



Helping People Help the Land

# Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

May - June 2014

## Farmer Sees Impact of Phosphorus on Lake Erie

Lenawee County farmer Gary Service saw first-hand why his efforts to limit phosphorus runoff from his farmland are important.

Service and his wife Donna were among a group of about 30 farmers who attended an event sponsored by Michigan Farm Bureau and the Lenawee Conservation District in August 2013. During the day-long event, the group went out on Lake Erie to see the effects of nutrient loading on the lake first-hand.

"The algae blooms were really shocking to the farmers," said event organizer Amy Gilhouse, who works for the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program in southeast Michigan.

The massive algae blooms that regularly form on western Lake Erie are caused by nutrient loading, particularly phosphorus. Fertilizers containing phosphorus running off of farm fields are a major contributor to algae blooms on the lake. Algae blooms lower oxygen levels in the water which harms aquatic life. The lake's recreational value is also degraded when decaying algae washes up on beaches and mats of algae cover the water.

The water quality issues facing Lake Erie and the rest of the Great Lakes are serious, said Gilhouse. Agriculture is only one of the contributors, everyone needs to come together to find solutions, she said. Still nutrient runoff from agricultural land plays a role.

"It's not just golf courses (contributing phosphorus to Lake Erie). If they continue to get the blooms, I'm



*Donna and Gary Service on their century farm in Lenawee County. The Service's use soil testing and variable rate application to reduce the amount of phosphorus they apply to their cropland.*

afraid we'll get legislation that's more critical than if we acted voluntarily," said Service.

Service has been pro-active in reducing the amount of nutrient runoff from his operation. His farm includes 520 acres of land that has been in his family since 1837. Service farms about 180 acres of corn and soybeans after enrolling about 200 acres of land into the Conservation Reserve Program in 2000. The land enrolled in CRP was hilly, highly-erodible land, said Service.

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United States  
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State Conservationist's Message	Page 2
Economist Grabemeyer Honored	3
Michigan Envirothon State Competition	4
It is Okay to Cut Trees	5
Breakfast on the Farm	6
News Briefs and Events	7
Event Calendar	8

## State Conservationist's Message

On May 27, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and NRCS Chief Jason Weller joined Senator Debbie Stabenow in Bay City to announce funding for the new **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**.

A large number of conservation partners were represented at the event including speakers from The Nature Conservancy and the Kellogg Company. RCPP will enable local governments, non-profits, agricultural producer groups, universities and American Indian tribes to partner with NRCS in conserving natural resources on private land.

Eligible groups in Michigan will be able to submit proposals through one of three funding pools; national, state and the Great Lakes critical conservation area. RCPP is intended to bring more resources to assist conservation on private lands, including technical and financial. NRCS will supplement resources provided by its partners with financial assistance to landowners through existing programs including **EQIP**, **CSP**, **ACEP** and **HFRP**.

There are already successful conservation partnerships working in Michigan. Most notable is the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program. MAEAP partners include the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, conservation districts, producer and commodity groups as well as NRCS. The

Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, The Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Resource Alliance and other groups were partners in NRCS programs like the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Program and the National Water Quality Incentives Program that were not continued under the new Farm Bill.



*State Conservationist  
Garry Lee*

Proposals for all three RCPP funding pools are submitted to NRCS headquarters and are due by July 18.

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For the fourth year NRCS and Michigan Farm Bureau have partnered together to promote USDA conservation programs. MFB awarded 38 grants this year to its county chapters to sponsor educational events throughout the summer and fall. County Farm

Bureau chapter have partnered with their local conservation districts to organize some unique events. The grants are helping to support a series of field days in Osceola County to promote soil health. In southeast Michigan organizers are planning trips to Lake Erie to educate farmers about the effects of fertilizer runoff on water quality. Additional information about these events are included in this newsletter.



