

**Soil & Water  
Conservation  
Districts (SWCDs)**

There are 97 soil and water conservation districts making a difference in your community. No matter how big or small, each of the 102 counties has the services of a SWCD. From educating homeowners on practical utilization of water to helping rural landowners save soil and improve water quality; it takes everyone working together to protect our soil and water! Without these vital resources our communities cannot thrive!



The 2013 State Budget contains funding levels for the 97 SWCDs that are \$739,500 (more than 10%) below 2012 levels, an amount that is sure to see many SWCDs falter and cease providing services during the 2013 fiscal year. Without further action by the General Assembly it is likely that 31 SWCDs will be unable to function by January 1, 2013.

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The drought of 2012 appears to be over. Illinois is still in deficit numbers for rainfall for the year. The concern now is "what happens if we get large amounts of rain?" The rainfall over the week and weekend of October 15 - 21 was welcome but came with an intensity in some parts of the state that caused excessive runoff and, in some cases, damages due to soil erosion.

The damage to cropland acres following a year of near record low corn yields will create hardship for farmers in the areas that received the heaviest rainfall.

The National Agricultural Statistic Service report as of October 1, indicated that the corn for grain yield in Illinois was estimated at 98 bushels per acre, down 12 bushels from the September 1 forecast. At that level, production would be 1.22 billion bushels, 38 percent less than last year's crop.

As of September 30, 71 percent of the crop was harvested, which compares to 25 percent last year at that time, and a five-year average of 33 percent.

This is the lowest average statewide corn yield since 1988. When the drought tolerance improvements in the newer seed corn varieties are considered, the 2012 drought was far worse on corn yields than the 1988 drought.

The October 1 forecast yield for soybeans in Illinois was estimated at 39 bushels per acre, 2 bushels above the September 1 estimate, still down 19 percent from last year.

Essentially, this means that the lowered yields will produce less residue for soil surface

protection from rainfall runoff. The lowered protection will cause greater amounts of soil erosion.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are doing whatever they can to assist agricultural producers with controlling their soil erosion but with reduced cost share available and reduced revenue from lower yields, producers are having a hard time implementing the needed practices.

In addition to grain producers, livestock producers are facing many challenges. The drought left their pastures dead and devoid of cover. The exposed soil erodes easily and will not be able to be controlled until the pasture is reseeded.

As with the grain producers, livestock producers are facing expenses they can ill afford. Many were forced to reduce their herd size due to lack of forage and other affordable feed for their animals.

Considering these circumstances, it is apparent that additional cost share is needed to assist agricultural crop and livestock producers with repairing the damage caused by the 2012 drought. It is also necessary that the soil and water conservation districts receive sufficient funding to allow them to provide the needed assistance.

As a legislator, you have the ability to help solve these problems. Please consider a supplemental appropriation for cost share and administrative funds for the SWCDs.



## Districts' Spotlight

**Knox County SWCD:** Contractors last month took an innovative approach to install a block chute, basically a soil stabilization structure that reduces soil erosion on a slope. Typically, a crew would have placed 962 concrete blocks by hand for this project. Rather, an excavator placed flexible, 12,000-pound "mattresses" of blocks on the streambank.

"I'm excited. We're doing a project that's new and innovative to stay with technology as far as erosion control goes," states Kara Downin, resource conservationist for the Knox County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Her conservation office designs and approves about three block chutes annually. This back-saving design provides the same erosion control goal as the labor-intensive one.

The farm of John and Becky Nichols near Oneida recently became the first in Illinois to install this innovative block chute through a state conservation program. In fact, a state engineer attended the installation to critique the system, which officials hope will become a state-wide approved erosion control practice. Placement on the general approved practices list means landowners can share up to 60 percent of the cost with conservation agencies for the betterment of soil and water. This particular project earned cost-share funding through the Partners For Conservation Program that is administered statewide by Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The volume of water that flowed to the stream from the farm's grassed waterways had eroded the streambank and exposed tile lines. This block chute slows the water to reduce its energy and, in turn, reduce soil erosion. The blocks create a hard [stable] point and the water can't erode that area.

Contech Engineered Solutions of Ohio makes this mattress of blocks, called Armorflex. In this system, 45-pound concrete blocks are cabled together for ease of installation.

The mats at the Nichols farm measured about 8 by 26 feet. Several were placed to form a carpet of interlocking blocks that measured 27 feet wide by 41 feet long.



Eroded waterway being surveyed for placement of block mattresses



Installation on of the block mattresses.

The blocks differ from the ones at a local hardware store. Features include high-strength concrete, tapered tops and notched edges that resemble a puzzle piece for an interlocking pattern. These blocks also contain holes in the center, which aid in the re-vegetation of grasses and plants.

The back-saving labor proves the main benefit to this block chute method so far. In fact, some predict it will become increasingly difficult to find contractors willing to hand-lay hundreds of blocks for a block chute. These block mats provide an alternative solution.

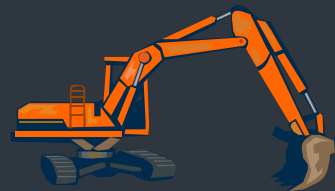
Johnston Land Improvement Inc. installs about three block chutes annually. The hand-laid method takes more men,

often four to six. This method requires three. But in the end, both methods will take about the same amount of time.

Downin predicts the method will be more stable as the block mattresses should withstand higher volumes of water. The primary disadvantage so far appears to be the cost, which for this project figured to be more than 50 percent higher than the installed cost of hand-laid method.

"It seems extremely strong and stable," Downin said. "Hopefully it's a win-win. We just need to analyze the cost."

Adapted from an article written by Joanie Stiers Register-Mail, Galesburg, IL



## Soil and Water Conservation Districts Provide Many Kinds of Services and Assistance.

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in implementing the most up-to-date conservation practices to maximize use of available resources while also protecting these essential environmental resources.
- SWCDs provide needed information for urban and rural decision makers so that they can make wise choices that will protect people and property in the future
- Through the various programs they administer and the technical assistance they provide, SWCD's encourage the protection, conservation and wise use of our natural resources to assure sustainability for future generations.



**NOTE:** SWCDs DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source funding to employ staff to administer programs.

Gaming expansion legislation being considered by the 97th General Assembly has the potential to create thousands of jobs and fund SWCDs at a sustainable level.