

THE FARMER'S REPORT



The Mendota Reporter The Amboy News

April 28, 2021

US farmers expect to plant more corn and soybean acreage

WASHINGTON – Producers surveyed across the United States intend to plant an estimated 91.1 million acres of corn in 2021, up less than 1% from last year, according to the Prospective Plantings report released today by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

Planted acreage intentions for corn are up or unchanged in 24 of the 48 estimating states.

The largest increases are expected in the Dakotas, where producers intend to plant a combined 8.90 million acres, an increase of 2.00 million acres from 2020. Producers across most of the Corn Belt intend to plant fewer acres than last year. If realized, the planted area of corn in Idaho and Oregon will be the largest on record.

Soybean growers intend to plant 87.6 million acres in 2021, up 5% from last year. If realized, this will be the third highest planted acreage on record. Compared with last year, planted acreage is expected to be up or unchanged in 23 of the 29 states estimated.

The Prospective Plantings report provides the first official, survey-based estimates of U.S. farmers' 2021 planting intentions. NASS's acreage estimates are based on surveys conducted during the first two weeks of March from a sample of nearly 80,000 farm operators across the nation. Other key findings in the report are:

All wheat planted area for 2021 is estimat-

ed at 46.4 million acres, up 5% from 2020. This represents the fourth lowest all wheat planted area since records began in 1919.

Winter wheat planted area, at 33.1 million acres, is up 3% from the previous estimate and up 9% from last year. This is the seventh lowest planted acreage on record.

Area planted to other spring wheat for 2021 is expected to total 11.7 million acres, down 4% from 2020.

Durum wheat is expected to total 1.54 million acres for 2021, down 9% from last year.

All cotton planted area for 2021 is expected to total 12.0 million acres, less than 1% below last year.

NASS also released the quarterly Grain Stocks report to provide estimates of on-farm and off-farm stocks as of March 1. Key findings in that report include:

Corn stocks totaled 7.70 billion bushels, down 3% from the same time last year. On-farm corn stocks were down 9% from a year ago, but off-farm stocks were up 5%.

Soybeans stored totaled 1.56 billion bushels, down 31% from March 1, 2020. On-farm soybean stocks were down 41% from a year ago, while off-farm stocks were down 22%.

All wheat stored totaled 1.31 billion bushels, down 7% from a year ago. On-farm all wheat stocks went down 16% from last year, while off-farm stocks went down 4%.



Durum wheat stored totaled 42.7 million bushels, down 17% from March 1, 2020. On-farm Durum stocks were down 4% from a year ago, while off-farm stocks of Durum

wheat were down 28%.

The Prospective Plantings, Grain Stocks, and all other NASS reports are available online at www.nass.usda.gov.

USDA's national agricultural classification survey is underway

WASHINGTON – The USDA's National Agricultural Classification Survey (NACS) is arriving in mailboxes around the nation. The survey, one of the most important steps in determining who should receive a 2022 Census of Agriculture questionnaire, asks recipients if they are involved in agricultural activity. The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) recently mailed the NACS to 633,000 potential agricultural producers. NASS requests that each person who receives the survey respond by May 3.

"The NACS shows the breadth of American agriculture and helps to ensure we get a complete count of farms and ranches in the upcoming agriculture census," said NASS Census and Survey Division Director Barbara Rater. "Every response matters. Even if a recipient believes the survey does not apply to them, we ask that they respond online to at least the initial screening questions."

NASS encourages recipients to respond securely online at www.agcounts.usda.gov,

using the 12-digit survey code mailed with the survey. Completed questionnaires may also be mailed back in the prepaid envelope provided.

Referenced by countless national and local decision-makers, researchers, farm organizations, and more, the once-every-five-year Census of Agriculture is the leading source of facts about American agriculture. "The NACS ensures that everyone who produces and sells, or would normally sell, \$1000 or more of agricultural product in a calendar year have a voice by being represented in the agriculture census," said Rater.

