



Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Spring, 2021

The Conservation Conversation

Hoosier Homestead Awards

The Jochem family of Dubois County has received the Hoosier Homestead Centennial Award for 100 years and Sesquicentennial Award for 150 years!

On March 5th, 2021 Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch and Indiana State Department of Agriculture Director Bruce Kettler presented 51 Hoosier Homestead Awards to families at the Indiana State Museum in recognition of their commitment to Indiana agriculture.

To be named a Hoosier Homestead, farms must be owned by the same family for more than 100 consecutive years, and consist of 20 acres or more, or produce more than \$1,000 in agricultural products per year.

“For generations, each of the families honored today have been committed to Indiana, to agriculture and to their families,” Crouch said. “The past year has been challenging in many ways but our agriculture industry remains strong. Hoosier farmers are a big reason why Indiana remains the 10th largest farming state. I was grateful to have the opportunity to present this award to these historic farming families.”

Families are eligible for three different distinctions of the Hoosier Homestead Award, based on the age of the farm. They can receive the Centennial Award for 100 years, Sesquicentennial Award for 150 years or Bicentennial Award for 200 years of ownership. Since the program's inception in 1976, more than 5,800 families have received the award.

“The Hoosier Homestead program is a testament to the resiliency of our Indiana agriculture industry,” Kettler said. “Each of these families have played a significant role in the heritage of our state and I am certain their legacy will continue for years to come.”



Pictured Left to Right: Molly Jochem, Kim Jochem, Greg Jochem, Adam Jochem, Mary Alice Jochem and Bruce Kettler

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Powerhouse Women Conservationists of the SW Area in Indiana – The Power is in the Partnership by: Morgan Devine Indiana NRCS District Conservationist and Federal Women’s Program

Since the beginning of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), women have played an important role in conservation. In the earliest era of the conservation movement women rarely held field positions. It was these early women that paved the way for all future female conservationists. In what is known today as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) there is an increasing number of women serving as conservationists, technicians, and all other positions.

Indiana NRCS is divided into four areas: the northwest (NW), the northeast (NE), the southeast (SE), and the southwest (SW). The SW Area of Indiana contains seventeen

service centers. Of these service centers, seven have District Conservationist (D.C.s) positions held by women. This means that 41% of the southwest area District Conservationists are women. This high percentage of female representation is a newer phenomenon. Among these seven female District Conservationists in the SW Area, only one has been a DC for nearly twenty years, while three have been D.C.s for about six years, and three have been D.C.s for less than one year. Comparatively, as of 2020, 38% of NRCS employees nationwide were female. These women D.C.s in SW Indiana manage 37% of all active contracts, or over 30% of the total dollar obligation of SW area contracts which comes out to approximately thirty million dollars.

Translating these funds into conservation on the ground comes from the cooperation of both NRCS and partner staff within the Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP). In the southwest, five county Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have come together to form the “Fab-5” as they are locally called. The power is in the partnership. Over the years, Posey, Vanderburgh, Warrick, Gibson, and Pike county SWCDs have partnered together along with NRCS to collaborate on training, women’s learning circles, workshops, and other projects.

Three of the seven SW Area female District Conservationists are located in the northern half of the area: Cara Bergschneider, Kristi Kennedy, and Amanda Kautz. Four of the seven SW Area female District Conservationists are in the southern half of the area, specifically in these “Fab 5” counties: Rita Becker Forler (Vanderburgh), Jessica Harig (Posey), Stephanie Mitchell (Gibson), and Morgan Devine (Pike).

Experience in the agency for these women range from only 4 years to over 25. Rita Becker Forler has been a D.C. for 20 years, getting her start in the agency in 1987 as a soil conservationist hired under the Food Security Act of 1985. She has been a D.C. in southwest Indiana for 20 years, including in Gibson, Spencer/Perry counties. She has been the D.C. for Vanderburgh county since 2017. Jessica Harig has worked for NRCS for 18 years in both Illinois and Indiana, serving in various roles from a soil conservation technician intern, soil conservationist, to a district conservationist. She has been a D.C. for Posey county, Indiana since 2014. Stephanie Mitchell got her start nine years ago with NRCS Kentucky as a Soil Conservation Technician. She then moved on to NRCS Indiana to work as an Engineering Technician, Soil Conservationist, and now a District Conservationist. She has been a D.C. for Gibson county since May 2020. Morgan Devine has been with the agency since 2016, hiring on as an Engineering Technician for the SW area. She has only been the D.C. for Pike county since November 2020.

