



Healthy Land
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CONSERVOGRAM

The newsletter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society



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Annual Conference News

The 2015 SWCS International Annual Conference will be held July 26-29, 2015, at the Sheraton Hotel in Greensboro, North Carolina. To keep up to date on all annual conference news, visit our website at www.swcs.org/15AC.

Exhibitor and Sponsorship Opportunities Now Available!

The 70th SWCS International Annual Conference, "Coming Home to Conservation: Putting Science into Practices," is an exclusive opportunity to promote products and services to a uniquely targeted group of conservation and environmental professionals. By becoming a sponsor or exhibitor, you get an affordable opportunity to reach your target audience, expand your outreach, and maximize your company's positive exposure. Don't miss this opportunity to connect with prospective buyers and conservationists!

For more information, or if you have an exhibitor or a sponsor referral, please contact Chrissy Rhodes at christine.rhodes@swcs.org or 1-515-289-2331 ext. 114 and continue to watch the conference website, www.swcs.org/15ac, for developing conference details!

70TH ANNUAL
 —·SOIL AND WATER·—
CONSERVATION SOCIETY
 —·CONFERENCE·—



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NORTH CAROLINA

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Iowa Cover Crops Conference

The Iowa Cover Crops Conference will take place on February 17-18, 2015, at the Sheraton Hotel in West Des Moines, Iowa. This event will provide a forum for farmers, industry leaders, and agribusiness professionals to exchange information, discuss opportunities for collaboration, learn about successful cover cropping practices, and troubleshoot challenges that may be encountered. Certified Crop Adviser CEUs will be available.

Breakout Session Topics Announced

Last month, we announced that the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture, Bill Northey, will be kicking off the Iowa Cover Crops Conference. This month, we are excited to share the breakout session topics that will be offered on day two of the event.

With nearly a dozen farmers speaking about their experiences using covers crops and experts from seven different states, we are confident you will find valuable information whether you are a cover crops novice or a seasoned pro. Topics include



- Cover Crop Basics 101 and 102
- Restoring Depleted Soils: Cover Crops and Soil Health
- Cover Crops for Pest Management and Weed Suppression
- Cover Crop Seed Innovations: Industry Perspective
- Cover Crops and Nutrient Cycling
- Cover Crops and Living Soil: Bacteria and Fungi
- Cover Crops: Additional Forage in Livestock and Dairy Operations
- Industry Advancement in Cover Crops

There will be 12 breakout sessions in total, with several of the above repeated. For more details, please visit www.swcs.org/15IACC.

To register for the conference at the discounted rate of \$99, [click here](#). Early registration rates are good through January 27, 2015.

Don't forget to book your hotel room when you register! A block of rooms has been reserved at the West Des Moines Sheraton for participants of the Iowa Cover Crops Conference. The discounted rate of \$97/night + tax is available until Monday, January 26, 2015. After the 26th, there is no guarantee of room or discount availability.

Board of Directors News and Election Update

Fifteen months ago, our members passed bylaws amendments that reduced the number of member regions as well as the number of elected board members and began a three year transition to implement the revised Board structure. The SWCS bylaws call for elections each winter to select regional board members to fill positions that expire at the close of our international annual conference each year.

This year, Southwest Region Director Cheryl Simmons and North Central Region Director Tom Prout will complete their elected three-year terms. However, there will continue to be elected directors to represent each of these regions: Mike Collins (Southwest) and Susan Meadows (North Central). For this reason, in accordance with the bylaw amendments, no elections will be conducted for regional directors this year.

At-Large Director Dan Towery will also complete his three-year term this July. This open At-Large Director position will be filled through a selection process conducted by the Board of Directors, as detailed in the bylaws. The Board is currently conducting the candidate identification and selection process.

We are grateful for the service these three directors continue to provide as their terms near an end. As the Board structure transition continues, your Board of Directors will continue to provide leadership and direction for the Society as it addresses the challenges of soil and water conservation for the future.

Upcoming Events

[Missouri Natural Resources Conference](#)
Osage Beach, Missouri
February 4-6, 2015

[Iowa Cover Crops Conference](#)
West Des Moines, Iowa
February 17-18, 2015

[Wisconsin SWCS Chapter Annual Conference](#)
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Wisconsin
February 27, 2015

[A Matter of Balance: Feeding Our Crops and Protecting Our Water in a Changing Climate](#)
East Lansing, Michigan
March 6, 2015

[SWCS International Conference](#)
Greensboro, North Carolina
July 26-29, 2015

Scholarship and Awards Application Deadline February 12, 2015!

If you need funds for your education or research project, make sure to check out the scholarships that SWCS has available! The Society offers three scholarships to members who have been with the Society for at least one year. For more details, please go to www.swcs.org/scholarships.

Want to honor an individual or organization for their conservation efforts? Show them that their accomplishments haven't been overlooked by nominating them for an SWCS award today! Go to www.swcs.org/awards for details on all awards available!

January/February Issue of the Journal

The newest issue of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* is available now! In this issue's feature section, Olson et al. make recommendations for agricultural land recovery following flood events, while Lehman et al. discuss the impact that our growing soil biology knowledge can have on maintaining healthy, resilient soils. Research articles include evaluation of the SALTMED model for simulating cucumber yield under varied irrigation treatments by Aly et al. and demonstration of improved soil properties, yield, and water use through the use of permanent raised beds in the North China Plain by He et al. Also in this issue, a research editorial by Dzuella et al. considers the use of the Nitrate Groundwater Pollution Hazard Index tool to identify nitrate leaching risk in California agriculture. Read these and more articles [online](#) or in your print journal.



