

Robert McLeese — Illinois' Featured NRCS Employee

Employee Job Title: State Soil Scientist

Location: Champaign, Illinois

Date: May, 2008



Robert McLeese
Illinois' State Soil Scientist

Meet Bob McLeese

Most NRCS staff have a special attachment to the land, but when you're a Soil Scientist, that attachment to the actual organic, living and breathing skin that covers the Earth is just a little more intense. Intensity and passion for soil is so much a part of Illinois NRCS' State Soil Scientist Robert McLeese that it's almost contagious.

Bob has been "into" soils (and soil pits) for all his adult life. Like many soil scientists, he has an appreciation, a fascination, almost an obsession with the art and science of soil. Not only is he technically up-to-speed with the facts, figures, characteristics and interpretations of soil, Bob is one of the most motivated marketing enthusiasts and Public Relations Guru for soil that has ever roamed the planet.

In fact, Bob is so convinced as to mankind's absolute and critical dependence on soil and our dire need to protect against erosion in order to maintain life as we know it, that he speaks to groups, students, radio and TV personalities whenever he can. Because he is intelligent, witty, and personable, Bob has the remarkable ability to tell stories, paint a picture and enrapture his audience—be it one poor bloke standing in line at the grocery or an award-winning crowd of 500 NRCS and partner employees.

For a technical scientist and potentially geeky-type person, Bob is remarkably sociable, poised and talented in public speaking, humor and the art of persuasion. Over his career, he has performed hundreds of speaking engagements for NRCS, the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association, and has appeared on many local news programs, morning shows, radio and TV special broadcasts, and even a PBS video production. Bob serves as a basketball referee, speaks for FFA Chapters, the Soil and Water Conservation Society events, recruiting efforts, University of Illinois functions and never misses an opportunity to make a point or positively impact those around him. Basically, if you ask Bob to do something and it offers a chance to promote soil, he'll do it. He'll find the time, make the commitment and do a bang up job and has never disappointed the crowd.

"Bob really set the standard. Now all the other states have to do is try to catch up!"

— *Bill Gradle,*
State Conservationist

CONSERVATION

Our Purpose.
Our Passion.

As Illinois' State Soil Scientist, Bob's passion for soils and soils technology has left an imprint on the land and the soils related products available to Illinois' private landowners and local units of government. Providing high quality digital soils data was a dream to Bob long before the Web Soil Survey was even conceived. Illinois NRCS has been providing soils data on CDs since 1996, giving Illinois the best digital soils report card across the nation. *"Bob really set the standard,"* says State Conservationist Bill Gradle. *"Now all the other states have to do is try to catch up!"*

Bob works well with his staff, the Illinois NRCS Leadership Team, and elementary school children. He can talk dirt with PhD-laden old farts or the 3rd grade students his wife teaches. The bottom line is that no matter who you are or what you do for a living, if you spend five minutes with Bob McLeese, you will know more about soil and you will appreciate its importance. Bob McLeese is a passionate NRCS employee who works everyday to make his slice of the Earth a better place to live. For Bob McLeese, his purpose and his passion are SOIL.



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