



# Annual Meeting

March 5, 2015 6p  
Madison County  
4H Building  
\$5 pp (pay at the door)

Purdue Engagement  
with Small Farms and  
Local Food Value  
Chains

## Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District Newsletter

February 2015

JAY ACKRIDGE-PURDUE UNIVERSITY DEAN OF AGRICULTURE



Dr. Jay Akridge was appointed Dean of Agriculture in 2009. As dean he has administrative responsibility for the academic, research, Extension, and international programs of the College of Agriculture as well as a number of state regulatory services, including the Office of the Indiana State Chemist.

Dr. Akridge received his M.S in 1983 and his Ph.D. in agricultural economics in 1986 from Purdue University specializing in marketing and

finance. Dr. Akridge earned his bachelor's degree in agriculture and business administration in 1982 from Murray State University in Murray, KY. A native Kentuckian, his family owns and operates a fourth-generation retail farm supply business in Fredonia, Ky.

We hope that you will join us Thursday evening March 6<sup>th</sup> for a wonderful evening with great food (Moreland's Catering) and a wonderful speaker!

RSVP by calling  
765-644-4249 ext 3

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## Cover Crops Gaining Popularity in Madison County

By Steve Schmidt

I remember starting my career at the Madison County SWCD in 2008. I was immediately exposed to the idea of planting cover crops on fields in the fall and winter months. For those of us who did not grow up on a farm, the idea was pretty foreign to me. The past few years I've heard all the benefits, as well as the negative aspects. I've talked to a lot of producers over the past few years regarding cover crops, and when it comes to managing their farms, I can agree with some issues on both sides. However, when it comes to managing their *soil health*, I see far more benefits than negatives.

We've all heard the facts. Cover crops capture nitrogen and other nutrients in the winter months and keep them in the fields, rather than washing downstream. Cover crops reduce the amount of soil erosion on a field. Cover Crops help to fix compaction. We've all heard these lines many times, but it wasn't until this year that it all came together for me.

This past year I attended a field day in Delaware County with the featured speaker being Ray Archuleta, USDA-NRCS. He is widely known across the country as the "Soil Health Expert" when it comes to no-till and cover crops. I cannot remember the title of his talk, but I'd like to call it the Mother Nature Model. During that

presentation he had us look at natural landscape, rather than a farm field with corn or beans. He challenged us to look at nature, and to have farm management mimic nature to produce the best results. For instance, you look at a forest that was once harvested down to bare earth. It does not take long for Mother Nature to plant her seeds and re-establish the landscape with vegetation. Vegetation heals the area where it was once torn down.

Basically, the part of the country we live and farm in was not created to be bare ground. The soil we've been blessed with in the Midwest has a purpose: to grow plant life. It's the same reason we have to

Spray weeds every spring. Mother Nature is trying to heal what was tilled or disked during our production processes. Planting cover crops in the fall when the ground is about to be bare is like using the "Mother Nature Model." Taking it one step further, doesn't it make sense to plant something beneficial in the month's we're not trying to grow corn and beans...just as Mother Nature would fill that void?

I am glad to see more and more uses of cover crops each year. The past two years the Madison County SWCD had the privilege of receiving cost share money from the White River Alliance (formerly the Upper White River Watershed Alliance) to use towards cover crops in the critical areas of the Upper White River Watershed. Even though there is money through NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), we applied for one year contracts on cover crops for those interested, but not willing to sign on for the three year commitment. In the first year, we were able to allocate the entire amount awarded for on-the-ground cover crop practices for 1000 acres. In 2014, our award was decreased slightly due to budgets, but we were still able to provide funding for 868 acres of cover crops.

We were fortunate enough to be recognized by the White River Alliance as the 2014 "Exceptional Commitment to Conservation" Award, which we are very proud of. As a matter of fact, the hand carved Bundy Duck they gave us sits on the front of my desk! Come check it out sometime and maybe we can discuss some soil management.

### Another Successful Year for the On Farm Network

We had another successful year for Indiana's On Farm Network. Working with fifteen producers from Madison, Delaware and Randolph Counties, we sampled corn stalks in over forty fields to study the nitrogen inputs and usage. This is our fourth year participating in the study.

It all came about as part of the Gulf Hypoxia down in the Gulf of Mexico. Low oxygen levels and other phenomenon were occurring due to high nutrient loads exiting the Mississippi river and creating "dead zones," where it made it hard for any life to survive in these areas. Worldwide, the northern Gulf of Mexico's hypoxic zone is the second largest, and many experts were concerned it was a result of farming in the Midwest due to excess use of fertilizers on the farm fields.

As a result, Iowa started the On Farm Network to study nutrient inputs, specifically nitrogen. Indiana got on board with Iowa, and the data we collected from our samples, allowed for determining how much of the nitrogen the corn is actually taking up. This has allowed for closer predictions on how much nitrogen to use in the spring. Overall, the plan is to be able to cut the amount of nitrogen inputs for our crops.