With this range in service comes a variety of experience and perspective. “I worked with no other women when I first started with NRCS” says Jessica Harig. Harig started in Illinois NRCS as a WAE intern who eventually signed on with NRCS full time as a soil conservationist. “I knew of three female D.C.s in my state but I



NRCS SW Indiana District Conservationists stand with a newly constructed Grassed Waterway and Rock Chute. From left to right: Jessica Harig (D.C. Posey), Stephanie Mitchell (D.C. Gibson), Morgan Devine (D.C. Pike), and Rita Becker Forler (D.C. Vanderburgh)

Powerhouse Women Conservationists , Continued

didn't get to work with them." She goes on to explain the attitudes she faced as a young female employee out in the field. "It was like I was either a precious flower or the attitude was more 'get off of my farm - you don't know anything.'"

Stephanie Mitchell and Rita Becker Forler both echo this sentiment. "At my first district job, a female soil conservationist technician took me under her wing, but then I didn't work with another female for almost 2 years until I relocated and met a D.C. in my work area" Stephanie shares. "Until my recent years in Indiana, I was usually the only woman out in the field."

Rita remembers her experience of getting hired on in 1987 under the Farm Bill 1985 hiring spree. "Many women were hired to carry out the tasks of the 1985 Farm Bill. At that time, I think many of the mostly male NRCS employees and partner staff didn't know what to make of so many women in a technical capacity coming to work for the agency." In speaking about it, she recalls feeling the tension amongst her coworkers when she first started. Still, what made it bearable was strong leadership within the agency. For example, she recalls her then supervisor going to bat for her and working to get her stationed closer to her family.

Leadership in the SW area and Indiana NRCS has played a major role in improving opportunities for women and other groups in the area and across the state. A lot has changed since the early days of their careers with NRCS. But one thing is for sure – women continue to be an integral part of the NRCS workforce and partnership. Female employees today are walking on the stones set by the women challenging the norms who have come before us. The discussion with these four D.C.s highlights how previous generations have set the scene for women employees to succeed today. Through these challenges and experiences, conservation continues to be implemented in the southwest of Indiana and beyond. The legacy of women in the agency throughout its history continues to shape the experience of NRCS employees today.

Happy Retirement

After nearly nine years of service to the Dubois County Soil and Water Conservation District, Patti Schroeder has retired. Schroeder is loving retirement! Although she seems to be keeping a full schedule as she is filling her time with hiking, sewing, knitting and gathering with friends. She is also planning sewing/craft/weaving classes for Traditional Arts Today. We wish her all the best with all of her new adventures.

Along with Schroeder's retirement, we have welcomed Jessica Condra as our new Administrative Assistant. Condra is from Huntingburg and has over fifteen years of administrative experience.



VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative Host Virtual Lunch & Learn

During the month of February, the VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative hosted a series of four virtual soil health diagnostic lunch and learn sessions via Zoom. This was a great opportunity to share our journey of the soil experience at LSI.

While we were disappointed not to be able to meet in person the virtual environment did provide a great platform to reach a broader audience. Program Technician Melissa Ruschau stated that “We were able to reach both local farmers and others across the state that would normally not be able to attend.”

February 3rd kicked off the series with *What is Soil Health? - Measurement and Assessment* presented by Stephanie McClean, NRCS Soil Scientist. McClean demonstrated how to identify healthy soil and discussed the benefits that healthy soils can bring to your farm. We discussed how the soil has changed on The Land Stewardship Farm the with 9 years of no till cover crop management compared to conventional tillage strip in the same field. And reviewed side by side comparisons of soil in the Slake test, the slump test and where compaction layers are present. Click here for the [Session 1 Video](#).