*(l-r) State Conservationist Garry Lee, NRCS Chief Jason Weller, Area Conservationist Albert Jones and Bay County District Conservationist Ronnie Maurer following Secretary Vilsack's RCPP announcement.*

## Grabemeyer Honored as USDA Economist of the Year

Shortly after June Grabemeyer retired as agricultural economist for NRCS in Michigan she was honored by the USDA Economists Group as its USDA Economist of the Year for 2014.

Grabemeyer retired at the end of January and in February Grabemeyer was honored at the group's annual meeting. USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Robert Bonnie announced Grabemeyer's selection.

Grabemeyer did not attend the event in Washington D.C. and was presented her award by NRCS State Conservationist Garry Lee in East Lansing. The award plaque reads: "June Grabemeyer provided exemplary economic support to NRCS staff and partners, resulting in significant contributions to the agency's mission of promoting conservation adoption."

Lee noted that Grabemeyer was selected from all of the economists working for the USDA

and not just NRCS. The USDA Economist of the Year Award has been presented since 1996.

Grabemeyer is the fourth economist from NRCS to earn the award.

The USDA Economists Group is an organization independent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The organization states that they are advocates for USDA economists within the USDA, the Washington community, the agriculture economics profession and society at large.

Grabemeyer retired from NRCS with 31 years of government service.



*Retired NRCS Agricultural Economist June Grabemeyer*

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## Lenawee County Farms Uses Soil Testing to Reduce Fertilizer Use

Service started using no-till on his cropland around 1995, before enrolling his hilly ground into CRP. Even his father before him minimized tillage to reduce soil erosion.

"Dad would never fall plow," said Service.

In addition to using no-till, Service has incorporated a number of conservation practices to reduce nutrient runoff from his fields. He utilized NRCS conservation programs to install vegetative filter strips along drains running through his fields, he also installed grassed waterways and three water and sediment control basins.

Service is also judicious in the amount of phosphorus he applies to his fields. He utilizes a soil testing regimen and variable rate application to minimize the amount of fertilizer he applies. Last year he only used a starter fertilizer because soil testing indicated additional phosphorus wasn't needed. When fertilizer is needed, grid soil testing allows fertilizer to only be applied where it's needed and in the amount needed.

"You really don't see a yield difference," said Service

of reducing the amount of phosphorus he applies.

The Service farm was recently environmentally verified through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program. The farm is MAEAP verified for both the farmstead and cropping systems.

Even though the Services' were already environmentally conscious, the 2013 trip to Lake Erie was compelling. The workshop included a visit to Stone Laboratory, operated by Ohio State University on Gibraltar Island in Lake Erie. Researchers at Stone Laboratory study the effects of nutrient loading on the Lake Erie including the formation of algae blooms.

"It was a wonderful event, very informative," said Donna Service.

The workshop was partially funded by an educational grant from Michigan Farm Bureau through a partnership agreement with NRCS. Similar workshops are being planned for August 2014, they will be announced when details are finalized, said Gilhouse.

## Glen Lake High School Team Wins Michigan Envirothon

A team of students from Glen Lake High School won the Michigan Envirothon state competition held May 19 through 21 at Lake Ann Camp in Benzie County. The team will now represent Michigan at the North American Envirothon held in Woodstock, Ill. in August.

The Glen Lake team finished first among 22 teams from across the state that competed against each other on their knowledge and skills of conservation topics. Finishing second in the competition was the Conservation Commandos from Hillsdale High School followed by a team from Roseville High School.

In addition to representing Michigan at the North American Envirothon Regional Stewardship Challenge in Woodstock, Ill., each winning team member received a \$2,500 scholarship to both Michigan State University and Lake Superior State University. The team members include Alexander Bennett, Molly Flerlage, Amanda Lodge, Ben Schweikart, and Emily Sherwood.

During the competition at Lake Ann Camp, teams were tested in an outdoors, hands-on setting, on topics including, aquatic ecology, energy, forestry, soils/geology, sustainable agriculture, and wildlife.

