



# Soil & Water

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

**FEBRUARY 2024**

A supplement of the **Journal Review**





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# Cornerstone Farms and Livestock named 2023 Conservationist of the Year

**Andria Grady**  
Journal Review

The Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District named Cornerstone Farms and Livestock the 2023 Conservationists of the Year. Cornerstone Farms and Livestock is owned and operated by Jarrod and Crystal Zachary of rural Darlington.

The Zacharys are first-generation farmers, planting their initial crops of corn and soybeans in 2017. The farm now also supports cow and calf operations. Primarily self-taught and always learning, the couple dedicated themselves to farming as an adventure they could navigate together.

“Farming is a lifestyle, not a job,” Jarrod said. “Our schedules are set by what is happening on the farm.”

Multiple conservation practices are utilized in their farming operations.

“Our goal is always to leave the land better than we found it,” Crystal said.

One conservation practice on the farm is an established Heavy Use Area Protection for livestock. Per the USDA, this practice provides surface stability in areas where the concentration of animals could cause a resource concern. Provisions, therefore, must be made for the collection, storage, utilization, and treatment of manure and contaminated runoff.

“It’s expensive, but it pays off,” Jarrod said.

Their Heavy Use Area has allowed them to maintain better cattle health and has resulted in increased birth rates remarkably close to 100 percent. The natural resources on the farm have not suffered from contamination.



The Zacharys are also big proponents of cover cropping. All the Cornerstone crops in the Darlington area are planted in cover crops.

“Cover crops add stability and nutrients to the ground, provide cover for habitat, and help with erosion control,” Jarrod said. “Though different farms have diverse needs, there is always a value to using cover crops.”

In particular, the farm is participating in a three-year commitment to clover seeding.

“Cattle like to eat it,” Jarrod said. “Pollinators need it. People do not

realize how important the pollinators are.”

The Zacharys agreed that encouraging others to take part in conservation is important to the future. They have used their own efforts to teach their children lessons along the way. The farm has provided the perfect backdrop to plant seeds of knowledge and initiate questions about the environment, with topics ranging from drought, erosion, animal husbandry, and everything in between. Curiosity and wonder are always prevalent.

In addition to farming, the Zachary

family serves the Montgomery County community in numerous ways. Jarrod has been a part of the Montgomery County Leadership Academy, served as an advisor to the West Central Indiana Career & Technical program, and is a North Montgomery school board member. Crystal is the president of CP Products Inc., a paper and janitorial supply company in Crawfordsville. Along with their two children, they most enjoy spending time together, especially getting away when the farming season allows, to their Wisconsin vacation home.



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# Conservation district, farm family earn honors

**Tina McGrady**

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The Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District and one local farm family have earned statewide recognition for their efforts to improve the environment and educate others.

The MCSWCD was recognized as a recipient of the 2023 District Showcase Award from the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Cain's Homelike Farms also was named the 2023 Conservation Farmer of the Year by the same organization.

Staff from the MCSWCD were joined by local board members and program partners, county officials and state conservation representatives at the Fusion 54 building to celebrate.

The District Showcase Award is an annual statewide award that highlights a successful soil and water district. It was given to the MCSWCD in recognition for initiating many new programs, making new connections and partnerships and gaining the support of the Montgomery County Council to add the program coordinator's salary to the county budget.

Kristin Latzke, conservation director for the MCSWCD, said this is the first time the county has received the honor.

Liz Rice, executive director for the IASWCD, said the recognition was earned because of the community involvement the district has developed.

"They are able, through their network, through their passion and through their knowledge to connect with everybody from urban producers and small backyard growers to folks with hundreds of acres of row crops



and engage them in conservation at all levels," Rice said.

The MCSWCD was recognized in January at the annual IASWCD conference in Indianapolis. The Cain family also receive recognition at the conference.

"Kenny is a farmer who exemplifies the definition of stewardship," Rice said. "His passion for the protection of soil and wildlife is absolutely contagious. Cain's Homelike Farms demonstrates decades of conservation practices ... and his family's commit-

ment to the education of others is exemplified in the annual hosting of the Fourth Grade Field Days."

Fourth Grade Field Days is two-day event that welcomes students to the family's farm near Darlington to learn about various aspects of soil and water conservation and farming practices. This year marked the event's 25th anniversary.

"Kenny's leadership in many various conservation organizations illustrates his earnest dedication to the next generation," Rice added. "It's one thing to

put conservation on your land and do the things you believe in, it's another to take risks and educate, evangelize and inspire others."

A surprised and humbled Kenny Cain thanked everyone for the recognition.

"It's not really about Cain Farms, it's about the resources and the Cains have always tried to be an example of doing the right thing," he said.

Cain and his family are standing on the shoulders of the four generations that came before them.

"It started when great-grandfather Thomas came here from Ireland and he knew the right thing to do was to take care of the soil," he said.

Today, Cain looks forward to the fifth generation, which includes his son and nephews, to carry on that legacy and stewardship.

Cain stressed that the relationship between the agricultural community and the MCSWCD is paramount.

"It's all about what we can do as a district," he said. "I'm proud to be a part of it ... and the evolution of that."

All of the presenters who spoke during the showcase event stressed the importance of not taking soil and water for granted.

"If you start looking at our resources and the availability of them, you will see they have changed or how we've polluted them or we've degraded them over time or over generations," Rice said. "You will quickly realize it is now incumbent upon us to invest in cleaning up our water and restoring our soil. With climate change coming down, we all have to understand a little bit of the science in order to be a part of the solution."



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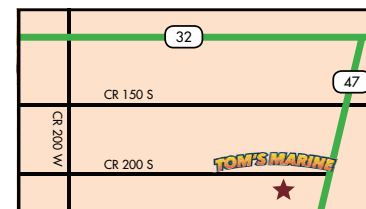
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**Josh & Brittany McCloud**



# Sauntering through your neighbors' gardens

## Journal Review

Community Growers of Montgomery County offered a free Garden Walk to three backyard gardens in downtown neighborhoods in July. Participants were invited to do the entire walk or visit individual gardens. Organizers invited those who came to the second annual backyard Garden Walk to bring lunches if they wished. The group gathered for lunch and conversation after the tour at picnic tables at the Lew Wallace Study.

This garden walk was not an ordinary “come and marvel” garden tour but rather a chance to see how three gardening families with varied levels of experience and garden desires have changed their city yards into native plant beds (pollinator gardens) and vegetable, herb, and/or flower gardens. Attendees heard from the gardeners, observed the gardens, and asked questions at each 30-minute stop. Each garden and gardener had a story to share.

The tour began at John Walter's garden at 409 E. Jefferson St. The Walters have lived in their home on Jefferson for seven years. When they bought the property, the backyard was “just grass and some overgrown trees.” John will talk about how this bland chunk of lawn has become a brightly colored oasis today. For John, raising a garden is synonymous with raising children. So visitors will see how lots of strawberries and lettuce, bright fences, benches, and pots become part of the plan when your main garden hand is a curious five-year-old. Seeds may well pop up in surprising places. John will have stories of bird and insect residents who seek out this green and growing place and of the delight of “letting nature plant.”