If you did not receive the 2017 Census of Agriculture or the NACS and believe you should have, please sign up to be counted at www.agcounts.usda.gov/getcounted. All information reported by individuals will be kept confidential, as required by federal law. For more information about the NACS, visit www.nass.usda.gov/go/nacs. For assistance with the survey, please call 888-424-7828.

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USDA invests more than \$330 million in specialty crops grants, incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables, and help for cotton producers

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the availability of more than \$330 million to help agricultural producers and organizations in the food supply chain recover from the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding announced today is part of USDA's Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative launched in March, and includes \$169.9 million for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP), the availability of \$75 million for Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program [GusNIP; formerly known as Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI)] grantees and approximately \$80 million in payments to domestic users of upland and extra-long staple cotton. This funding will aid in developing new markets for U.S. agricultural products, expand the specialty crop food sector, and incent the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers. USDA also informed dairy producers and processors today about ongoing plans for the Dairy Donation Program (DDP) as established in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

USDA launched the Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative in March with \$6.5 billion in available funding to address shortfalls and disparities in how assistance was distributed in previous COVID-19 assistance packages, with a specific focus on strengthening outreach to underserved producers and communities and small and medium agricultural operations.

"We launched USDA

Pandemic Assistance for Producers to respond in a broader, fairer way to the pandemic's impact across food and agriculture, and we are following through on our promise," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in wide-ranging impacts that were felt throughout the agricultural sector. The Biden-Harris Administration is focused on ensuring that the entire agricultural sector successfully rebuilds following the pandemic, and the funding we're announcing today will reach a broader set of producers and businesses than previous COVID-19 aid programs."

Developing New Markets for Specialty Crops and Expanding Existing Ones

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is announcing \$169.9 million for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) to fund innovative projects designed to support the expanding specialty crop food sector and explore new market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products. The total includes:

\$72.9 million available as part of the annual Farm Bill funding for the program; and An additional \$97 million available as emergency funding for applications under this solicitation. Congress provided this funding in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, due to COVID-19 impacts to the food system.

Grant project funding awarded as part of pandemic assistance can also go to organizations to assist farmworkers (e.g., for PPE and vaccination costs), projects

to fund farmers, food businesses, and other relevant entities to respond to risks and supply chain disruption.

The SCBGP funds are allocated to U.S. states and territories based on a formula that considers both specialty crop acreage and production value. Interested applicants should apply directly through their state departments of agriculture. A listing of state contacts is available on the USDA website.

Applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 11, 2021. Any grant application submitted after the due date will not be considered unless the applicant provides documentation of an extenuating circumstance that prevented their timely submission of the grant application. For more information about grant eligibility, visit the SCBGP website.

Advance Notice to Trade about Dairy Donation Program

USDA will soon implement the Dairy Donation Program (DDP) as established in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. The program will facilitate the timely donation of dairy products to nonprofit organizations that distribute food to persons in need and prevent and minimize food waste. Because the statute allows retroactive reimbursements of donations made before donation and distribution plans are approved, USDA provided advance notice today of the minimum provisions to be included in the program to encourage the dairy industry to process and donate surplus

milk supplies as it moves through the spring surplus milk production season. For more information, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/notices>.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming

America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart

food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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Trooper Tracy plants seeds of thought on rural road safety during high-traffic season

By **CHRISTOPHER HEIMERMAN**
For Illinois Press
Association

As a beekeeper, a longtime Illinois state trooper, and the face and voice of rural road safety, Tracy Lillard knows you catch more flies with honey.

With planting season underway, the overseer of the Illinois State Police's social media channels leverages the ISP's main Facebook page and its 263,000 followers, 33 other pages, seven Twitter accounts and three Instagram channels to drive home the importance of being mindful of massive, slow-moving farm vehicles.

The threat of a ticket, or the horrifying proposition of a deadly crash, can stop

people in their tracks. But it's her authentic, upbeat, slice-of-life posts that go viral.

"The public wants those feel-good stories," said Lillard, better known as "Trooper Tracy." "We can talk all day long about what drivers are doing wrong, but when we humanize rural road safety, it sticks with people."