The second event was held on February 10th. Purdue Extension’s Kenneth Eck moderated a panel of local soil conservationists, agribusiness professionals and farmers as they discussed *Changes to LSI Soil Health*. After 10 years of operation there was much to discuss! We learned they have chosen to serve on the LSI’s Ag Advisory committee. They shared the changes that they have observed on the property over the last nine years and provided attendees with their best tips. Whether you are just getting started with no till and cover crops, or have experience and want to take your operation to the next level they have advice for you! [Session 2 Video](#)

Our third event help on February 17th was all about our *Local Farmer Testimonials*. Three Dubois County farmers: Alex Hohl, Duane Hopf and Jack Welp shared details of their operations and why they are so passionate about soil health and the differences that their management practices have made in the soil. They discussed ideas for cover crop implementation and some of their best tips on how to implement these practices in your fields. [Session 3 Video](#)

The final event occurred on February 24th and introduced attendees to our partners the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Indiana Department of Agriculture (ISDA) and our Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District staff (SWCD). These individuals discussed their programs and answered questions about the technical and financial support that their agencies provide. [Session 4 Video](#)

The soil health diagnostic series was presented by VUJC Land Stewardship Initiative, Dubois County Soil and Water Conservations District, United States Department of Agriculture, Purdue Extension-Dubois County and the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative. Thank you for participating in our virtual Lunch & Learn events.

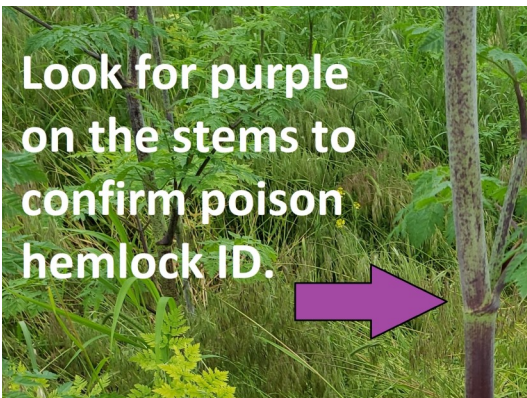
If you were unable to attend then you are in luck! With our virtual format we were able to record and post each event on our YouTube page for you to watch on your schedule. [Dubois SWCD - YouTube](#)



Invasive Species

Control Poison Hemlock NOW—Before Flowering!

Poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is a biennial plant, meaning it takes two years for the plant to complete its lifecycle. During the first year, the plant grows as a short, less than 18 inches in height, rosette with its leaves arranged in a cluster at the base of the plant, similar to a dandelion's growth habit. In the second year, in March and April, the plant will still appear as a low-growing rosette but as spring progresses the plant will bolt/flower and send a flowering stalk from the base of the plant until it is about four to six feet in height. The flowers are umbrella-shaped and white in color. At this point, it is most often confused with wild carrot (Queen Anne's Lace) or wild parsnip. Wild carrot is usually 18 to 24 inches in height when flowering compared to poison hemlock's towering height of four to six feet at the same stage. Poison hemlock will be less than 24 inches in height when it is not flowering. The other key difference is that wild carrot has numerous, fuzzy white hairs along the stems. Wild parsnip will reach the same height as poison hemlock during flowering but will have yellow flowers and no purple coloration on the stems.



The key characters to look for are red to purple spots along the stem and a complete absence of hairs. It is critical to look very closely because poison hemlock plants vary widely in the number and intensity of purple spots on the plant. Coloration, when it is in the rosette stage, can be very faint, just light reddish/purplish spots that you will only see if you look closely.

Remember to wear gloves when handling poison hemlock! Once the plant begins to flower, the spots typically become very purple and can cover most of the flowering stem/stalk.

Management of this weed is particularly important for livestock and hay producers. Small populations can be removed by hand digging but remember to avoid contact with your skin by wearing gloves.