The second stop was at Amanda Ingram and Mark Elrod's home at 606 S. Water St. Amanda and Mark are both lifelong gardeners and Amanda selected her home where the couple now

lives for its “room to grow.” She and Mark are quiet, urban homesteaders of a sort: think chickens, tea-making, beer brewing, and a stand of corn near the mailbox. Both of them like to “try to grow almost everything we want to eat ... pretty much anything that will grow in our horticultural zone.” In recent years they've gone no-till and use organic mulches. They will tell visitors what they've learned about soil building and conservation as they show us their various beds.

The third and final stop was at the home of Joyce and Patrick Burnette. Joyce's backyard plot will bring a chord of recognition to many visitors: Joyce is an informal gardener who gardens as much as she can around a busy work life. “I started gardening when I moved into this house 26 years ago ... I was mainly motivated by and wanting some decent tomatoes.” Despite this modest beginning and casual approach, Joyce raises lots of vegetables and makes use of perennial fruits on her property.

## WALTER GARDEN

John Walter has been a lifelong gardener except for the decade (from ages 18-28) that he spent as a combat soldier overseas. That service to our country surely deepened his love of peaceful, growing things. “It's great to eat what I grow, to teach my children where food comes from.” He lights up when talks about showing the kids the things gardening brings with it: “All the pretty Bs! Birds, butterflies, bees, and bugs.” For John himself the benefits are large too. “It's so calming to work in the garden after my day job. If I hadn't changed my backyard, all I'd be able to do is mow a rectangle of boring grass.”

Libby Walter, age five, is John's primary garden assistant and she has lots of say about where she wants things planted. This has led to a few hilarious moments that visitors will



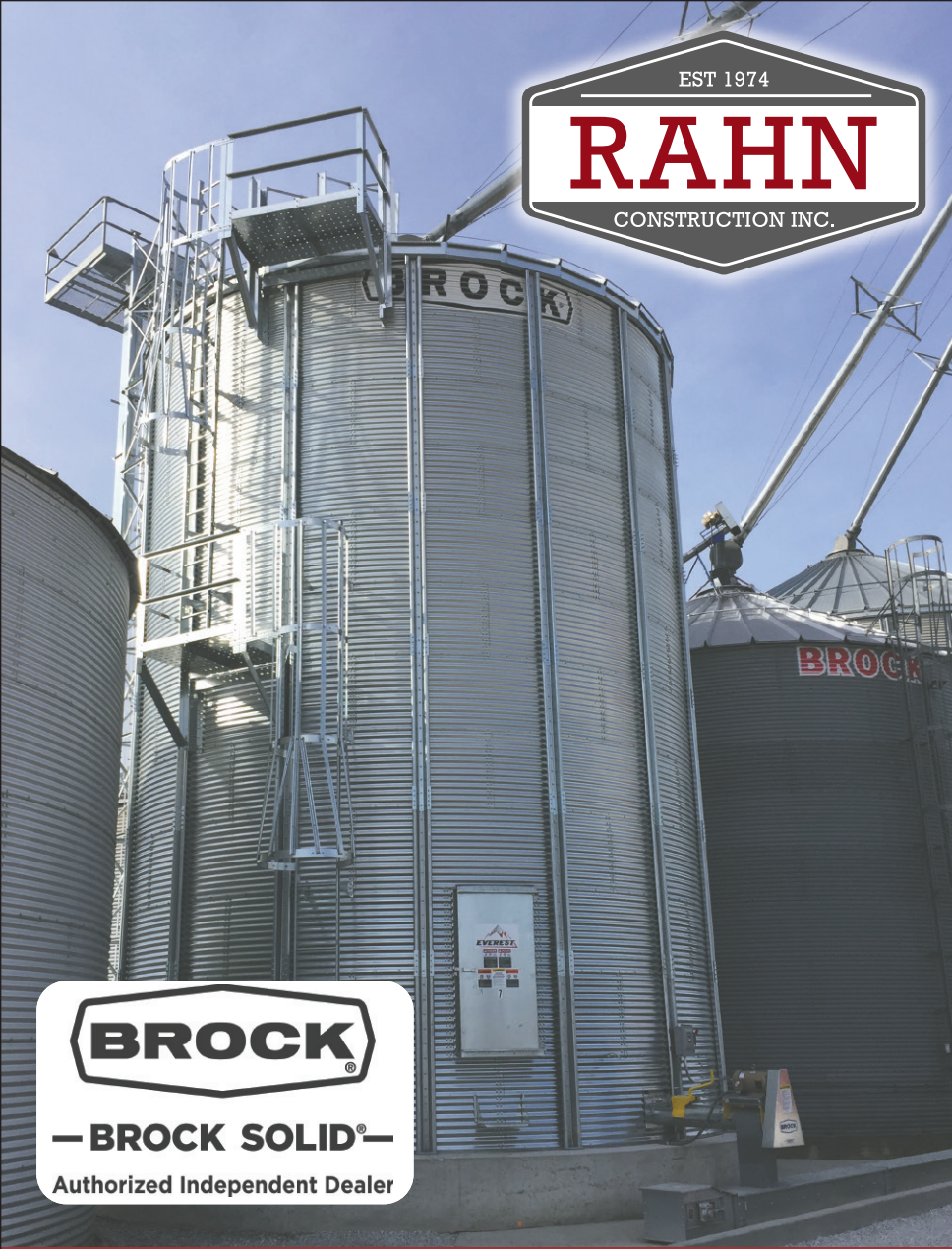
get to see. Teaching and showing only go so far. John wants to raise an independent set of kids (he has three) who understand how things work. All the Walter kids now know that they can eat radishes right out of the ground and tomatoes off the vine. The family gardens organically. Their strawberry crop was phenomenal this year, but best of all is the ongoing life learning. His little garden assistant approached and picked a new vegetable the other day: “Daddy, the Cucumbers poked me. You didn't tell me they had stingers.”

John describes himself as a “left-handed gardener” who starts in spring by drawing out the ideal garden he'd like to see on a sheet of paper. His eyes light up and he chuckles at what comes of this: “I love the Beautiful Mess of July with vines everywhere and rows hard to find.” That's when the goldfinches start visiting the sunflowers and the fledgling birds come to his bird baths. Backyard salad is surely on the Walters' dinner menu.

## INGRAM-ELROD GARDEN

Mark and Amanda met after they both got jobs at Wabash College. Amanda is a professional botanist and professor. Mark has a great many related interests but surely they must have found “common ground” in their families' deep gardening cultures that both were raised in. Mark chuckles when he says that he's been a gardener “since I could walk.” To prove the point he adds that his parents “have a Super 8 film of me in the garden as a toddler.” That little kid crawled to the cucumber trellis, pulled himself up, picked a cuke and took a bite. The next shot shows little Mark with his entire little face wrinkled up in disgust. He then tries to reinsert the spat-out piece into the cucumber! Mark notes wryly, “To this day I dislike raw cucumbers.” But the gardening passion continued. He reminisces: our family always planted the garden on Me-





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morial Day so I remember digging holes and making rows while we all listened to the race on the radio.”

