

The Dillon Soil & Water Conservation Quarterly Newsletter

“The Living Soil” Essay Contest



Of all the planets in the known universe, only Earth has a living, breathing “skin” (soil) formed over the course of countless millennia. Our entire world is dependent on the health of our dirt, but it is safe to say that most of us don’t consider soil that important. It’s probably at the bottom of our list of things to improve to keep our planet healthy and sustainable. BUT that is changing!!!

What We Know

One teaspoon of compost-rich organic soil hosts 600 MILLION to ONE BILLION (yes that is NINE zeros) helpful bacteria from 15,000 species. One teaspoon of chemically treated soil can host as few as 100 bacteria. It also takes approximately 34,000 years for nature to produce six inches of topsoil, and very 28 years, one inch of topsoil is lost as a result of current farming practices.

The Essay Contest
We are excited about the Soil Health Initiative that NRCS is promoting for the 2013-2014 year. To coincide with this, the Dillon County Soil & Water Conservation District is sponsoring an Essay contest that is open to all 5th grade students in Dillon County. The subject is “The Living Soil” and will give students the opportunity to research and learn about the importance of health of soil and what “we” can do to protect and preserve this natural resource.

The Dillon Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners are excited to offer you and your 5th grade students the opportunity to participate in a county wide essay contest. The purpose of this contest is to give students the experience of researching a topic dealing with **SOIL HEALTH** (“The Living Soil”), to increase the awareness of the Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District in the county, and to focus their attention on conservation and how it impacts their lives.

There will be one overall winner from each participating class, and they will receive \$25.00 gift card. This winner is chosen by you- the teacher. Each classroom winner essay will be sent to the Conservation District office for final judging to determine the overall district winner. ALL participating teachers of classes that participate will receive \$25.00 gift card.

The teacher and student that is the district winner will each receive \$50.00 cash. All students participating in the contest will receive a recognition award for their efforts and contribution.

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I NEVER KNEW!! Interesting Facts

- There are 70,000 types of soil in the US.
- It takes a minimum of 500 years to form one inch of topsoil.
- 15 TONS of dry soil pass through one earthworm each year.
- It takes 4,000 gallons of water to produce one bushel of corn.



South Carolina celebrates Arbor Day on the first Friday in December every year. This year the date is

December 6th, and the Soil & Water Conservation of Dillon County have invited each of our 4th grade classes and schools to be a part of this this celebration

by allowing us to have a tree planting ceremony on their school grounds. This will not only allow the students to watch the tree grow through the years, but it will also help with the beautification of the school grounds and give the students a venue to learn the importance of trees and their place our environment. Arbor Day marks the

beginning of planting season in South Carolina Trees lend beauty to the SC landscape, cool us with shade, reduce air pollution, provides food and shelter for birds and wild animals, prevents soil erosion and filters noise. The first Arbor Day ceremonies took place over a hundred years ago on the windswept prairies of the Nebraska Territory.



Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District

Partnering with Richland County on Federal Grant



The Dillon Soil and Water District has received a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from the USDA-SC-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to conduct agricultural field trials and partner with the University of South Carolina's Earth Sciences and Resources Institute.

The Richland County SWCD will monitor soil health indicators and crop yields during a three year period of multi-species cover cropping and no-till management.

As the message of the soil health movement affects more people and the costs of inputs rise, farmers are becoming more accepting of the idea that soil health actually can provide real benefits in the form of increased soil moisture, crop yield, reduced inputs and better bottom lines. There are three local farmers, Carl Coleman, Sonny Price and Alan Gaddy that are participating in this project that will;

- 1) Grow organic matter through the use of multi-species cover crops on designated land
- 2) Measure the expected amount of plant available nitrogen from organic matter mineralization through use of Haney-Brinton soil CO₂ burst test;
- 3) Use the burst test results as a basis for reducing commercial nitrogen application on a part of the designated land;
- 4) Measure and compare cash crop yields between set aside land where nitrogen is applied according to standard fertilizer recommendations and land where lower nitrogen rate has been applied as recommended by the Haney-Brinton test;

Cover crops are typically grown during fall and winter to

increase soil fertility, improve soil health, and reduce erosion between cash crops. Common cover crops species include small grains such as wheat, rye, and oats; legumes including crimson clover and hairy vetch; and brassicas—plants in the mustard family, including radishes, turnips and rape. Because leguminous species add nitrogen to the soil, planting a cover crop can reduce a farmer's need to add commercial fertilizer to grow the following season's cash crop.

