

INDIANA'S CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

Helping People...

...Help the Land



Northwest Indiana Irrigation Systems Get Upgraded



Since its formation, the LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District has been committed to the conservation of surface and groundwater quality and quantity. In 2009, they strengthened their commitment to conservation by offering producers who irrigate cropland in Kankakee River's 298,240 acre watershed an opportunity to receive grant funds under NRCS' **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)** program. AWEP is a component of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and focuses on improving overall irrigation system efficiency to conserve water use and improve water quality.

According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, LaPorte County has nearly 50,000 acres of irrigated cropland, the largest number of irrigated acres in Indiana, and the number continues to grow each year. Because soils in LaPorte County have high leach potential, irrigation must be done as efficiently and effectively as possible.

To assist producers with evaluating the efficiency of their irrigation systems, the LaPorte County SWCD is providing an Irrigation Technician to implement the AWEP program. The technician will provide assistance by assessing the uniformity of watering systems and helping landowners with irrigation scheduling, also known as Uniformity Testing. This type of testing is increasingly beneficial to landowners as it evaluates even water distribution, comparing actual vs. desired watering. Additionally, to assist in the irrigation system efficiency, a web-based scheduling tool aids producers in determining when water should be applied and how much in order to achieve optimum yields for several different soil types and irrigated crops.

To date, uniformity tests have been completed on 37 irrigation systems which cover almost 5000 acres. System upgrades that have been installed include new nozzles to improve efficiency and the replacement of river screens which assist in saving energy and equipment wear and tear. Additionally, one system upgrade that has been completed is the installation of a device that will shut off the well if the pivot unexpectedly stops, a common occurrence on this particular operation. This upgrade will save thousands of gallons of water from being wasted, saving the operator dollars and saving the Kankakee River from unneeded runoff.