Amanda too has “gardening in the bones,” and clearly a love of plants shaped her professional life. Their current shared gardening passions flow from these rich gardening heritages. Both say that they like to “grow almost everything we want to eat.” They can give visitors tips on how they can, dry, freeze, and pickle the extras. “When we’re exhausted from preserving, we foist the rest on friends.” Food adventures in their own yard testify: Amanda and Mark usually try something new each year. This year hibiscus is a feature and hibiscus tea may be on the docket.

The couple’s love and knowledge of science blends perfectly with gardening. They have the homesteader passion for knowing the patch of ground on which they live. Mark is a highly skilled beer maker; Amanda does all kinds of food and flower extensions. Key to all of this is caring for their soil. As Mark and Amanda have transitioned to no-till and using all organic mulches for fertilizer and weed-suppression over the last several years, their increased soil fertility has been notable. And, as Amanda says, “This has made our plants so much more resilient to drought and pests.” Visitors will be all ears to learn more about that in this summer of record-breaking heat in parts of our country.

## BURNETTE GARDEN

Joyce’s garden of tomatoes, peppers, green beans, lettuce, tomatoes and tomatillos is a happy “hobby garden.” And, it’s Joyce’s garden that will be most encouraging to visitors who have little gardening experience. Joyce’s immediate family did not garden. She did have an aunt and uncle who had compost. Compost? She wondered what that was, having never heard of the word or concept. She learned. “Otherwise,” she notes, “I just read about it.” First generation

gardeners — and we need millions of them in this era — deserve lots of credit. They have pluck. Too many people think they “don’t have a green thumb” and so never try. To be bold enough to try gardening after “just reading about it” is to open your life to new possibilities. In our electronic learning era, many a successful gardener has gotten his or her start “by reading about it” using YouTube videos, gardening podcasts, and the like.

While a graduate student and living in little apartments without green space, Joyce longed to try growing things. The Burnette’s Crawfordsville backyard has given her the chance. As a scholar, professor, and a person who travels for work, and who is deeply involved in our community, gardening is a respite and it has taught her to be flexible. “You learn to pay attention, to see what works and what doesn’t.” She’s enjoyed the perennial fruits in her backyard, the raspberries and the cherries.

In addition to the raspberry muffins, tart cherry pie, and yummy batches of tomato sauce along with bags of frozen tomato chunks, Burnette most appreciates “being able to do something physical rather than mental. It’s a good break from my normal job. Growing something is very satisfying.”





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# Thum to lead Soil Conservation Division

## Journal Review

INDIANAPOLIS — Jennifer Thum has been promoted to Soil Conservation Director for the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA). Thum has worked for the department for over a decade and was most recently deputy soil conservation director.

“Soil conservation and water quality initiatives are critical for Hoosier farmers and our numerous partners across the state, and they need a strong leader to enhance conservation practices,” said Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. “Jennifer has been a dedicated public servant for over 10 years with ISDA and I am looking forward to her leading the largest division at the department with energy and grace.”

Thum hails from Milford, Mich. and attended Oakland Community College and Eastern Michigan University for her undergraduate degrees and received a Master of Public Administration degree from Northern Michigan University.

Her previous role with ISDA included securing over \$50 million in funding for soil conservation projects. She also oversaw the Western Lake Erie Basin Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Kankakee Regional Conservation Partnership Program, a team of six staff and the upcoming iCover project.



“Jennifer has been a tremendous team player for over the past decade,” said Don Lamb, Indiana State Department of Agriculture director. “She has transformed the Western Lake Erie Basin group, secured funding in the millions of dollars and led her staff with tenacity. We are so excited to promote her to role of director and we know she will

go above and beyond for farmers, landowners and her staff.”

In her new role as director, she will continue to work with conservation partners, farmers, landowners and all 92 local Indiana Soil and Water Conservation districts. She will over-

see the Division of Soil Conservation staff and its various programs like the Indiana Conservation Partnership and data collection, the State Nutrient Reduction Strategy and is Secretary of the State Soil Conservation Board.

“Over the past several years, I have been very fortunate to work with Indiana’s incredible agriculture industry, from the commodity groups to the non-for-profits and our 92 SWCDs, and our neighboring states on several projects,” said Thum. “I am looking forward to continuing to work hand-in-hand with our partners across the state to enhance soil health and water quality.”

Thum resides in Fort Wayne with her family. In her spare time she enjoys backpacking and hiking with her family and attending her three sons’ various sporting events.



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# Climate change, water quality and wetlands among key topics at Indiana's 2023 Water Summit

Scientists, lawmakers and business leaders joined together to talk about how to better manage Indiana's water

**Casey Smith**

Indiana Capital Chronicle

How are new developments, aging infrastructure and climate change affecting Hoosier water resources? Those were some of the key questions discussed at Indiana's 2023 Water Summit, hosted in August by the White River Alliance in Indianapolis.

Environmental and water experts, along with business leaders and policymakers, joined together at the annual symposium to talk about issues impacting Indiana's water supply — and what steps local and state leaders should take next.

The two-day event included specific dialogue around threats to Indiana's water quality and supply, the U.S. Supreme Court's recent wetlands decision, and a plan to divert billions of gallons of water per year from the Lafayette region down to Boone County for a controversial high-tech park.

Check out the other highlights from this year's summit — and a glimpse at

what water-related actions could be taken by state lawmakers in future legislative sessions:

## **How climate change is affecting Indiana — and what experts say needs to be done**

Indiana's climate is changing — and more changes are on the way.

Heavier rainfall and hotter, drier summers are likely in Indiana's future, said Keith Cherkauer, a Purdue University professor of agricultural and biological engineering and the director of the Indiana Water Resources Research Center.

Pointing to data published in the Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment, Cherkauer noted the Hoosier state will see 6 to 8% more rainfall by 2050 than it averaged in the recent past. The increasing precipitation will not fall evenly across the entire year, however.

Most of that increased precipitation is expected to come in the spring, while summers and falls are likely to become slightly drier than they are now.

That's because temperatures across

Indiana are continuing to go up, too, causing evaporation to increase and making summers drier. Cherkauer said Hoosiers witnessed a little bit of that this summer with the early season drought.

As the climate warms, rain is additionally predicted to take the place of much of the snow in the cold season from November through March. In southern Indiana, there will be little snowfall at all by late in the century. In the north, snowfall will be greatly reduced compared to the past, Cherkauer said.

"On average, we're looking at a little hotter, potentially drier summers that are not necessarily long, multi-year droughts like in the 1930s, but actually more flash droughts — so very rapid changes, increased temperatures and very rapidly drier conditions," he said. "It means that moving forward, we need to think about how we manage water."

Gabe Filippelli, who works at Indiana University's Environmental Resilience

Institute, emphasized that climate change is already challenging Indiana's water infrastructure "significantly," especially due to "a lot more extreme precipitation events" than in the past.

"We're already seeing some of these impacts. We will be getting probably a little bit more precipitation, but it'll come in much, much larger, extreme precipitation events, and it will get substantially warmer," he said.

More rain is expected to lead to increased surface runoff, he continued. That can cause higher concentrations of pollutants, like E. coli, to move through streams and waterways, in addition to increasing occurrences of harmful algal blooms.