No-till management means planting next season's crop in last season's stubble without plowing or disking the field. Like cover cropping, this method can also improve soil health, reduce erosion, and increase soil fertility.

The purpose of the grant is to demonstrate how cover-cropping and no-till management can reduce commercial fertilizer inputs while maintaining crop yields. Reduced commercial fertilizer inputs and no-till management will increase profitability and reduce agriculture's environmental impact. Results of the field trials will be shared with other farmers and researchers at a number of educational events.

This project was one of seven to receive CIG funding statewide. The grants are administered by the NRCS to demonstrate innovative approaches to conservation on private lands and to encourage the adoption of practices addressing resource concerns. For a complete list of CIG awardees and more information about NRCS conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Coordinator's Corner

(update on my world events)

I recently attended a training workshop in Manning, SC and there were some very interesting sessions that taught me a lot about various conservation practices.

The first session was on "Composting" and how to make our garbage a resource of nutrients for our soil. The second session, that was of interest to me even before I attended, was "How To Make a Rain Barrel". This was the first time I had used a reciprocating saw and climbed into a 50 gallon drum to cut a hole, insert a spout and caulk it~ now that was an experience! Conservation Districts are unique in that they work closely with federal and state government but VERY closely with their local governments.

I have told many that all the "jobs" I've had in the past have prepared me for this one! This month is my first year anniversary, and I'm so excited to be BACK home in Dillon County working after 25 years.



All federal, state and local programs and services provided through the Dillon Conservation District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.

Soil Health/Cover Crop Meeting

The Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District in partnership with Southern States and First Citizens Bank, hosted an education session on soil health July 23rd at Shuler's BBQ in Latta. For the past two years, the conservation district has been proactive in learning more about how multi species cover crops contribute to positive soil health and improved crop yields.

While fertilizer and herbicide input cost continuing to rise, it is feasible to look at our soil health to learn as much as we can to better utilize our inputs of commercial fertilizer and herbicides. Dillon County has two major resource concerns, compacted soils and low organic matter which significantly reduce our crop yields during times of low and excessive rainfall.

Nathan Lowder, District Conversationalist, NRCS Stanly County Field Office in Albemarle, NC presented his findings on multi species cover crops research. A demonstration was used to show the improved integrity of no-tilled soil versus conventional tilled soil. The research in NC has shown improvements in yields even when rainfall was not sufficient as compared to conventional tillage.



Many of you may be asking "What exactly is soil health"? We have learned that no-till planting into a cover crop will increase organic matter, increase water conservation and increase nutrient cycling while requiring the same commercial fertilizer inputs

for desired yields. Soil health is building microbial and organic chemical diversity. When this diversity is significant-

ly improved, usage amounts of commercial fertilizers and herbicides generally are reduced. Most of our soils contain an abundance of nutrients and are unavailable to the plant root for maintenance, growth and reproduction.

Increasing microbial activity such as soil bacteria and fungi increases the availability of these nutrients. A good example of this is the amount of nitrogen required for corn to produce a desired yield. The air we breathe is approximately 74% nitrogen yet none of this nitrogen is available to the plant. Commercial nitrogen must be applied or utilize plants that convert nitrogen to a form usable by the plant root.

There are many things we do not know in Dillon County about multi species cover crops. But we DO KNOW that none of the answers will come overnight, it will take time along with trial and error. The Dillon Soil & Water Conservation is in search of what is the answer **for Dillon County farmer**. The CIG grant (see page 2 of this newsletter) will help determine the path forward. Attending the event were representatives from Marlboro, Marion, Darlington, and Richland Counties. There were more than 60 present, and we believe this confirms the local interest in this subject. If you would like more information on soil health and how it might become part of your plan of operation, contact the Dillon Soil and Water Conservation District at 843-774-5122 ext. 3.



New Commissioners Take Oath



Mr. Carl Coleman, on left was sworn into the office of appointed commissioner on July 9th, 2013 at the monthly board meeting of the Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District. Mr. Marc Cribb Program Manager of the Conservation Districts with the SCDNR performed the swearing in ceremony. Mr.

Coleman as served as an elected commissioner since 2004 and is actively serving as a board member of the SC Association of Conservation Districts Board. Mr. Coleman was also elected to serve as the board's Secretary/Treasurer, when Mr. Jamie E. Smith retired after serving for over 30 years as commissioner.