For instance, she'll write and post "Dear so-and-so" letters to farmers and drivers, thanking them, while illustrating the importance of other drivers allowing them to safely plant and harvest the crops that fuel our daily life.

Lillard is constantly patrolling for educational opportunities. She recently shared a picture of a semi-trailer on the shoulder of

a highway, with its lights flashing and a sprayer nearby. She explained what was playing out, while also sharing snippets of their conversation, as it turned out both drivers were longtime friends of her family.

"Who's the guy in the tractor?" Lillard said. "Is it the neighbor? My dad? Is he a 12-year-old kid moving equipment? While these folks are working hard against the clock, people just see it as an inconvenience because they're late for work."

Let's pump the brakes so Rodney Knittel, the Illinois Farm Bureau's assistant director of transportation and infrastructure, can rattle off mistakes drivers make most often while navigating slow-moving vehicles that



Illinois State Police Sgt. Tracy Lillard takes a selfie as her father mows along the roadside in rural Champaign-Urbana, to point out that drivers need to practice caution around tractors and slow-moving vehicles. Lillard tagged the Illinois Farm Bureau in a Facebook post, which received nearly 6,000 likes. (Credit: Facebook)

bear the red-trimmed orange triangle.

Of course, the most horrifying scenario is a head-on crash precipitated by a driver passing on the left. Knittel said drivers need to give plenty of space between their vehicle and the farm equipment before passing, and be 100 percent sure there's no oncoming traffic, and no upcoming intersections where other drivers could be turning into the passing lane.

He said it's also common for drivers to rear-end machinery that's traveling around 15 mph. And while such a crash is bad for the farmer, you can imagine who most often gets the worst end of that exchange.

"Obviously, distracted driving is always an issue," Knittel said. "If you look down at a text message and look back up, your reaction time is all of a sudden drastically shortened. When I was a kid, we had a bag phone, so you didn't have to worry about a text message or a Snapchat, or all these things we think are so important."

Knittel said another trou-

blingly common scenario is one in which a farm implement driver has to veer left into the passing lane in order to execute a right-hand turn because of, you know, the laws of physics. Knittel said whether it's because they're impatient or simply unaware the driver needs to veer out to make the turn, the tailing driver tries to pass on the right.

You'd think that reflective, Slow Moving Vehicle emblem would be universally recognized, but as Knittel pointed out, even before the pandemic, there began a trend of urban flight. And with it becoming more widely accepted for employees to work from home, many lifelong urban residents are moving to the country.

"I think people want a little piece of country and quietness, and that's probably as heightened now as ever," Knittel said. "Growing up, most people knew what an SMV sign meant, but now that you have urban coming to country, there might not be that awareness."

He said rural residents not only need to be more

educated, aware and focused while driving, but that they also need to budget more time to get where they're going, particularly during planting season in the spring and harvest season in the fall.

"I know people have to get somewhere, but it's for a short couple of months of the year," he said.

And if they think they're in a hurry, consider the farmer.

"They only have so much time to get crops in the ground," Knittel said. "They're rushing, trying to get it done, and getting the crop in is the most important part of the year, and the most stressful."

He's seen rear-end crashes. He's seen drivers pass on the right. Some of the collisions he's witnessed are seared into his memory.

"You see those types of things, and they're a lasting image you'll never forget," he said.

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Crop Scout School features 22 free, online training videos

URBANA – The 2021 Virtual Crop Scout School is available and free to the general public. The Scout School, offered through the Crop Protection Network, consists of 22 webinars from crop protection specialists at 11 Midwest universities.

Crop scouts, farmers, and other users can pick and choose from a variety of diverse subjects to help them become more knowledgeable on crop scouting. Topics are split into digestible bits so crop scouts can interact with subject matter in a way that best suits their time and interest.

Crop scouting is an important part of integrated pest management IPM that can help farmers obtain higher yields and increased profit per acre. Scouting gives farmers and agronomists a heads-up about what is happening in the field, allowing preemptive action and appropriate management decisions to be applied. The field scout gathers information on the crop condition of a field that can help in discerning what management tools to use.