When Poison Hemlock plant bolt in May in Southern Indiana, it is your last chance to control them before flowering. Watch Finch's video on our YouTube channel to learn more about controlling Poison Hemlock this time of year. [Poison Hemlock Video](#)

This May SWCD staff will start conducting roadside invasive plant surveys around the county. The first plant they will focus on is Poison Hemlock, though additional surveys later in the year may be added to map additional species. This data will give a better picture of the distribution of target species in our area, and may also be used to contact landowners with information on best management practices. Daviess and Martin counties are also participating in this work through a joint Clean Water Indiana grant through the Indiana State Department of Agriculture's State Soil Conservation Board.

What's Up With Burning Bush?



In 2020 we first unveiled our new Burning Bush Billboard, with help from Lamar. Now, we continue to partner with local Soil & Water Conservation Districts to encourage you to breakup with your Burning Bush. Special thanks to the Dubois County REC Operation Round Up community grant program for funding our 2021 Dubois County billboards. For more information please visit www.isacdc.org.



by Victor Shelton, March, 2021

The two weeks in the middle of February either tested your patience with the weather and/or your winter contingency plan! I think I had personally gotten a bit too used to milder winter weather over the past few years and was more concerned about mud control and saturated soils than wintery monstrosities that started reminding me a bit of the winter of '78. In reality, it wasn't that bad, but the mixture of snow and ice in layers and extremely cold temperatures certainly tested your preparations.

Even though there has been some bitter cold weather the past few weeks, when the snow melted away, you had to be a bit surprised to see so much green still present in your pasture and lawn! I've noticed the same thing with some cover crops. Even species that we usually expect to winter kill normally are still hanging in there such as oats and radishes. Snow may be frozen and cold to the touch, but it can still provide some good insulation for plants underneath it. Perhaps it makes the statement, "blanket of snow" that much more fitting.

The weather, as far as I know, can't be controlled. I honestly hope that nobody ever figures out how to manipulate the weather either. I wouldn't trust anyone with that kind of power. The slight differences from season to season are quite interesting to watch and it keeps us on our toes. Most years, we have enough cold weather, particularly multiple nights with temperatures below 25 degrees, that puts most forages into winter dormancy.

Forages going into winter dormancy is actually a good thing. It allows the plant to rest from above ground forage growth and not utilize much energy from stored reserves. Those reserves will be needed soon to initiate the first new spring growth. If those reserves are continuously tapped into—especially before dormancy sets in for the winter—then you usually have slower and reduced growth in the spring until photosynthesis has kicked in enough on new growth to replenish energy reserves, then above ground growth can catch up if allowed to.

My wife has noted remarkable growth on some daffodils and questioned me if that was there prior to the mid-February snow. I honestly don't know. I wasn't paying that close attention to them and instead paid more attention to getting animals attended to during the snowy bluster. But she was correct, they were remarkably not only up through the ground and approaching almost four inches, but a few buds were also present. They are simply reacting to the weather around them. This is not the first time for them to do this and it is certainly not always a good thing either because I have seen them frozen, flowers nodding, after a heavy freeze while in full flower.

The question of the day isn't about daffodils, though, but forages, especially cool season forages and exactly what are they doing right now? New spring growth is mostly influenced by day length and temperature.

In response to a comment or question, "Don't you think that the grass seems greener after the snow melted away and is it growing," certainly caught my attention and made me stop and think a bit. It might still feel rather cool to most people, but it doesn't take much warmth, especially in soil temperature, to initiate some growth for cool season grasses. Soil temperatures much above freezing, especially with some warm sunny days and increasing daylight, can entice new growth. Soil temperatures above 50 degrees really promotes growth. So, first, what is the soil temperature now? That will depend a lot on where you are, temperatures and how much sun your fields are getting. A look at soil temperature of some bare ground on a late day of February early morning shows just a bit above freezing, but when taken midafternoon, it was approaching almost 40 degrees. It can't maintain that temperature with nights still dropping down, but that is normal!

The melting of snow can add minute amounts of nitrogen to the sward but is for the most part insignificant. If I had to guess, and it is a guess, I'd assume perhaps a scanty five pounds at best. Major swings in soil temperature do stimulate microbial activity in the soil and energy. We might not notice this difference on a soil thermometer, but the plants do.