More "super warm" and dry summers can also have agricultural implications in the long-term, moving the corn and bean belts away from Indiana, Filippelli added. In more urban areas, cities will also face challenges with extreme, even deadly heat.

Sarah Beth Aubrey with IN-Climates said farmers want to be part of the



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to be more. Improved communication with growers is key, she said, as long as “they aren’t made to feel like their backs are against the wall.”

“Two years ago, I would have said to you how to talk to farmers about climate, don’t use the word climate. They don’t want to feel vilified,” she said. “Some growers are very comfortable in the conservation space with the practices that they do today. Others feel like they’re not sure what practices they can do. They’re not sure how to pay for those, what they might cost, how they might change their labor and equipment needs, and so they may be more reticent to engage around that.”

Filippelli further emphasized that while Hoosiers “need to stop putting carbon in the atmosphere ... this crazy weather that we’re having is not going to go back to what it was 20 years ago” just addressing carbon alone.

“We’re locked into whatever the climate is — we’re locked in for hundreds of years,” he said.

Policymakers should be looking farther in the future when enacting new laws, he said, and be “much, much, much more intelligent with how we build flood maps and flood hazard zones. He also suggested that state and local leaders need to explore more ways to introduce green infrastructure — like planting trees and restoring wetlands.

### Floodplains and wetlands

Cherkauer said Indiana policymakers should focus more on wetlands and existing drainage channels that can store excess water in the winter and springs so it’s available in the later, drier seasons.

Antonio Arenas Amado, a professor at Iowa State University, doubled down, saying there is an “urgent demand from municipalities for updated data to update their infrastructure design” to reflect the impact of climate change.

But in recent years, Indiana’s Republican-dominated legislature has refused more “restrictive” water regulations. Instead, GOP-led efforts have resulted in rollbacks and removals of protections for certain wetlands.

A U.S. Supreme Court ruling from earlier this year will also effectively remove

federal protections for most of Indiana’s wetlands — and enable Hoosier lawmakers to repeal already-weakened state protections for those areas.

Rachele Baker, chief ecologist and president of central Indiana-based Little River Consultants, emphasized that wetlands provide flood management, rainfall storage and water quality protection.

Baker said well-managed wetlands can replace “expensive” expenditures for regional water detention facilities, combined sewer overflow projects, water treatment and flood relief plants, as well as costs associated with endangered species protections, farming tile drains, buffer strips, and other infrastructure maintenance and repair.

“This is certainly not a solution to all of our climate change problems with respect to water supply, but certainly isolated wetlands exist as a partial solution, and we’re not protecting them,” Baker said. “Instead we’re looking at, can we build massive infrastructure and save on all this water and then build infrastructure to send it out to everyone? I think that we need to be thinking more about protecting these isolated wetlands as a way of protecting our water supply.”

### Threats to Indiana’s water resources

PFAS and coal ash were additionally of high concern for environmental advocates who spoke at the summit.

Matt Prater with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s (IDEM) Drinking Water Branch outlined the agency’s recent efforts to monitor and test for PFAS throughout the state’s water supply.

PFAS are a group of human-made chemicals found in all kinds of non-stick and stain-resistant products — from pans, to carpets to fast-food wrappers. Among other things, exposure to them has been linked to kidney cancer, problems with the immune system and developmental issues in children.

IDEM’s ongoing PFAS sampling project has already shown that 19 drinking water utilities in Indiana have levels of PFAS above federal health guidelines. More test results on the way later this year, Prater said.

A bill authored in the 2023 session by

Rep. Maureen Bauer, D-South Bend, establishes a pilot program to monitor PFAS exposure in Hoosier firefighters. Bauer said at the summit that she hopes to pass more legislation tackling PFAS in the 2024 session.

Indra Frank, the Hoosier Environmental Council’s (HEC) director of environmental health and water policy, additionally pointed to Indiana’s continued need to address coal ash.

Despite pushback from environmental advocates, Indiana lawmakers adopted new legislation earlier this year to prevent state environmental regulators from making stricter coal ash rules than federal ones.

“We have our standards we want to maintain (in Indiana),” Rep. David Abbott, R-Rome City, said about the new state law. “I think the over-restriction of the federal government is probably the biggest thing I get concerned about ... I like to be less restrictive and focus on our state without having an overreaching authority over us.”

Frank said the policy decision was a step back for Indiana.

“As we see more precipitation and more of our precipitation falling in extreme storms — that puts coal ash sites at increased risk for flooding like it does everything else,” Frank said.

“Yeah, it does cost money,” she continued, talking about the proper disposal of coal ash. “But we’ve been building appropriately engineered landfills for our municipal waste since the 1990s, and probably before in this state, and so it’s just a matter of having the coal ash disposed of at least as carefully as we dispose of our municipal waste.”

Draft federal regulations for toxic coal byproducts could cover nearly 50 exempted dumps spread across 14 locations in Indiana. The rule has not yet been finalized, though.

### Action at the state level and the Statehouse

State lawmakers at the summit also discussed a yearslong effort to create an option for Indiana counties to join together to form watershed development commissions. A bill, authored by Rep. Mike Aylesworth, R-Hebron, passed in

the most recent legislative session.

The most commissions can now work on both water quantity and water quality issues in their watershed by using small assessments on the properties within the watershed.

Watersheds are the natural boundaries for water movement in the landscape. The HEC has hailed the effort as a positive move for water resource management in Indiana.

“We want to provide that option for the local governments to come together, create some body that gets people talking and coordinating efforts, and then provide you with a way to raise fees to implement that strategy,” said Matt Meersman with the St. Joseph River Basin Commission.

Sen. Sue Glick, R-LaGrange, who sponsored Aylesworth’s bill, said major development projects around Indiana warrants more attention to water resources — which local and regional stakeholders should have a hand in.

“If you’re going to do major projects, such as the LEAP project, you better figure out early in development where the water com going to come from, or that’s going to be a real sad place when they turn on the faucet and they don’t have enough water,” Glick said.

“We have to know where the water is. We have to know the strain, we have to know what kind of quality it is,” she continued. “And that’s where the watershed development commissions can be very effective and very important.”

Rep. Carey Hamilton, D-Indianapolis, additionally said Indiana should do more to adopt green energy policies and practices.

“We’re hearing from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation that virtually every company that wants to come to our state is looking for green energy,” she said. “That is a priority for where they start their new businesses. We’re going to start to hear about more failures of business attraction if we don’t pivot to more green energy more quickly.”

Hamilton said she will continue to push for a statewide climate change commission. Her bill to do just that got a hearing in 2020, but no vote.





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# Local soil and water districts awarded over \$2.3M for water quality initiatives

## Journal Review

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indiana State Department of Agriculture and the State Soil Conservation Board awarded \$2,313,287 in matching grant funds to 26 projects within soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) and soil health organizations through the Clean Water Indiana program.

“Providing farmers and landowners with tools and funding to keep our Indiana waterways clean and their soil structure healthy is key to keeping Indiana agriculture thriving,” said Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. “This funding will allow 48 organizations across 26 projects to improve their local water systems, keep their soil healthy and keep their communities thriving. Last year’s increase in Clean Water Indiana funding from the general assembly is already making a lasting impact.”