Due to droughts and other weather circumstances, it may take a few more years to come to any conclusions, but trends in the data are starting to form.



By Chanda Hiatt

Steve Schmidt and I have begun our seventh year of working together. I remember being so excited the day I received word that I had been hired. That excitement turned to worry when I learned that my fellow employee was a graduate of Indiana University! How could this be? Up until that point, I had very limited contact with IU graduates. Most of them included physicians, dentist or people I had nothing in common with. My mind ran wild! What if we did not get along? Would he throw a chair across the office like Bobby Knight? Will he decorate his cubicle in red and white and force me to look at that day in and day out? What could he possibly know about agriculture? I am quite embarrassed how closed minded I can be. I am a work in progress.



Six years later, I can honestly say that the board members knew what they were doing when they decided to pair us together. I worried over nothing! Steve has a bachelors from IU in Environmental Science with experience in septic system inspections. I have a bachelors from Purdue in Organizational Leadership and Supervision with experience in patient accounts. My agriculture experience came from 4H. We do not really have much in common. I live in the country, he lives in a neighborhood. He loves to watch sports and I do not watch much TV. The list goes on and on. You would think that we would have nothing to talk about throughout the day but conservation issues, but that is not the case.

I believe that there are two things that makes Steve and I great work partners.

- HONESTY-we were both honest from the beginning about our strengths & weaknesses
- TEACHABLE-we are not afraid to learn! If we do not know about a subject we seek someone who does!



It is like in the words of George Patton *"Prepare for the unknown by studying how others in the past have coped with the unforeseeable and the unpredictable"*.



Steve and I ask each other questions every day! Asking questions lead to great conversation that will reveal how a person achieved or did not achieve success. Their mistakes are just as powerful as the things they did right to achieve success.

When I was younger, I used to get embarrassed about admitting my mistakes to others. I learned mistakes are not made in vain if *they save* someone else time, money and pain! That is when mistakes become a gift! Steve and I have embraced laughing at ourselves. When a person can communicate, learn and laugh about their mistakes, people will naturally be drawn to learn from you. Steve and I are humbled that years into our positions people are *now* asking us how we reached success with our programs.



Will Rogers once said *"A man only learns in two ways, one by reading and the other association with smarter"*

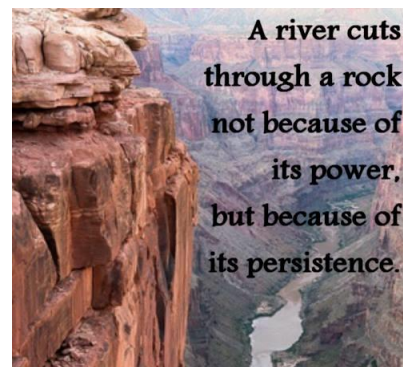
## Conservation Corner

Steve and I learned a long time ago that there is no shame in admitting we do not know something. I started selling fruit trees long before I knew much about them. Steve learned about cover crops by giving away grant money for producers to try them.

What is so great about telling a customer, "I do not know", but promising you will research it and get back with them, is that along that journey your knowledge base grows too! If you really stop and think about it, we are ALL on the "learn as you go along" degree plan.

My challenge to you today is to get you thinking about where you are with your goals? Whether you have farmed your whole life, just started gardening or recently purchased land, it is never a bad time to reach out and find a resource that can help you reach your conservation goal.

It is not uncommon to find yourself lost underneath the stresses of life to the point you forgot what your goals were in the first place. It is very easy to become complacent or just give up all together.



When you hit a wall and you find yourself discouraged, back up, analyze and try again. Repeat until you reach desired result. Just because you are keeping your eye on the goal, does not mean you will not need to adjust the goal.

No matter what kind of conservation goal you have, spending time with people who have tried, failed or been successful is powerful! The SWCD, public library, Purdue extension, and the internet are great places to seek information. Consider starting a group with goal minded people like yourself on meetup.com. I try and remember just because the Boilers put the hurt on the Hoosiers on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January does not mean I cannot still learn from Steve. A house divided can still stand!

Madison County SWCD  
182 W 300 N  
Anderson, IN 46012

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Find us on FACEBOOK  
Madison Cty SWCD



*Learn to properly prune at Apple of His Eye Orchard*

**Date:** Saturday, February 21, 2015 10 a.m. to Noon

**Location:** Apple of His Eye Orchard  
3185 South 300 East  
Anderson, IN 46017

**RSVP:** Kathleen Sprouse, Purdue Extension  
765.641.9514 or [ksprouse@purdue.edu](mailto:ksprouse@purdue.edu)

Farming for Soil Health  
March 24, 2015  
Delaware Cty Fairgrounds  
Heartland Hall

Seeding Selections  
Compaction  
Cover Crops  
And  
More!

For more information  
contact

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765-747-5531 ext 3