Illinois authors include Chelsea Harbach, University of Illinois Extension commercial ag educator at the Northwestern Illinois Agricultural Center, and Nicholas Seiter, Illinois Extension field crops entomology specialist.

“The Virtual Crop Scout School is coming on the heels of a web book on crop scouting released by CPN earlier this year,” said Daren Mueller, Extension associate professor at Iowa State University. “Crop scouting can do a lot to bring greater yields to farm fields.”

CPN has partnered with Midwest universities to create the webinar series. CPN is a multi-state and international partnership of university and provincial Extension specialists, and public and private professionals that provides unbiased, research-based information. This work is supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the North Central IPM Center. CPN’s goal is to communicate relevant information to farmers and agricultural personnel to help with decisions related to protecting field crops.

Access the webinar series at: <https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/virtual-crop-scout-school>.

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“You don’t want your family to be involved in that.”

Lillard concedes that the scared-straight approach to education is effective. She spent 12 years on patrol writ-

ing tickets and hopes those memories stuck with folks.

“If we can write those tickets, we write them,” she said. “And hopefully they’ll remember it for the rest of their lives.”

For Lillard, this stuff hits

home—as in her current home in southern rural Champaign, near the ground her brother and cousin still farm. As a youth, she spent about 14 years detasseling corn on her family farm, and her father drove a truck in-sea-

son and school buses in the off-season.

“I see all of those concerns with people behind semis, so I get frustrated,” she said. “I’ve also seen how we can use education, rather than waiting for the crash to happen.”

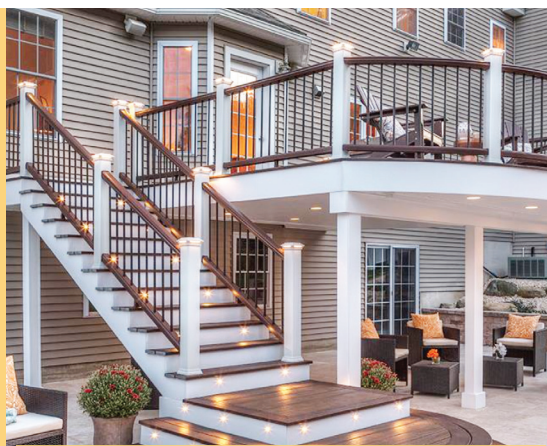


The driver of a semitrailer and a farmer operating a sprayer work along a roadside April 15 in rural Champaign-Urbana. Illinois State Police Sgt. Tracy Lillard visited with the farmers, and used the opportunity to record a Facebook video explaining why a semitrailer would be parked along the shoulder, obstructing traffic, and requiring other motorists to proceed with caution. (Credit: Facebook)

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How do farmers protect our natural resources?

BY KATIE ZELECHOWSKI
Illinois Farm Bureau

If you've ever budgeted your finances, you know there are a lot of factors to consider when balancing your income and expenses.

Over time, many of those factors will change and you'll need to recalculate and reorganize your priorities based on what's available.

Southwest Illinois farmer Richard Guebert Jr. says farmers manage the needs of their soil, crops and animals in similar ways. The deci-

sions they make regarding the use of their land, water and other natural resources directly affect the food, fuel and fiber they produce.

Guebert serves as president of Illinois Farm Bureau, the largest farming organization in the state. With Earth Day recently celebrated, he shared information about how environmental stewardship influences Illinois farmers' decisions.

How do farmers manage natural resources on the farm?

Guebert: We are blessed to have some of the most

fertile soils right here in Illinois. Thanks to the high productivity of our land, farmers can raise a lot of different crops and animals on their farms. But keeping the soil healthy can be difficult, especially since most of what's grown on the farm is influenced by the weather.

Just like other farmers in the state, managing the health of my soil and crops while protecting the integrity of those resources for the future are top priorities for me.

Before planting each spring, I work with a crop specialist to assess the soil nutrients on my farm. Based on soil samples collected from different areas of each field, the crop specialist prescribes specific amounts of nutrients I should apply to each field based on what's needed for crops to grow. That information is plugged into the technology on my tractor and nutrients are precisely applied to each part of the field.