Along with the competition, each team also completed a community outreach project prior to the competition that addressed a natural resources concern in their community. The team from Glen Lake, "Bad Birches 5", addressed the issues honeybees are facing. More specifically, they created a documentary and hosted a social event to educate the community on the importance of honeybees and how they can be protected.

Michigan Envirothon is an environmental education program of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts. High school students from anywhere in Michigan are eligible to compete.



(Above) The team Bad Birches 5, from Glen Lake High School, finished first at the 2014 Michigan Envirothon state competition. Members of the Glen Lake team are (l-r) Alexander Bennett, Molly Flerlage, Amanda Lodge, Ben Schweikart and Emily Sherwood. (Below) Michigan Envirothon participants examine soil during the state competition at Lake Ann Camp.



### Michigan Envirothon

For more information about Michigan Envirothon go to [www.michiganenvirothon.org](http://www.michiganenvirothon.org) or call the Michigan Envirothon coordinator at 517/324-5274.



## It is OK to Cut Trees!

by Bill Cook, Michigan State University Extension

Why do so some people seem to believe that cutting trees is bad?

According to Michigan State University Extension, trees provide essential raw material for thousands of products that Americans use every day. As a nation, we are huge consumers of wood. Wood is the most environmentally-friendly raw material available, by a long-shot. Metals, coal, oil and concrete all have significantly larger environmental, energy and carbon footprints than wood.

Trees are renewable. Unlike other raw materials, they keep growing back, at least in North America. With management, forests have better odds than other raw materials for remaining healthy, vigorous and continuing to produce all the values we have come to cherish, including wood.

Trees provide an incredibly rich economic base, especially in rural areas. Too often, the loggers, foresters and mills are taken for granted. Yet they make up the backbone of our economy in many counties. Recently, wood-based mills have closed or curtailed production. Local economies have been affected.

It seems the word “economy” has taken on an increasingly negative connotation. However, economy is simply the word to encompass the ways in which we all survive as a collection of communities. It makes a lot of sense to base an economy on local resources, rather than those from far away. Using local resources keeps more money local and attracts money from other places.

Trees in managed forests provide habitat diversity for the largest number and greatest variety of wildlife and plant species. While a portion of our forest should remain in older, less vigorous conditions for biodiversity reasons, the

managed majority of our forest base will provide more abundant habitat for birds, game species and long lists of relatively unknown fauna and flora.

Trees in managed forests are healthier than in unmanaged forests. With an extended number of recent dry growing seasons, some of the unmanaged forests are beginning to decline while the managed forests remain relatively healthy and vigorous. Stressed trees are more vulnerable to attack by insects and diseases.



Trees in younger forests accumulate carbon and produce oxygen at a greater rate than old forests. Photosynthesis collects carbon then releases oxygen and respiration does the opposite. Trees require both processes. Older trees and older forests sometimes respire more than they photosynthesize. Older forests also have greater populations of decomposers, which release carbon.

Trees and forests are ever-popular places to recreate. Large trees make for impressive visual quality, but the majority of our forests that attract millions of visitors every year are young to middle-aged. However, the reproduction stages of even-aged forests (fresh clearcuts) attract complaints, regardless of how necessary such management is from an environmental point of view.

Trees help maintain soil and water quality, even in the freshly clearcut and regenerated forests, such as aspen. The protection of soil and water resources has long been a target of timber harvesting. Some might argue that protection measures have grown excessive, especially considering other, more serious, threats.

Trees have attracted a growing interest in producing energy, oils and many chemicals.

- continued on page 6 -

### Enjoy Free Family Fun and Learning at Three Breakfast on the Farm Events

Interested in learning more about where your food comes from and how it's produced? You can get an opportunity this summer when you visit any of three Breakfast on the Farm events, scheduled from July to September.

Breakfast on the Farm is a free family-friendly program that gives consumers and farm neighbors a first-hand look at modern food production.