Mr. Bruce G "Sonny Price, on left was sworn into the office of district commissioner on July 9th, 2013 at the monthly board meeting of the Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District. Mr. Marc Cribb Program Manager of the Conservation Districts with the SCDNR performed the swearing in ceremony. Mr. Price has served as an Associate Commissioner of the Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District for over two years. Mr. Price was recommended by the board to complete the term of office that was left vacant, when Mr. Jamie E. Smith retired after serving over 30 years as commissioner.



NRCS Offers Conservation Practices to Improve Soil Health and Protect Natural Resources

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that farmers interested in new farmland conservation practices **must apply by November 15** to be considered for 2014 funding. Applications are being taken for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at all USDA Service Centers in Wisconsin. EQIP is the primary program available to farmers for farmland conservation work, offering payments for more than 90 basic conservation practices.

“EQIP – the Environmental Quality Incentives Program - is still authorized through a continuation of the old 2008 Farm Bill. EQIP can help all types of farmers - livestock and dairy, grazing, or cash crop, including specialty crops, organic, and agro-forestry."

All eligible applications received by November 15 will be evaluated and ranked for funding. Farmers can sign up at the NRCS office in USDA Service Centers statewide.

NRCS is expecting increased interest this year, in part because of the extreme weather in recent years which showed the importance of conservation practices for good soil health, water holding capacity and erosion control. The key conservation practices for improving soil health are crop rotations, cover crops, no-till or mulch tillage, and erosion-reducing practices such as buffers and grassed waterways.

Organic, Energy and High Tunnels Very Popular

Special sign-up opportunities also are now open for On-Farm Energy, Organic, and Seasonal High Tunnel conservation practices. All three initiatives offer technical and financial assistance through the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). All applications must be received by November 15 to be considered for funding in 2014.

Interested landowners should contact the NRCS office at the USDA Service Center located at 1212 Commerce Drive, Dillon, SC.



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Thank You!!!

Without each one of you, the expansion and continuation of programs offered in Dillon County through the Soil & Water Conservation District would not be possible!! "Thank You" seems so inadequate, we hope that you will realize that your giving has touched the lives of others, through educational programs and community projects in Dillon County.



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Membership Application on Next Page

Dillon Conservation District Affiliate Membership Application

You can be instrumental in helping conserve Dillon County's natural resources! You can help a student attend a workshop. You can make a difference in educating the public about conserving the abundance of natural resources available in Dillon County – air, water, soil, plants & wildlife.

You can help keep Dillon County a wonderful place to live.

Please help conserve your county's natural resources by becoming an affiliate member of the Dillon Conservation District. We are asking for your financial support to help us accomplish our educational goals, and inform the public about the importance of conserving our natural resource. We are a non-profit organization and your support will be tax deductible.

Programs Presently Sponsored

Essay Contest ~ Open to all Dillon County 5th graders. Helps educate the community on the importance of natural resource stewardship. **This year's theme is "The Living Soil"**

Farm City Day ~ promotes the relationship that exists between farms and urban areas.

Outstanding Student Award – Students nominated by local high schools

Arbor Day ~ Celebrated the first Friday in December with 4th grade students in the county

Outstanding Conservation Farmer ~ recognizes individuals who acknowledge their resource concerns, and are willing to treat those concerns that affect the natural resources of our land.

Poster Contest – Winners will compete in the state competition. State winners will compete in national competition.

Mail application to:
Dillon Soil & Water Conservation District
PO Box 609, Dillon, SC 29536

\$25.00 Silver Membership \$50.00 Gold Membership \$75.00 or more Platinum Membership

Name _____

Contact Person (if business or organization) _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____ Amt _____

Dillon County was first included in a Soil Conservation District in 1941. It was then part of the Lower Pee Dee Conservation District which was composed of Dillon, Marion, and Florence Counties. The Dillon Soil and Water Conservation District was organized as a separate District in August of 1951.

The Board of Commissioners is composed of five (5) members. They determine the needs and set priorities for the conservation work in the district. The commissioners serve without pay. Two members are appointed by the SC Department of

Board of Commissioners

Neal Rogers—Appointed Commissioner—Chairman ; Carl Coleman—Appointed Commissioner—Secretary/Treasurer Keith Allen—Commissioner; Alan Gaddy—Commissioner; Bruce "Sonny" Price, Jr.—Commissioner; Mendel "Bud" Smith—Associate Commissioner