This precision cuts down on cost for the farmer and is better for the environment. From the variety of seeds planted to types of nutrients and fertilizers applied, farmers make decisions like these every day to maximize their production while protecting our natural resources.



Precision technology is an important tool for Richard Guebert. During the spring planting season, soil information is collected as his tractor passes through the field and is displayed on monitors in the cab. (Credit: Illinois Farm Bureau)

What does your farm look like and how does it compare to a typical Illinois farm?

Guebert: I raise corn, soybeans, and wheat on my farm in Randolph County. Some of our land has been farmed by my family for generations. In many ways, my farm is similar to others in Illinois because a majority of farms are family owned and operated and because corn and soybeans are the most popular crops in our state.

Illinois farmers also raise a wide variety of livestock including pork, beef, dairy and poultry. We grow a lot of different specialty crops,

like horseradish, pumpkins and Christmas trees.

How does agriculture impact Illinois?

Guebert: In Illinois, nearly a half-million jobs are supported by agriculture and related industries. We have tremendous assets in Illinois such as rich soils, river and rail transportation, many food manufacturing companies located in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Another way agriculture impacts our state is through biofuel production. The corn used to produce ethanol and the soybeans used for biodiesel are a more carbon-friendly alternative

to gasoline and diesel fuel. The biofuels industry as a whole also adds jobs to our state and promotes a healthy economy.

How do Illinois farmers celebrate Earth Day?

Guebert: From the food you purchase at the grocery store or local farmers market, to the fuel you fill your car with and clothes on your back, agriculture is all around you. As the heart of agriculture production, Illinois farmers celebrate Earth Day like they always do – by managing our natural resources to produce the products American families need most.

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Volunteers give 184,000 hours valued at \$5.5 million to Illinois Extension

URBANA – Volunteers are core to University of Illinois Extension's success improving families and communities. Last year, more than 9,100 volunteers gave over 184,000 hours of service to the organization. Those hours are valued at over \$5.5 million dollars statewide.

National Volunteer Week ran April 18 to 24, and Illinois Extension Director Shelly Nickols-Richardson acknowledged the profound impact both youth and adult volunteers have for the organization.

"Without them, we would have a hard time organizing our 4-H clubs and programs,

planting our community gardens, conserving our nature preserves, training our public leaders, and educating youth and their families about healthy living," Nickols-Richardson says. "We count on their reliability, readiness, and resilience."

The outreach arm of

University of Illinois, the 100-year+ organization is tasked with extending the unbiased, research-based knowledge of the university to families, businesses, and communities.

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Its efforts are multiplied by the passionate volunteer workforce who give generously of their time and talent.

Master Gardeners are one of Illinois Extension's strongest volunteer programs. Even in a year riddled with participation restrictions from COVID-19, over 2,640 Master Gardeners donated nearly 93,000 hours. They problem-solve public inquiries for plant

issues, work in community gardens, and offer educational programs and activities.

"Extension Master Naturalists are passionate about preserving the prairie state's natural legacy for future generations," says Extension Master Naturalist state coordinator Chris Evans. More than 1,000 volunteers spent over 48,000 hours on projects, including collecting prairie seeds for restoration projects, teaching youth about

natural areas, assisting in the removal of invasive species, and performing water quality tests.

Extension's volunteer Money Mentors work one-on-one with individuals to help make plans to pay down debt, save for dreams, and get finances organized. New mentor training begins June 10. For more information, visit: extension.illinois.edu/cfiv/money-mentors.

From robotics and photography to baking and fishing, the vast experience

of Illinois 4-H volunteers enrich the lives of the 200,000 4-H participants annually. In addition to 4-H club volunteers, adults and youth help with workshops, camps, and afterschool programs.

"Communities are stronger because of the impact of 4-H volunteers," says Illinois Extension 4-H leadership specialist Patricia McGlaughlin. "In addition to the help they give youth, 4-H volunteers gain skills in teaching, leadership,

and communication that are useful in their work and lives outside of 4-H."

