



## Get Those Pastures Ready for Spring

by Victor Shelton, NRCS Grazing Specialist



Spring is on its way! Now is a good time to get those soil tests done! Of course, if you haven't taken any for a while, then it is even a better time. Soil samples should pull pretty easy right now and there should be ample time to send them in and get results. Needed nutrients can then be applied so that they are available to start the growing season.

Some soil deficiencies in pastures are obvious enough that you can see them and they need to be taken seriously. Calcium, magnesium, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sodium and sulfur are all "macro" nutrients and are needed in larger amounts. Trace elements are needed in lesser amounts; boron, chlorine, cobalt, copper, iodine, iron, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, selenium and zinc fall into this category. They may be minor, but they can have huge impacts on forage production, parasite infestations, and the health of the herd. Remember that the plant only contains what the soil can provide. Most mineral mixes that are sold are shotgun mixes of nutrients that someone has anticipated to be deficient. A detailed forage analysis will show where you are with micronutrients. You can then customize mineral mixes to the site and situation.

The grazing ruminant knows when something is not right or deficient. Their noses are working overtime to delicately seek and find their "cravings" to meet their needs. That is why you occasionally see a cow reach through the fence to eat a weed instead of the good forage you have provided them.

Nothing affects availability of nutrients more than calcium. It is one element that could probably never be over-applied and certainly one of the best first dollars spent! Calcium and its ratio to magnesium, has a major impact on the forages' ability to extract nutrients from the soil. It also has an impact on the acidity or alkalinity of the soil, which dictates what will or can grow. A 4:1 ratio of calcium to magnesium is recommended; dairy requires a higher ratio. If calcium is deficient, fixing that problem should make other elements more readily available. Phosphorus sometimes doubles after high cal lime is applied. If total phosphorus is a lot higher than available phosphorus on a detailed soil test, then calcium is normally not adequate.



Applying lime in the fall will allow it plenty of time to break down over the winter. If lime cannot be applied in the fall, then apply it in the spring prior to new growth. If applying after urea, wait two to three weeks to avoid nitrogen loss.

Timing of fertilizer application is important. When planning to take an early cutting of hay off a field, putting all of the fertilizer on in early spring is not a bad idea, especially with nitrogen. If the application is on pasture, however, then this is not the case. No use adding fuel to the fire by adding a lot of nitrogen to the spring growth spurt; it's much better to wait and do a split application. Put half of it on in mid-June toward the end of the spring spurt, and the other half on in early fall for a great fall growth period. The June application will often help keep things going through the summer better, especially with some timely rains.

The 2009 edition of the Clark/Floyd County Plat Book is here!

Cost: \$20

Stop by the SWCD office to purchase one today!

### Inside this issue:

Scholarship Applications Available	2
Compost 101	2
SWCD Encourages Soil Stewardship	2
Poster Contest Announced	3
Important Questions, Answered	3
Don't Let 'Articulated' Vehicle Laws Park Farm Trucks	4

### Dates to Note

- 4/2/09—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 4/10/09—Good Friday Holiday, SWCD office closed
- 4/12/09—Easter
- 4/22/09—Earth Day
- 4/24/09—Arbor Day
- 5/7/09—SWCD Monthly Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.
- 5/25/09—Memorial Day Holiday, SWCD office closed

# Scholarship Applications Available

Applications are currently available for the Marvin Wright Conservation Scholarship sponsored by the Clark County SWCD and funded through the Southern Indiana Community Foundation. The \$1,000 scholarship is awarded each year to a current high school senior or current college student from Clark County, pursuing a career in a natural resources related field.

Forms have been sent to all area high schools, but are also available by contacting Tami Kruer, SWCD Education Coordinator, at 256-2330, ext. 107, or through our website at [www.clarkswcd.org](http://www.clarkswcd.org). Application deadline is April 30, 2009.

## Compost 101

**What is compost?** Compost is organic material that can be used as a soil amendment or as a medium to grow plants. Mature compost is a stable material with a content called humus that is dark brown or black and has a soil-like, earthy smell. It is created by: combining organic wastes (e.g., yard trimmings, food wastes, manures) in proper ratios into piles, rows, or vessels; adding bulking agents (e.g., wood chips) as necessary to accelerate the breakdown of organic materials; and allowing the finished material to fully stabilize and mature through a curing process.