The Clean Water Indiana program is administered by the state’s soil conservation board. The program, led by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), provides financial assistance to landowners and conservation groups that are working to reduce runoff from non-point sources of water pollution, whether it’s on agricultural land, urban areas or eroding streambanks.

Once received, districts can use the funds to partner with other counties or address specific needs within their jurisdiction. Some examples include participating in a cost share program, hiring staff, providing technical assistance, implementing cover crop incentive programs or increasing watershed capacity.

Gene Schmidt is chair of the State Soil Conservation Board and is looking forward to seeing the work done on the grassroots level by the soil and

water districts. The Clean Water Indiana Grants Committee is Ray Chattin, Brad Dawson and Jane Hardisty.

Clean Water Indiana (CWI) is managed by ISDA’s Division of Soil Conservation and funded by a portion of the state’s cigarette tax. Projects can be up to three years in length and grantees could apply for any dollar amount that was necessary to complete the project. Funded projects ranged from \$10,000 to \$300,000. In addition to CWI funds, each grantee is required to produce a match for their project, which can be cash or in-kind. Projects requesting staffing were required to have a 25% match for that component, while all other project areas required a 50% match. Many SWCDs will target producers not currently served by other conservation programs.

Below is the list of awardees, their project titles and overviews.

- Cass County SWCD – \$48,600

Administrative Assistant Staff Position, Part-time, for Cass Co. SWCD—Cass County SWCD currently has one employee who was hired to do both administration and outreach. In order to continue to maintain and build current programming and introduce new programming and outreach into the community additional staff support is needed. Funds will be utilized to pay for a part-time administrative assistant. This new position will allow the Cass Co. SWCD to continue to build momentum and grow to better support the county.

- Clark County SWCD – \$23,968

Save Our Soil Initiative — The District will purchase a new 10-ft. no-till drill to assist landowners in improving the quality of their soil and water resources. The drill will be equipped with a small seed box as well as a grain box that will allow it to be used to plant soybeans, legumes and

pollinator plots. This drill also offers the capability to fold the tires behind the drill body for ease in hauling on narrow, rural roads. In surveying drill users, the SWCD has found they prefer the larger drill because it requires fewer passes and therefore less time in seeding.

The district currently conducts a no-till drill rental program. This project will help keep sediment out of waterways, keep topsoil in place, improve organic matter, and keep sheet, gully and rill erosion from occurring.

- Clinton and Carroll County SWCDs — \$36,000

Bi-County Soil Health Systems Cost-Share Program — The Clinton County SWCD seeks to improve the soil health on agricultural lands in a two-county area, which will ultimately result in improved water quality in our local streams. The partnering SWCDs will collaborate to develop a cost-share program that will focus on practices that build and maintain soil health such as cover crops, transition to no-till, nutrient management planning, integrated crop management, gypsum application and other practices consistent with conservation cropping systems.

- Daviess County SWCD — \$76,957

Education Coordinator Position — The Daviess County SWCD has had a part-time Education Coordinator for over 25 years. This position has done many great things including a 4th grade Farm Fair, education outreach in schools and actively participating with the Washington Stormwater Departments MS4 outreach and rain garden. This position has been an integral part of the success of the district. As agriculture production continues to provide many daily necessities for our ever-growing population, there is an increased need to educate the public on the importance of conserving valu-

able natural resources. The primary goal of the position will be to increase public awareness and impact a larger area of the county through a variety of education programs.

- Decatur, Franklin and Ripley County SWCDs — \$15,750

Keep the Lights On Pollinators: Fireflies, Hummingbirds, Butterflies Oh My! — CWI funds are being used to form a partnership between the Decatur, Franklin and Ripley SWCDs by installing pollinator habitats, replacing invasive shrubs in the community and educating the public on the importance of native pollinator habitats. Through the grant, the districts will provide native pollinator seed to landowners to convert part of their ground to native plant gardens.

Additionally, the project will work to replace invasive shrubs on residential property. Homeowners can remove an invasive shrub and replace it with a native pollinator friendly shrub by working with a local nursery. The landowner will be reimbursed for their native shrub by the project. This will help reach small-scale homeowners that might not have the land to install a traditional pollinator habitat.

- DeKalb County SWCD — \$100,000

Cedar Creek Stream Stabilization — The DeKalb County SWCD, in partnership with DeKalb County Cedar Creek Drainage Board, City of Auburn and Parks & Recreation Department, Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and Maumee River Basin Commission (MRBC) will utilize CWI funds to complete a stream bank stabilization project on Cedar Creek in Eckhart Park where the creek banks have been eroding and sending sediment downstream. The overall purpose of the project is to restore degraded stream banks and protect the surrounding lands, which will improve water quality and reduce





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consists of stabilizing approximately 750 linear feet of Cedar Creek.

- Elkhart County SWCD — \$150,000  
Water Quality of Life — The Storm Water Alliance Management Program, or SWAMP, has been providing Elkhart County farmers with Elkhart County dollars to implement conservation practices including: blind inlets, cover crops, filter strips, grade stabilization structures, grassed waterways and exclusion fencing. The purpose of this grant is to improve the SWAMP program and offer additional funding for our local land users and expand into urban areas.

- Fulton County SWCD — \$145,461  
The Nature Exploration Conservation Station (NECS) — This grant will allow Fulton County SWCD to add a part-time District Administrator. The new administrator will be responsible for the operation and management of the SWCD office and the preparation and delivery of conservation education programs. This grant will also add a brand new outdoor mobile classroom that will allow residents of all ages to learn about the local environment, understand and make informed decisions regarding environmental impact and connect residents to technical and financial assistance for implementing conservation practices and technologies.

- Gibson and Pike County SWCDs — \$72,000

Gibson County CWI Invasive Technician — The district plans to hire an experienced Invasive Species Technician to address, support and improve non-native invasive education and eradication in Gibson County. The technician's main duty will be re-organizing and running the Pike and Gibson CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area). In addition, the invasive species technician will inventory invasive species hotspots in the CISMA as well as assist with field days, workshops and demonstrations promoting soil health and water quality.

- Hamilton County SWCD — \$70,900  
Hamilton County Invasive — The

Hamilton County Invasive Partnership (HIP) is the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) for the county and is fully administered by the SWCD. Created in 2019, HIP has a demonstrated record of successfully implementing educational projects, volunteer workdays and delivering technical assistance.

The project outlined in this grant focuses on delivering the financial resources needed for landowners to initiate invasive species management efforts. This project also includes a series of educational efforts dedicated to specific messages for target audiences in the county.

- Johnson County SWCD — \$15,995  
Franklin College Invasive Species Internship — Johnson County SWCD requested funds from the Clean Water Indiana (CWI) Program to provide financial assistance to Franklin College Biology students. This will be accomplished through providing stipends for semester-long internships offered by Johnson County SWCD to help with various projects related to invasive species management and promotion of native species. Internships will be offered in the fall, spring and summer sessions during the Franklin College academic calendar.

In addition to monetary compensation provided by CWI funding, each student will earn a credit hour towards their degree and invaluable professional experience working with natural resource professionals including Johnson County SWCD staff and partnering organizations.

