your questions to [elkhartcountyswcd@gmail.com](mailto:elkhartcountyswcd@gmail.com) or drop them off at the office and have your question answered by Walden the Worm in upcoming Grass Roots publications!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### January 2024

22<sup>nd</sup> SWCD Board Meeting: 5:30 PM,  
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN

### February

19<sup>th</sup> SWCD Board Meeting: 5:30 PM,  
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN

### March

5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Pay Dirt 2024 Workshop: Elkhart County Fairgrounds,  
ECCC Bldg, go to our website to register:  
[www.elkcoswcd.org](http://www.elkcoswcd.org) or call in to the office to register.

7<sup>th</sup> 82<sup>nd</sup> SWCD Annual Meeting: *Save the Date* ~  
6:30 PM, in the ECCC Building/ Martin Room at  
the Elkhart County 4-H Fairgrounds, Goshen.  
To register call the office at (574) 523-2030, or you can  
email Lora at: [latkins@elkhartcounty.com](mailto:latkins@elkhartcounty.com). You can also  
go to our website to RSVP at [www.elkcoswcd.org](http://www.elkcoswcd.org).

18<sup>th</sup> SWCD Board Meeting: 5:30 PM,  
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN

29<sup>th</sup> Good Friday Holiday: The SWCD Office will be closed  
for the *Holiday* observed.

## SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN 46517  
Ph. (574) 523-2030 • [www.elkcoswcd.org](http://www.elkcoswcd.org)

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### Board of Supervisors:ww

Tom Kercher, Chairman Alex Wait, Vice Chairman  
Dale Leer Dean Rink Darrell Shover

### Associate Supervisors:

David Bontrager Gary Kauffman  
Keith E. Miller Tom Perry

### SWCD Staff:

Jim Hess, District Manager  
Lora L. Atkins, Secretary/Treasurer  
Todd Clark, Conservationist  
Jenna Wait, Conservationist

### NRCS Staff:

Troy Manges - Acting District Conservationist

### ISDA Staff:

Sandra Hoffarth - District Support Specialist  
Heath Hurst - Resource Specialist Manager

All programs and services of the Conservation Partnership  
and the Soil and Water Conservation District are offered on  
a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, na-  
tional origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.