Grazing Bites, *continued*

Now, that said, just because we have some new growth coming on in the pastures does not mean to let the livestock have at it. We are a good way from that yet. Grazing too early in the spring does nothing but remove some of that solar panel the plants need to start rebuilding sugar and growing new roots. The forages really need to be able to canopy over and get a good start before livestock start removing that top canopy or production will be reduced. Besides, it is early still, and there are some scattered snow patches just hanging around enticing some more.



In some areas, the green never totally disappeared this winter.

Most producers with pasture or hay ground understand the concept of “frost-seeding” clover. Frost seeding is taking advantage of the freeze-thaw process of the soil during winter months. When water in the soil freezes, it moves upward, pushing some soil with it. This creates little pockets for seeds to fall into, especially slick smooth seeds like clover. This process provides a good environment for seed-to-soil contact and good conditions for that seed to grow later. Soils that have had a little more disturbance and that have small amounts of soil visible are subject to more heaving due to the lack of enough cover and therefore the seed takes better, but these fields will also usually require more rest prior to grazing in the spring because of it. We will most likely still have frost-seeding conditions yet, so if needed, get'r done.

If you already have some clover and are just enhancing what you have, then utilize improved varieties for the best results. If you don't have any clover presently, then you should inoculate the seed with the appropriate rhizobium. The seed may germinate and thrive without it, but it will do so much better if it is present, especially if one of the goals for planting the legume is as a nitrogen source for the grass component of the stand. Clovers add diversity, boost yields, provides pollinator loving plants to the pasture and there are some benefits, especially with red clover, in reducing or diluting endophyte-infected tall fescue issues.

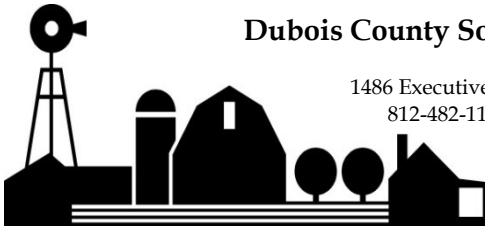
I mentioned “preparation” for wintery conditions at the beginning. Utilizing proper nutrition is a priority. We may not spend any longer than we have to with the livestock on those days, but they don't have much choice. Energy requirements are higher, so it's a good time to feed the higher quality feed. Have hay marked or organized and ideally backed with forage sampling ahead of time. Supplement as needed to meet nutritional and energy needs.

Having your feeding area easily assessable, for any weather condition, is certainly also very advantageous. Keeping hay/baleage close to the feeding area and having good infrastructure for storage and movement is very beneficial, especially when things get snowy, icy or just muddy. Heavy use area sites and access roads suddenly appear and are very beneficial and worthwhile. Having a series of bales set out, where all you have to move is poly wire and perhaps a ring is also a great way to get through these situations if you have good soil conditions, ideally being dry or frozen.

In closing, spring is coming and will be here before we know it. Management does impact spring regrowth, so wait on grazing unless you still have stockpiled forage so you can maximize production. Keep on grazing!

Remember, it's not about maximizing a grazing event, but maximizing a grazing season! Keep on grazing!

More pasture information and past issues of Grazing Bites are available at
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/in/technical/landuse/pasture/>



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Rental Equipment Available at Dubois County SWCD

No-Till Drill—Rental fee is \$8/acre or minimum of \$50.

Great Plains No-Till drill has a seeding width of 7 feet, and can be used to plant soybeans, wheat, legumes, grasses, etc. It can also be used to plant native or warm season grasses.

Stapler/Staples—\$10/Rental fee, \$50/box of 1,000 staples.

This stapler is for erosion control blankets. The plunger simply pushes the staples into the ground.

Spinning Jenny—No Rental Fees.

Use to install high-tensile wire fences. Load with wire and set on the ground. Walk away pulling the end of the wire and it will spin, preventing your wire from tangling. Slow down gradually before stopping to prevent over-spinning and tangling. Can also be used to rewind wire in the field.

Tile Flags—\$7.00/bundle of 100.

Flags on 36" wire staff can be used to mark underground power lines or surveying jobs.