- Knox County SWCD — \$73,000  
Watershed Planning and Soil Health- The Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework (ACPF) is an ArcGIS toolbox developed by USDA that uses high-resolution geo-spatial data to identify places where conservation practices may be needed to control erosion, reduce runoff, stabilize streambanks and protect water quality. The ACPF identifies and addresses high-risk areas, thus enabling conservation efficiency and effectiveness, but the ACPF is not widely used in Indiana because it requires a degree of skill in

ArcGIS and it takes significant time to condition the data layers and run the analysis.

Knox County SWCD's conservation technician and watershed specialist will analyze all 36 of Knox County's 14-digit watersheds using the ACPF. The data generated will be used to promote Farm Bill conservation programs and to guide LARE and IDEM watershed planning and implementation projects. The SWCD will also offer to train staff from other SWCDs and watershed groups so that they can use the ACPF for their watershed projects and other conservation efforts.

- LaPorte County SWCD- \$259,570  
Native Habitat for Pollinators Stewardship Program — The grant funding will provide:

Project cost-share (participant reimbursements including land prep and planting material and native vegetation management),

Retaining a full-time county conservationist as project lead, technical support and staff/ participant educator

Hiring two seasonal restoration management technicians for its vegetation management/invasive species control efforts, and

Purchasing necessary equipment for restoration management activities that will all be required to meet its project goals

- Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts — \$300,000

Urban Soil Health Program- Urban Soil Health Program (USH) was launched in 2021 to support urban and small-scale producers across Indiana. The program is designed to serve all districts, all conservation partners and all communities. This model ensures that there is equitable access to the program from districts and partners who wish to engage. There is a strong connection with ICP partners and conservation programs. The USH Program cultivates locally led initiatives and provides state-level support and coordination amongst traditional programs.

- Lawrence County SWCD — \$62,000  
Cultivating Future Land Stewards in Lawrence County — The Lawrence

County SWCD will hire a contract Conservation Educator to help educate and inspire the next generation of landowners and producers. The Conservation Educator will assemble and implement K-12 educational conservation programs that promote and support the stewardship of natural resources through increased knowledge and understanding of natural resource conservation topics. The focus of this project would be to strengthen local conservation awareness in the school districts and other events in Lawrence County.

- Marshall and St. Joseph County SWCDs — \$86,250

Marshall and St. Joseph Counties Landowner Invasive Management Cost Share Program- A cost share program through the districts for invasive species removal. The land would be managed by the applicant who would agree to follow set guidelines. Three-year programs would be used for the 10 applications for 10 acres or over of woodlands, and the management plans for under 10 acres could be more flexible, depending upon the ability of the landowner's desires and ability to assist/participate.

- Martin, Daviess and Orange County SWCDs — \$135,282

Tri County Invasive Species Specialist — This project will increase invasive species education, outreach and assistance for landowners in three southern Indiana counties, and build district capacity for the Martin County SWCD. The Martin SWCD will use project funds to hire a full time Invasive Species Specialist to cover Martin, Daviess and Orange counties.

The specialist's duties will include, working closely with landowners to control invasive species on private lands. Including providing technical assistance, site visits, written invasive management plans and referrals to partner agencies as needed.

- Monroe County SWCD — \$22,000

Controlling Soil Loss - No-till Drill Purchase — Funds will be used to purchase a new no-till drill to fulfill landowner requests for use for planting cover crops, establishing new



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pasture, inter-seeding for pasture improvements, native grass for prairie establishments and developing native plantings for pollinator habitats. This drill will increase the ability of Monroe County landowners to install and re-seed existing practices in our county such as grassed waterways, pollinator habitats, filter strips, field borders and wildlife corridors. The SWCD hopes to see additional acres of cover crops in smaller fields as well.

- Newton County SWCD — \$62,222  
Increasing Soil, Water and Natural Resource Education Capacity in Newton County- The purpose of this project is to increase, improve and sustain high quality soil, water and natural resource education and outreach efforts in Newton County by hiring a full time educator. An additional staff member will help achieve the district's goals to deliver quality programs, education, technical and administrative efforts to address the SWCD's highest priority resource concerns including surface and ground water quality, soil erosion and loss of health/function and invasive species. This funding will provide a portion of the District Educator salary, support the new employee's travel and account for program support to ensure project success.

- Pike County SWCD — \$159,000  
Soil Technician and Cover Crop Project— This will be a three-year program to employ a full-time, experienced Soil Conservation Technician, to address, support and improve conservation in Pike County and address soil health and water quality through a cover crop cost-share program.

The technician's main duty will be assisting SWCD staff with advertising the cost-share program, meeting with producers and assisting them on technical aspects of cover crops, and field check tracts enrolled in the cost-share program. In addition, the technician will also help with the district's conservation programs, re-enroll field checks, working closely with the District Conservationist to ensure participants are complying with signed contracts.

- Spencer County SWCD — \$10,000  
Spencer County Ground Cover Incentive Program- The SWCD desires to promote the further use of cover crops throughout the county and reduce the continued degradation of soil health by offering a cover crop cost share program. Cover crops are the single most cost-effective best management practice the district can promote that reduces sediment runoff, reduces loss of nutrients, protects water quality of our district and downstream communities, reduces the growth of weeds in fields and increases field productivity and yields.

The district will target highly erodible land (HEL) first with this program, preventing further erosion on already sensitive soils and slopes. More than 60% of the district soils can be classified as HEL.

- The Nature Conservancy- \$82,500  
Indiana Cover Crop Premium Discount Project — Over 85% of cropland acres carry crop insurance, and linking resilient practices, like cover crops, to crop insurance has the potential to catalyze conservation adoption and keep Indiana as the epicenter of soil health. This project mirrors statewide efforts previously established in both Illinois and Iowa, and it provides eligible participants a \$5/acre premium discount on the following year's crop insurance invoice for every acre of cover crop enrolled and verified in the program.

Farmers participating in the project will be awarded a \$5/acre insurance premium discount from USDA-RMA through normal crop insurance processes. Only acres in cover crops (absent other state or federally incentivized cover crops) will be eligible for the premium discount. Applications reviewed and confirmed by ISDA will be forwarded to the USDA-RMA for processing premium discounts on crop insurance premium invoices for their cash crop. Being a first-time cover crop user is not a requirement but will be given priority for funding. The 2024-2025 Cover Crop Premium Reduction Program will support 30,000

acres of cover crops.

- Union and Fayette County SWCDs — \$75,000

Cover Crop and Invasive Incentive Program- Union and Fayette County SWCD are partnering on the Cover Crop and Invasive Incentive Program. This program will provide funding to private landowners and parks to start or continue practicing the planting of cover crops and/or removal of invasive plant species and the reintroduction of native plants.

The program provides funds for cover crops to both counties at \$12,500 per year and invasive species plant removal at \$12,500 per year.

The first portion of invasive funding will go to the parks for tools and invasive plant removal. The second portion will be available to landowners in cash match for removal of invasive species plants on private land. SICIM will be providing a technician for invasive species reports and assistance with public educational programs. Union and Fayette County SWCD will be hosting educational events on identification and removal of invasive plant species including why removal of invasive species is beneficial to water, soil and natural habitats.