Bluegrass Chapter Forum Overview

The Bluegrass Chapter hosted a very successful Kentucky Soil Health and Cover Crop Forum on December 17, 2014. The forum had 208 participants. After a short presentation by Steve Blanford, Kentucky Natural Resources Conservation Service State Soil Scientist, five farmers presented personal stories of soil health and cover crops on their own farms. The meeting was followed by discussion and creation of a list of critical needs for future implementation. The Kentucky Chapter has shared the resulting list of critical needs, which may also be applicable for other states, below:

- Cover crops need to be profitable on their own or have financial assistance available to make them economically feasible. Economic considerations need to be studied by universities to be able to show producers the long-term economic benefits of implementing soil health. Producers need to be informed of the risks, including the possibility of short-term economic losses.
- A model may be developed to be able to predict the benefits of implementing soil health practices.
- Universities, etc., need funding to be able to study the benefits of implementing soil health practices. Obtaining the high standard of data required by universities through statistical replicated plots is expensive. There is a need to identify funding sources to be able to begin implementing studies and obtaining the data producers need.
- Plots need to be local.



January Reader Question:

What do you think a top priority for 2015 should be concerning soil and water conservation?

We ask that our readers answer the question via email (to pubs@swcs.org) or respond through social media, and in the next issue, we will post some of the responses as well as ask a new question. We hope that this will provide a discussion forum for our readers and us!

Top photo: Farmer panel discussion. Middle photo: Steve Blanford Kentucky NRCS State Soil Scientist. Bottom photo: Forum participants.

New Members

Welcome members who joined in December!

Canada—Ontario

Andrew Graham

International

Maria Gaztambide

Liqin Qu

Misbah Zeshan

Louisiana

Jordan Jessop

Missouri—Show Me

Ib Hagsten

Missouri—University of Missouri

Sebhattin Acikgoz

Eda Akdemir

Handan Sahin

North Carolina—Hugh Hammond Bennett

David Lindbo

North Carolina—North Carolina State University

Walker Ferguson

North Dakota

Karl Rockeman

Nebraska

Jack Russell

New Hampshire/Vermont

Katherine Healy

Ohio

Peter Rietschlin

Oregon

Kier Thomas

Texas—East Texas

Grant Martin

Texas—Heart of Texas

Mauro Di Luzio

Virginia

Ken Jensen

Chris Lawrence

Ben Leatherland

Corporate Members

Please contact corporate.info@swcs.org for more details.

Gold

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CORPORATION

DOW **Dow AgroSciences**

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Look for the bright orange inlet - Hickenbottom's Trademark®

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Bronze

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IRRIGATION DISTRICT

Ecosystem Services Exchange
Valuing Conservation

From the Leadership

Tapping Innovation to Increase Productivity and Conservation

By Bruce Knight, At-large Director

Farmers and ranchers around the world face a monumental challenge: to feed more than 9.5 billion people by 2050. To do so, we need to employ every possible strategy to boost production.



I believe much of the necessary increase in production will come from US farmers, and for a number of years, I've been focusing on sustainable intensification as the approach most likely to pay off in responsibly maximizing production. That means using optimal inputs on healthy soil that's been managed and nurtured for peak productivity.

I am hoping that past progress is not only repeatable but expandable. Just look at the last 75 years—in 1940, one American farmer could feed 19 people. Today one American farmer feeds 155 people. That's the result of a huge increase in productivity.

Here are just a few statistics to illustrate what US agriculture has accomplished. In 1931, the average yield per acre of corn was 24.5 bushels; today it's more than six times greater—160.4 bushels. We've increased production of grain sorghum from 16.2 bushels per acre in 1931 to 62.2 bushels per acre today. Wheat production has more than tripled from 14 bushels in 1931 to 46.2 today. Wisconsin data show that the average production per cow was 5,140 pounds in 1933; today it's more than quadrupled to 21,436 pounds.

In the last generation, we have increased productivity by improving genetics, boosting mechanical power, and making the most effective use of labor. Increased productivity for the future will be determined by identifying the most productive innovations and encouraging as many farmers as possible to adopt them, which is one reason I have always been a strong supporter of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program. Part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, CIG offers

innovative landowners and organizations an opportunity to try new strategies that may prove effective at protecting the land and increasing productivity. I like the fact that NRCS is sharing the results of these experiments by providing access to final reports of each grant on its website and summaries of projects at SWCS conferences. Those who want to know more have the opportunity to investigate what innovations have proven successful and cost-effective.

But I'd like to see the agency go further. Making information available on innovative practices that minimize environmental impact or improving soil health while increasing productivity is just the first step. To really take advantage of the investment in CIG, we need to encourage more farmers to adopt these practices.

The way to do that is for NRCS to take innovations identified by CIG projects and other efforts as practical and effective and establish national practice standards or enhancements for them. If something works, why not encourage others to adopt the idea by providing farmers the technical assistance and cost-sharing that will get that practice on the land? That's the next step.

The CIG program is just the beginning. There are agricultural innovators across the land who have experimented or just put two and two together and come up with additional effective conservation practices, methods, and tools that boost productivity while reducing the carbon footprint or improving the water quality or availability. I want to see NRCS open up the process so that anyone—an individual farmer, a state or local government, a nongovernmental organization, a university researcher, a private company—can petition the agency to consider a new conservation measure, technique, or technology for acceptance for NRCS programs.

NRCS should establish a formal, standardized process for petitioners to recommend new conservation practices, enhancements, and tools. If we are going to meet both the environmental and productivity challenges we face, we must get innovations online more rapidly. To put the most effective conservation practices on the land, we need to put innovations in the book more quickly. That will serve American farmers, the environment, and the world's consumers.