**Why compost?** Composting makes sense. Instead of sending organic matter to a landfill, it can be transformed into a useful additive which can even be sold. The following are a few of compost's most important benefits:

- ◆ **Compost enriches soils and** helps regenerate poor soils. The composting process encourages the production of beneficial micro-organisms. Compost has also been shown to suppress plant diseases and pests, reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, and promote higher yields of agricultural crops.
- ◆ **Compost helps cleanup contaminated soil** by absorbing, binding to, degrading, and sometimes completely eliminating harmful substances.
- ◆ **Compost helps prevent pollution** by preventing pollutants in stormwater runoff from reaching surface water resources, and preventing erosion and silting on embankments, roadsides, hillsides, playing fields, and golf courses.
- ◆ **Using compost offers economic benefits** Using compost can reduce the need for water, fertilizers, and pesticides. It is a low-cost alternative to artificial soil amendments.



A handful of compost

### How do I compost?

All composting requires three basic ingredients:

- Browns—Includes materials such as dead leaves, branches, twigs
- Greens—Includes materials such as grass clippings, vegetable waste, fruit scraps, and coffee grounds
- Water

Having the right amount of greens, browns, and water is important for compost development. Ideally, your compost pile should have an equal amount of browns to greens and alternate layers of organic materials of different-size particles. The brown materials provide carbon for your compost and the green materials provide nitrogen, while the water provides moisture to help breakdown the organic matter.

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for scheduling**

**Stop by our office  
and sign an Equipment  
Rental Agreement**

**Rental rate is \$8.00  
per acre**

**\$50 minimum charge**

### Creating a compost pile:

1. Select a dry, shady spot near a water source for your compost pile or bin.
2. Add your brown and green materials as you collect them, making sure larger pieces are chopped or shredded.
3. Moisten dry materials as they are added.
4. Once your compost pile is established, mix grass clippings and green waste into the pile and bury fruit and vegetable waste under 10 inches of compost material.
5. Optional: Cover top of compost with a tarp to keep it moist.

When the material at the bottom is dark and rich in color, your compost is ready to use! *Note: This is usually occurs in two months to two years.*

### Don't want to make your own?

Sources of ready-made compost in this area:

Earth First, 9251 Hwy. 150, Greenville, 812-923-9866

A Superior Compost Co., Charlestown, 812-256-7920

# SWCD Encourages Soil Stewardship

The Clark County SWCD encourages you to think about your personal responsibility to be a good steward of all natural resources, including soil, during its annual Stewardship Week celebration. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) has proclaimed April 26 – May 3, 2009 as Stewardship Week.

2009 Stewardship Week is themed “DIG IT! The Secrets of Soil.” Correlating education materials were developed based on an exhibition created by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History and sponsored by the Soil Science Society of America and the Nutrients for Life Foundation.

Soil supports forests, wetlands, grasslands, tundra, and aquatic ecosystems. Soil makes up the outer layer of the earth’s surface, it nourishes the plants we eat, the animals we use for food and fiber and the thriving underground kingdom of bacteria, fungi, protozoa, earth-

worms and other microbes that are critical to the planet’s food web. Soil directly and indirectly effects agricultural production, water quality and climate. Thanks to the earths soils, most of the rainfall hitting the planet is trapped and absorbed, watering plants and replenishing aquifers, rivers, lakes and streams.

The Clark County SWCD is a member of the National Association of Conservation Districts ([www.nacdnet.org](http://www.nacdnet.org)) which oversees the Stewardship Week program. Stewardship Week is one of the largest national annual programs to promote conservation. NACD represents the nations 3,000 conservation districts, which were established to encourage resource conservation across the country.

“Since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, the protection of soil from erosion and degradation has greatly increased through the work of conservation districts and our partners. These conservation groups assist landowners and the general public



through education and technical assistance as to the importance of the soil and how to properly manage it,” said NACD President Steve Robinson. “Soil is one of our precious natural resources that we must conserve for the next generation. All communities benefit when they have a better appreciation of soil and its connections to our every day life. Conservation districts are working with local communities to instill the appreciation for our natural resources across America.”

For information about Stewardship Week and conservation, contact the Clark County SWCD at 256-2330, ext. 3, or visit the national stewardship web site at [www.nacdnet.org](http://www.nacdnet.org).