Michigan State University Extension began organizing the statewide effort in 2009 to further educate consumers about farming practices. MSU Extension works closely with county branches of Michigan Farm Bureau and farmer-hosts to recruit volunteers and promote the breakfast. While on the farm, visitors participate in self-guided tours and meet with local farmers to have their questions about food production answered.

To date, BOTF has reached more than 53,000 children and adults since its beginning in 2009. Data from past surveys at the events show that for 45 percent of the attendees, it was their first visit to a modern working farm in at least 20 years. Another 33 percent of the visitors have only been on a farm one to five times in the last 20 years.

Breakfast on the Farm is an opportunity for families to learn about the agriculture industry from the experts themselves, the farmers.

Upcoming Breakfast on the Farm 2014 dates include:

- July 19, Crandall Dairy Farms LLC, Battle Creek (Calhoun County)
- August 16, De Grins Oer Dairy Farm, Blanchard (Mecosta County)
- September 6, Uphaus Farms, Manchester (Washtenaw County)

All of the events run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. with breakfast ending at noon. Although there is no cost to attend the event or take the tour, tickets are required for the free breakfast.

To find out more about Breakfast on the Farm, to learn how to apply to be a host farm or to see pictures from past events, visit [www.breakfastonthefarm.com](http://www.breakfastonthefarm.com). Locations to pick up your tickets will be posted on the website approximately one month before each event. Direct questions to Ashley Kuschel at 586/337-4985 or [kuschela@anr.msu.edu](mailto:kuschela@anr.msu.edu), or Nancy Thelen at 734/222-3825 or [thelenn@anr.msu.edu](mailto:thelenn@anr.msu.edu).

- continued from page 5 -

### It is OK to Cut Trees!

Some technologies have been used for a long time. Other technologies are new or emerging. Woody biomass will likely help replace some of our fossil fuel consumption, which if done properly, will end up a great practice in the long run, and for many reasons.

Of course, timber harvesting can be done unprofessionally, resulting in fewer benefits, or even long-term setbacks and damage. Timber harvesting for a land use change is not forestry, such as second home construction or a new pasture. On certain sites, soil and water damage may occur. It is the forest owner's responsibility to see that management is done correctly, with the assistance of a professional forester.

Less than a generation ago, most people understood that cutting trees was essential if we are going to enjoy all the thousands of products made with wood. With nearly a century of research and experience, foresters know how to sustainably manage forests for all their values. They have actually been doing it for decades. So, why is it that so many people seem to think cutting trees is a bad thing?

*This article was published by Michigan State University Extension. For more information, visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu>. To contact an expert in your area, visit <http://expert.msue.msu.edu>, or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464).*

## Osceola Summer Soil Health Series

A summer series of on-farm field days focused on soil health are planned in Osceola County beginning on July 1.

A partnership, including NRCS, Michigan State University Extension and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, are sponsoring the events. Six field days are planned and all qualify as Phase 1 meetings for producers interested in becoming MAEAP verified.

All six field days will feature cover crop demonstrations and other conservation farming methods unique to each farming operation. Different aspects of utilizing cover crops will be covered including incorporating into vegetable production, seed availability, aerial seeding and different tillage methods.

- July 1 – B&B Farms, 9775 Haskell Lake Road, Marion, 7-9 p.m.
- July 14 – Veddler Dairy Farm - North Farm, 7217 County Line Road, Marion, 7-9 p.m.
- Aug. 22 – Jernstadt Dairy, 20310 Coolidge Road, Big Rapids, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Sept. 23 – Thornton's, 11315 E. 64th, Reed City, 1:30-3:30 p.m.
- Oct. 9 – Michele & Chad Nicklas, 16134 Schofield Rd., Hersey, 6-8 p.m.
- Oct. 21 – Norman's Vegetable Farms, 22735 20 Mile Road, Tustin, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

The field days are financed in part by the Michigan Farm Bureau. There is no cost to attend and lunch or refreshments are provided at each event.

Please contact the Osceola-Lake Conservation District at 231/832-2950 or MSU Extension at 231/832-6139 for more information.