- Vermillion and Parke County SWCDs — \$175,000

Bridging Conservation Gaps: Empowering Communities for Sustainable Agriculture- The Vermillion County Soil and Water Conservation District (VCSWCD) and the Parke County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) plan to foster sustainable land management practices while improving local ecosystems and agricultural practices.

In Vermillion County, the SWCD recognizes the critical need to ensure safe drinking water for all residents. The district aims to address water quality concerns affecting agricultural and residential areas by initiating a county-wide well water testing program. The SWCD will identify potential contaminants through rigorous testing and provide necessary guidance to mitigate health risks.

Parke County's agricultural legacy is integral to its identity. However, gully and rill erosion present challenges that impact soil health and water quality. To counter this, the SWCD proposes comprehensive strategies to reduce erosion, including effective conservation practices, reforestation and the establishment of protective cover crops.

- Warrick County SWCD — \$24,432  
No-till drill purchase to facilitate conservation — The Warrick County SWCD will purchase a no-till drill, overall width 9', planting width 8', to include both a standard grain (jumbo grain & small seed) box and a standard grass (fluffy box & small seed) box. The SWCD will also purchase a cultipacker for use with smaller ATVs.

The SWCD sees a large window of opportunity to assist producers and operators with conservation practices by making this new drill available, thus furthering its business plan goal to increase acres of native grass/forbs plantings. It also furthers the State Soil Conservation Board's business plan goals tying to resource concerns of water quality improvement and soil health/degradation. The purchase of a cultipacker will benefit pollinator plots that are broadcast-planted on a more urban scale. This will ultimately help improve sediment and nutrient reduction on both urban and agricultural lands.

- Washington County SWCD — \$30,150

Washington County No-Till Drill Purchase — The Washington County SWCD will purchase a 10 ft. no-till drill with a main seed and grass seed attachment. This drill will benefit land users in the area by providing an affordable and reliable drill for use. This project will address the critical natural resource issues of water quality, erosion control and soil health by helping to reduce sediment loss and increase cover crop adoption on crop acres. This will positively impact soil health by decreasing soil compaction, increasing infiltration, and decreasing runoff of nutrients and sediment to waterbodies.





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# New conservation record set by Hoosier farmers

## For the Journal Review

INDIANA — According to a recent conservation survey, Indiana farmers have set a conservation record this year by planting an estimated 1.6 million acres of overwinter living covers.

“Protecting our most vital natural resources is top of mind for our Indiana farmers and this year’s record breaking cover crop acreage is a testament to that,” said Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Indiana’s Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. “Through the implementation of cover crops and other conservation efforts, farmers are ensuring our land and water resources remain healthy and productive.”

Overwintering living covers (i.e. - cover crops and small grains, like winter wheat) are known for their environmental benefits. Cover crops and small grains, planted in the fall after harvest, help increase organic matter in the soil and improve overall soil health by adding living roots to the soil for additional months of the

year. Cover crops also improve water infiltration into the soil, while other covers, like legumes, serve as natural fertilizers.

Although the conservation transect does not differentiate between cover crops and small grains, Indiana farmers typically plant fewer than 200,000 acres of small grains annually, so cover crops vastly dominate the 1.6 million estimated acres. Apart from corn and soybeans, cover crops are planted on more acres than any other commodity crop in Indiana.

“Hoosier farmers have held strong at 1.5 million acres of cover crops planted since 2021, so we are excited our farmers were once again able to move the needle forward,” said Don Lamb, Indiana State Department of Agriculture Director. “Soil conservation successes would not be possible without the dedicated farmers and the Indiana Conservation Partnership to help them along the way.”

As a result of the cover crops planted, it is estimated that 1.7 million tons of sediment was prevented from entering

Indiana’s waterways, which is enough sediment to fill more than 480 Olympic-size swimming pools. Overwintering covers also prevented 4.3 million pounds of nitrogen and over 2.2 million pounds of phosphorus from entering Indiana’s waterways.

The conservation survey also showed that about 68% of farmed acres were not tilled and 17% had employed reduced tillage after the 2022 harvest. This early spring survey is not intended to quantify pre-planting tillage.

“Conserving our natural resources is not a one-agency job. Indiana conservation succeeds through its partnerships, working closely with individual farmers and landowners, local, state and federal government agencies, private industries, nonprofits, and many other people and groups,” said Curtis Knueven, Acting State Conservationist for Indiana’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. “These partnerships share their unique areas of expertise and allow us to expand the reach and depth of conservation in

Indiana.”

The Indiana Conservation Partnership conducts many programs that help encourage private landowners to adopt cover crops as part of their agricultural strategy. One such initiative that helped contribute to the successful year for cover crops in 2022 was the Cover Crop Premium Discount Program (CCPDP). It is a program that provides a discount on crop insurance for planting cover crops. CCPDP assisted landowners in planting about 30 thousand acres of cover crops in 2022.

The conservation transect is a visual survey of cropland in the state. It was conducted between March and May 2023 by members of the Indiana Conservation Partnership, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Indiana’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Purdue Extension, as well as Earth Team volunteers, to show a more complete story of the state’s conservation efforts.

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# New free soil sampling program coming to life for Indiana farmers

## For the Journal Review

INDIANAPOLIS —The Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) and partners throughout the state have worked with the Gulf Hypoxia Program (GHP) to develop a no-cost program with a focus on increasing the knowledge and use of soil sampling as a nutrient management practice to benefit farm operations. The program, titled Indiana’s Mississippi River Basin Soil Sampling Program, is open now for applicants.

“Hoosier farmers care deeply about the land and work hard each year to keep their soil healthy,” said Lt. Gov. Crouch, Indiana’s Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. “This free program is a great way for farmers to test their soil and ensure the proper nutrients are being utilized on their fields.”

ISDA promotes the importance of nutrient management and the principle of the 4R Nutrient Stewardship framework. The 4R framework incorporates using the “Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, and Right Place” to achieve cropping system goals. The new program focuses on soil sampling and testing because it is a key component, and first step, of developing a

plan for nutrient management.

Soil sampling provides an assessment of the soil’s fertility which can be used for making fertilizer application recommendations, assessing available nutrients over time, increase farmer profitability and enhance environmental protection by reducing the risk of nutrient loss. This project was developed to help further Indiana’s State Nutrient Reduction Strategy efforts.

“This free program for farmers will help them assess their land so they can continue to produce as much food as possible with fewer fertilizer inputs. As a farmer myself, I know how critical that is,” said Don Lamb, ISDA director. “This program would not be possible without a few incredible partners whose top priority is assisting Hoosier farmers and keeping Hoosier land in great shape.”

This program includes row crop fields, pastures and specialty crops located within Indiana’s portion of the Mississippi River Basin. Participating landowners will be prioritized by fields that have never been soil sampled and fields that haven’t been sampled regularly (i.e., within the last 3-4 years). Further prioritization may be implemented based on interest in the program. This program excludes

hobby gardens and private lawns.

Interested farmers can sign-up online at ISDA’s website or by reaching out to [soilsampling@isda.in.gov](mailto:soilsampling@isda.in.gov).

Sign-ups are now open and ISDA is accepting sign-ups until April 17.