In a recent national 4-H survey conducted by McGlaughlin and a team of 4-H specialists, 78% of volunteers indicate their 4-H volunteer experience has increased their own civic engagement in the communities they live; 84% indicated they made

community connections on behalf of 4-H.

Of the nearly 3,000 volunteers surveyed, 53% were Gen X'ers (age 41 to 56), 63% had been in 4-H as a child, and 37% had volunteered for more than 10 years. In addition, 96% of those responding indicated they contributed supplies to the program, and 89% donated money to the organization.

Managing cattle grazing distribution: It's not as simple as it sounds

WASHINGTON — Grazing is an agricultural term to describe the natural behavior of cattle moving across pastures and rangelands as they consume different plants. Surprisingly, grazing cattle are selective about where and which plants they will eat, and land managers consider grazing distribution an essential factor in deciding how to manage their herds, including how to prevent overgrazing for conserving biodiversity of the land.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) collaborated with various universities and the Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) network to examine the influence of topography on grazing distribution that can inform land managers in the selection of efficient grazing strategies.

Livestock managers desire information on several factors affecting grazing distribution before implementing land management strategies. With this in mind, researchers at USDA-ARS completed a cross-site collaboration study with university-operated experiment stations and four LTAR funded sites, with the primary goal of determining

how factors like landscape topography and water availability affect cattle grazing distribution. The data collected at all sites creates a benchmark for understanding how environment can drive the spatial patterns of animal use in pastures under several management practices and across numerous ecosystems covering arid, semiarid, and sub-tropical environments.

The study collected data from seven rangeland sites in Florida, Nebraska, New Mexico, Colorado, and Idaho and used collars equipped with global positioning system (GPS) technology to measure cattle movement and activity. This technology was successfully used in prior studies completed by scientists David J. Augustine and Justin D. Derner, from the Rangeland Resources and Systems Research Unit, at Fort Collins, CO and Cheyenne, WY.

Cattle wearing GPS collar At the Central Plains Experimental Range in northeastern Colorado, cattle were fitted with global positioning system (GPS) collars to track their grazing behavior and pasture use.

"The information collected from the GPS-collars allowed us to develop

a broad-scale analysis of how topography in these seven rangeland sites in North America determines livestock grazing distribution," said E.J. Raynor, Research Associate Ecologist within the Rangeland Resources & Systems Research Unit at Fort Collins, CO at the time of study and currently with the Pasture Systems & Watershed Management Research Unit in University Park, PA. "By studying how livestock grazing occurs on different parts of the landscape like flat plains, lowlands, open slopes, and upland, we developed models that can be used to predict distribution of grazing cattle. One observation from these models is cattle prefer to graze low-lying locations in drier regions and more elevated locations in wetter regions, where flooding likely reduces selection." The USDA-ARS LTAR Grazinglands working group of scientists is optimistic that this study will set the stage for similar collaborative efforts, including plant community composition, forage production, and livestock weight gains to provide insights into sustainable livestock management strategies across diverse rangeland ecosystems.



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SOIL & WATER STEWARDSHIP WEEK

April 25 - May 2, 2021

“THE LIVING SOIL”

While most of us seldom come in daily contact with soil, we all depend on soil for our daily survival, according to organizers of the Soil and Water Stewardship Week observance. In generation after generation, it is important to bring full attention back to the central theme - the living soil sustains all life on earth. Without the soil, nothing lives. Conservation districts work to protect healthy soils that in turn support a healthy environment, and healthy environments support healthy life.

We eat the food, drink water, breathe the air, and enjoy the views, but only a few of us walk the fields and forests on a regular basis and understand what those lands need from us in order to sustain the living soil. However, the local district has suggested three things each of us can do in our own backyards to be better stewards of our soil resources:

1. Protect the soil from wind or water erosion by keeping healthy plants growing on the surface.
2. Restore & maintain organic matter in the soil, such as grass clippings or tree leaves (compost).
3. Protect soil life by using the least amounts and least toxic materials to control pest problems.

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