## MFB Awards Educational Grants

Michigan Farm Bureau awarded grants to 38 of its 67 local chapters to educate its members about USDA conservation programs.

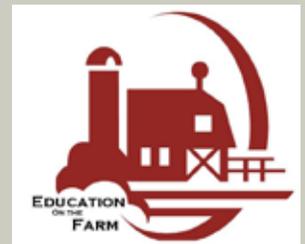
This is the fourth year MFB has offered the grants to its local chapters and it received its highest number of applications, said Emily Reinart who helps coordinate the program for MFB's Agricultural ecology department. The chapters receiving the grants serve 43 counties in Michigan. The grants are offered through a partnership between MFB and NRCS.

"Our grant program with NRCS is all about keeping farmers motivated to always strive toward achieving the ultimate in environmental stewardship," Reinart said.

Local MFB chapters who receive the grants will host public events throughout the year. More information will be provided by individual MFB chapters when they schedule their events. Events can range from informational meetings to local farm tours.

## Eastern UP Field Day Planned

The Chippewa Luce Mackinac Conservation District and Michigan Farm Bureau are hosting a field day on Aug. 2 to promote USDA conservation programs.



The full-day event will be held at two Chippewa County farms and will include a free lunch featuring locally-grown meats. Participants will learn about conservation practices applicable to the eastern UP such as cover crops, how to get involved in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program and a tour of a local slaughtering facility.

For more information visit the conservation district website at [www.clmcd@macd.org](http://www.clmcd@macd.org) or call Mike McCarthy, MAEAP Technician, at 906/632-9611 ext. 101.

### Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

#### July

- 1** Osceola County Soil Health Summer Series - Cover Crops, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., B&B Farms - Marion, more information on page 7
- 7** Weed Management 101 - Strategies for managing weeds in gardens and small farms, 6 p.m. to 7:30, Lansing Roots Farm - Mason, go to [greaterlansingfoodbank.org](http://greaterlansingfoodbank.org) for more information and to register
- 14** Osceola County Soil Health Summer Series - Cover Crops, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Veddler Dairy Farm - Marion, more information on page 7
- 19** Breakfast on the Farm, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Crandall Dairy Farm - Calhoun County, for more information go to [breakfastonthefarm.com](http://breakfastonthefarm.com)
- 22-24** Michigan State University Ag Expo, 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., MSU - East Lansing, for more information go to [agexpo.msu.edu](http://agexpo.msu.edu)

#### August

- 2** Education on the Farm Field Day, all-day event including lunch, Chippewa County, more information on page 7
- 4** Organic Integrated Pest Management, 6 p.m. to 7:30, Lansing Roots Farm - Mason, go to [greaterlansingfoodbank.org](http://greaterlansingfoodbank.org) for more information and to register

- 10** Detroit - Wayne Co. Seasonal High Tunnel Educational Initiative - Farm Tour, for more information go to [semircd.org](http://semircd.org)
- 13** Annual Soil Seminar, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Morgan Composting - Sears, pre-registration required, \$20 fee includes lunch, for more information go to [www.dairydoo.com](http://www.dairydoo.com)
- 16** Breakfast on the Farm, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., De Grins Oer Dairy Farm - Mecosta County, for more information go to [breakfastonthefarm.com](http://breakfastonthefarm.com)
- 16** Detroit - Wayne Co. Seasonal High Tunnel Educational Initiative - Cool Season Production, for more information go to [semircd.org](http://semircd.org)
- 22** Osceola County Soil Health Summer Series - Cover Crops, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Jernstadt Dairy - Big Rapids, more information on page 7
- 28** Smart Drainage Field Day, 8:30 a.m. to noon, for more information contact the Clinton Conservation District at 989/224-3720 ext. 3

#### September

- 6** Breakfast on the Farm, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Uphaus Farms - Washtenaw County, for more information go to [breakfastonthefarm.com](http://breakfastonthefarm.com)

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