Paul Hodgen, president of the Indiana Corn Marketing Council, is excited to bring this program to fruition. Hodgen is well versed in soil fertility with a bachelor’s degree in agronomy, a master’s degree in soil science and a doctorate degree in agronomy and soil fertility.

“Regular soil sampling and testing is a critical part of a nutrient management plan to economically produce a crop,” Hodgen said. “We look forward to working with ISDA and other partners to help Hoosier farmers continue to make informed decisions on nutrient management. Soil testing is a keystone to sustainably producing a crop. This effort will further our goals for nutrient management stewardship across Indiana. This will help us make smarter decisions about where to apply nutrients and to spread that data across more acres. This program will be a great way to increase the number of farmers who better understand their soils, and it will allow them to make improve management decisions



based on good data.”

This program was made possible thanks to ISDA, Indiana Soybean Alliance, Indiana Corn Marketing Council, Indiana Agriculture Nutrient Alliance (IANA), Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP) members, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, farmers and Certified Crop Advisors.





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# Land use in Indiana grabs more attention

Key players discuss Indiana's farmland use issues, citing challenges and opportunities

**Darrell Boone**  
Indiana Prairie Farmer

Development gobbles up thousands of acres of prime Hoosier farmland every year. How to move into the future in ways that balance preserving farmland with economic development was the topic of the recent Indiana Land Use Summit held in Danville, hosted by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture and Purdue University Extension. Panel members representing agriculture, government, development and conservation discussed their views regarding the increasing loss of agricultural land, why it matters, and how to best manage it.

The panel was moderated by ISDA Director Don Lamb, himself a farmer from Lebanon. The panel

included Kendall Culp, R-Rensselaer, a farmer, Indiana Farm Bureau vice president and state representative, representing government and agriculture; Deborah Luzier, senior planner with GRW Engineering, representing development; and John Ketzenberger, with The Nature Conservancy, representing conservation.

Discussion sprang out of Culp's sponsorship of two bills, both signed into law in 2023. House Bill 1132 created a 13-member land use task force, which held its first meeting recently. House Bill 1157 directed ISDA to conduct an inventory of farmland lost in Indiana from 2010 to 2022, including its new use.

Here are highlights of the panel's discussion, starting with questions asked by Lamb:

## **What do you see as barriers to effective land-use planning?**

Culp: One barrier is our attitudes, with some people wanting growth, and some people being adamantly opposed. I know of one example where a community had the opportunity for an attractive industrial project, only to have it be turned down because "it would increase traffic."

We must be forward thinking, separate emotion from fact, and look not only at today, but 20 years from now. If our communities are not moving forward, they're going backward. We need good qualities of life, including health care and bridging the digital divide if we want the next generation to come back. We also need local, state and federal officials working together for funding to find

solutions to position ourselves for smart growth opportunities.

One thing I want to get out of these two bills is that we can come up with a checklist of what I would perceive as an ideal community, which could become a guide for communities around Indiana.

Luzier: In Indiana, we don't like to tell people no. Instead, we would rather incentivize things we want to see, including comprehensive planning, where we lay out the future for our communities. Farmland needs to be part of that incentivization. We have funding available for preparing those comprehensive plans. But when it comes to enacting laws and regulations that make that all happen, there's no funding for developing those laws, or for guidance and education of public officials.





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That's where the breakdown and our challenge is.

Ketzenberger: I concur with Ms. Luzier but add that conservation should also be incentivized. We've talked a lot about loss of wetlands in Indiana and changes that have come about in the Legislature. We worry about that from a conservation perspective. Why don't we look for ways to incentivize so that we don't have friction between developers and other land uses? I recognize that developers are trying to maximize value of that piece of land, but let's also help them maximize that value by conserving part of it as an amenity. This is an opportunity to change conservation around development in a way where we more fully understand what our desired outcomes are, and how we get to those.

#### **How can different elements of land use — agriculture, government, development and conservation — work together better?**

Culp: Collaboration is key. Whether it's agriculture, state government, local government, industry, Purdue or development, we all need to be partners. Siting is key. Whether it's a hog building, solar installation or housing development, getting the right project in the right place is huge. From an agriculture perspective, we must realize we have to be pro-development. If we're going to continue to be efficient, use new technology, and grow our industry, we must have those technologies and developments, as well as growing and vibrant communities to support our industry.

I've been surprised by the concern that non-ag folks have about loss of farmland as it pertains to food. Ten or 15 years ago, the debate was about "food vs. fuel." Now, since the pandemic and empty shelves in grocery stores, that debate has rekindled as "with all this development,

where's our food going to come from?"

Luzier: Yes, collaboration is key. We also need to take a mindset that farmland is not just a placeholder till something better comes along. Farmland is important on its own, and changing that mindset is going to be very important. I'm interested in seeing what the numbers from the task force and inventory of lost farmland will show. We know changes in land use impact remaining farmland and speed up conversion from agricultural to development.

Ketzenberger: I also endorse the collaborative approach, and I believe we have a responsibility now. I hope we can reduce competition and not get caught up in fights that distract us from what's important — how we have the best circumstances for wherever we are across the state. Hopefully, results of the task force will help us think about land use in ways that will help us balance the various interests and think about land use in a more holistic fashion.

We're well positioned for well into the future to be a place for people to live. We have water, land and a climate that will continue to sustain those natural resources. The pandemic showed us that people need to reconnect with nature, walk and enjoy the natural state of Indiana. Indiana's economic future depends on our ability to grow. Our responsibility is to ensure that we understand what we have and plan.

As our population begins to rise, we must have a rational path for dealing with those things and make sure that we have great places to see and visit, and a state that people want to visit and work in. We're talking one or two generations down the road, but if we take our jobs seriously, this is the time to make those decisions. Rep. Culp's bills are a concrete sign that we can do that.



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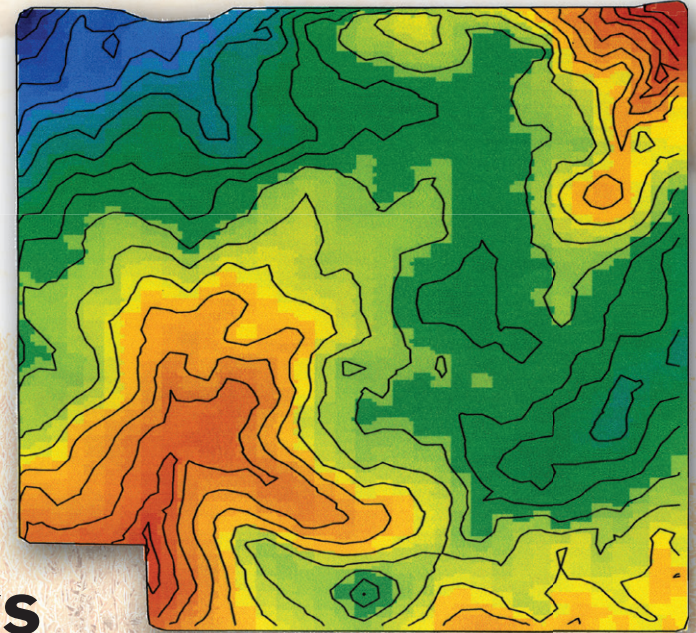
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