



Soil and Plant Science Division

Technical Soil Services

North Central Soil Survey Region

Educating the Next Generation

Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 74—Central Kansas Sandstone Hills

Purpose

From September 2024 to May 2025, staff from the Salina, Kansas, MLRA Soil Survey Office (SSO) participated in three events aimed at educating students on the importance of soil conservation. These events were held in Bennington, Kanopolis, and Salina, Kansas.

Background

The first event was Bennington's Big Truck Day, a fun version of a career day that Salina MLRA SSO staff have participated in for a couple of years. Representatives from many professions brought their work trucks to the school parking lot, gave a short talk about their jobs or career field, and answered students' questions. Soil Survey Leader Greg Clark gave an overview of soil survey and demonstrated how to use a truck mounted soil probe (fig. 1).

The second event was the Loder Point Conservation Field Day. This is an annual event held for fourth graders at Kanopolis Lake. The students learned about many facets of conservation and the outdoors, such as aquifers, fishery, soils, streams, wetlands, and wildlife. As part of the soil presentation, Soil Scientist Will Ruiz Lugo helped students make soil profiles using different colored soils applied to card stock and double-sided carpet tape (fig. 2).

The third event was for the Homeschool Village of Salina. Approximately 25 students and their parents toured The Land Institute (TLI) campus outside Salina, Kansas. The students and parents learned about the different plant breeding programs TLI is currently conducting. TLI staff highlighted the program attempting to breed the Kernza perennial wheat plant into a viable commercial alternative to the annual wheat varieties that are currently the base for many of our foods. Salina MLRA SSO staff set up an educational Soil Tunnel to increase students' understanding of how soils play a role in TLI's plant breeding programs (fig. 3).



Figure 1.—Soil Survey Leader Greg Clark speaking to students on Bennington Big Truck Day.



Figure 2.—Students select colored soil for their soil profiles (top), and Soil Scientist Will Ruiz Lugo helps them apply it to pieces of double-sided tape (bottom).



Figure 3.—Soil Scientist Nathan Stremcha (left) describing different soil properties to students standing in the Soil Tunnel.

Key Outcomes

These events are an excellent opportunity to improve the soil and conservation knowledge of the students across our area and raise the public profile of NRCS and our conservation work. They can also strengthen the relationships with our conservation partners as in our cooperation during TLI tour.