## Poster Contest Announced

The Clark County SWCD is happy to announce the kick-off of our Third Annual Poster Contest. The theme for the contest is “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil” in coordination with the 2009 National Stewardship theme for the year.

NACD is using the Dig It! theme in partnership with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and the Soil Science Society of America. This collaboration will complement the Smithsonian “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil,” exhibition, which will run July 19, 2008 through January 3, 2010 at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. and travel to museums across the United States May 2010 to September 2013.

Students can obtain the poster contest rules and entry forms from the SWCD web site, [www.clarkswcd.org](http://www.clarkswcd.org), or the SWCD office at 9608 Highway 62, Charlestown. Deadline for entries is May 22, 2009.

More information on the National contest, pictures of previous year’s winning posters, and poster ideas are available on NACD’s website: [www.nacdnet.org/education/contests/poster](http://www.nacdnet.org/education/contests/poster)

## Important Questions, Answered

### What does “knee-high by the 4th” of July” really mean?

Folk wisdom dictates that in the Midwest, corn should be at least knee high by July 4th. The idea is that corn with a good start will be more likely to produce a healthy crop. Of course, assuming a crop will be successful because it was “knee-high by the 4th of July” is more than a little short-sighted; it doesn’t take into account problems that may come later in the season, like weather, insect damage, or wildlife feeding.

### What is a “Bush Hog”?

“Bush Hog” is a registered trademark of Bush Hog, LLC, of Selma, AL. The company, which was founded in 1950, is probably best-known for its pull-behind rotary mower-cutter which cuts easily through heavy patches of weeds, bush and even small saplings. It is also used to mow pastures, roadsides and even lawns. Because they were one of the first rotary mowers and one of the most popular, the name Bush Hog became the

adopted name of almost any rotary mower used on the farm.

### How much corn grows on a single plant?

Approximately one ear of corn grows per plant, though the variety of corn will make a difference. An ear can have from 500 to 1,200 kernels, but an average ear has about 800 kernels.

([www.iowacorn.org](http://www.iowacorn.org))

*The Hoosier Farmer, Winter 2006/07*

**Tree and Pond Packets Available in the SWCD office**

**Pond Packets contain: information on designing and building a pond, fish pond stocking and management, commercial fish suppliers, and more.**

**Tree Packets include: information on hardiness zones, pruning, mulching, hardwood plantings, tree terms, and more.**

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Clark County Farm Bureau*

## Don't Let 'Articulated' Vehicle Laws Park Farm Trucks

Farmers who transport crops, livestock and other agriculture-related items should start the new year on the right side of the law, according to a Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service specialist.

Indiana State Police are enforcing state and federal transportation laws covering commercial motor vehicles, including pickup trucks that pull trailers for farm purposes, said Fred Whitford, coordinator of Purdue Pesticide Programs. Trucks with attached trailers are known as "articulated" vehicles, he said.

Whitford noted that some farmers "... have been surprised that the state police treat articulated truck and trailer combinations as a tractor-trailer or other commercial motor vehicle, if they are hauling farm products, supplies, equipment and livestock, and if the weight or weight rating of the truck-trailer and the

load they're carrying is over 10,000 pounds."

By law, articulated truck-trailers with a combination gross vehicle weight rating or weight of more than 10,000 pounds must be properly registered and meet specific safety standards. Drivers of those vehicles must be at least 18 years old and have passed a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) physical examination. Police who stop articulated vehicles are likely to ask for certain documents (such as your drivers license and the registration for the truck and trailer) and inspect the truck-trailer.

"Once they understand you are a farmer, they will ask for a DOT medical card and annual inspection for both the truck and trailer, and check to see if you have a fire extinguisher and reflective triangles on the vehicle. And, obviously, they're going to make sure your seatbelt is

on.", Whitford said.

Violations could result in a warning or fine. The penalty for noncompliance depends on the county and the number of citations you've received.

As a general rule, the DOT regulations do not apply to articulated vehicles with a gross combined weight or weight rating under 10,000 pounds.

Additional information on regulations dealing with the transportation of agricultural products is available in Purdue Extension publication PPP-68, "Carrying Farm Products and Supplies on Public Roads." The publication is \$1 and available through the Purdue Extension Education Store by calling toll-free 1-888-EXT-INFO (398-4636), or can be downloaded online at no charge at <http://www.btny.purdue.edu/Pubs/PPP/PP-68.pdf>.