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**Conservation & Ag EXPO**

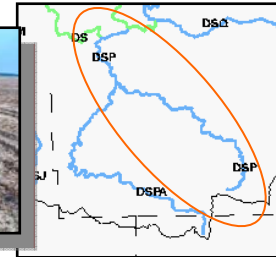


This event, for grades 1-5, was held at the Livingston County 4-H Park in Pontiac on October 9, 2008. The Livingston County Soil and Water Conservation District, University of Illinois Extension and Farm Bureau hosted the EXPO.

The EXPO consisted of 25-minute activity stations where students participated in grade level appropriate activities on topics such as soils, water quality & conservation, forestry, recycling, wildlife habitats/adaptations, safety, and ag commodities.

Special presenters for the EXPO included: David Stokes, with an interactive program entitled "The Unhuggables", the Field Museum's Soils Adventure Mobile, the IDNR Rock Box, Farm Safety for Kids activity, LiveLine Demonstration, My Little Petting Farm, Pontiac Fire Department Fire House, and many more. There were over 70 activity stations operating simultaneously.

About 1,300 students participated in the event. The Expo depended on volunteers to present learning station activities, register volunteers, greet buses, move picnic tables, etc. They were anyone who enjoys working with youth and promoting natural resource and agricultural awareness. Most were local, but we also had individuals from the Illinois Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, the Illinois Trappers Association, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency, neighboring SWCDs, and the WMBD Weatherman. FFA students from four local schools as well as Ecology students from Pontiac Township High School were able to teach ag related topics to younger students.



**Resource Management System Initiative Program**

The Conservation Partnership between the District and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is available to assist in the planning and design of Best Management Practices (BMPs) on agricultural operations. The staff work with landowners helping them identify and install practices that best conserve resources and benefit their farming operation developing and implementing a Conservation Plan.

A Conservation Plan is a voluntary plan, when implemented, will protect the resources of the operation. These resources include: soil, water, plants, animals, and air. The purpose of meeting with the landowners is so that they understand their resources, problems, and opportunities and assist in making wise decisions on how to manage and conserve them. The Plan is the documentation of the decisions a landowner makes about the resources on their land. When completed, the Plan will describe each of the conservation practices the farmer selects to manage their natural resources in order to meet their goals and objectives. The success of the planning process depends on the voluntary participation of the farm operator.

The South Fork of the Vermilion River is the first area where the producers will be approached about the program. The goal is to have 75% participation. Once we have completed the planning for this area, another area will be selected. This is a long term project to eventually encompass the county.

Once the area is identified, landowners will be notified about the program and the advantages of participating. A questionnaire, follow up calls, and appointments will be set up. The District will do the initial field visit and farm site evaluation with the landowner. NRCS will sit down with and develop the conservation plan with them. Once the objectives and alternatives are discussed, NRCS will develop the plan with the landowner. Potential cost/share programs will be discussed. The landowner will then implement the plan.