

the CONSERVATION VOICES

VOICES

Summer 2016

A quarterly newsletter produced by the Foster Creek & South Douglas Conservation Districts

Foster Creek Direct Seed Program Update

By Amanda Ward

Foster Creek Conservation District is continuing to increase its Direct Seed program with a new Ecology Water Quality grant confirmed for 2017 through 2019. This funding will provide cost-share assistance for 12 new direct seeders, increasing the number of direct seed operators participating in the program to 24. Our region's economy is dependent on agriculture, with many thousands of acres devoted largely to dry-land wheat, and FCCD's Direct Seed program aims address some of the water quality and soil erosion issues that have been proven to stem from conventional tillage practices.

Soil erosion is an issue recognized on a national level since the "Dirty thirties". Wind and water act as carriers, transporting soil off tilled fields, depositing it into nearby streams, ditches and across county roads. The 1970's saw the evolution of no-till practices, designed to leave crop residue in the field and the soil basically undisturbed during the following seeding operation. Unfortunately, even though erosion decreased significantly, weed pressure and disease became unmanageable problems for farmers and the new system lost momentum as many reverted to conventional tillage practices.

So why consider Direct Seeding now? Technology has improved tremendously over the past 30 years and we have a much greater understanding of overall soil health, including weeds and crops diseases. Research is ongoing, but there are many proven advantages, including:

Direct seeding reduces the number of

passes across a field, providing economic benefits such as reduced fuel and labor costs, and decreased maintenance and repairs.

Fewer passes across the field means less soil disturbance, dust and compaction issues.

Decreased soil movement means improved water and air quality – sediments and nutrients are kept in-field.

Direct Seed (integrated into conservation tillage, mulch till and/or no-till practices) leaves between 15-30%; conventional tillage leaves less than 15% residue

Residue helps to stabilize the soil, decreasing susceptibility to wind and water erosion.

Increased residue means increased organic matter, beneficial soil microbes and bacteria which, in turn, contributes to improved soil structure, improved nutrient exchange and water holding capacity and enhanced water infiltration.

Increased residue protects the soil surface from 'splash erosion' (rain drops bombard the bare soil, displacing soil particles and destroying soil structure), buffer the soil from temperature extremes and help to reduce moisture evaporation (more moisture for crop utilization).

Direct seed sequesters carbon from plant materials, keeping it in the soil; conventional tillage accelerates decomposition which releases carbon, in the form of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the air.

Direct seed is not a fool-proof system – equipment can be costly and there are still some challenges to be met, but it is

now a much more feasible option that provides a broad range of soil health benefits – and it is the soil that supports healthy, strong, and resilient plant communities.

NEW WEATHER STATION!!

By Carol Cowling

Back in 2007 South Douglas funded a weather station for the Waterville School. Perched on top of the courthouse in Waterville, it was hard to maintain and deliver accurate weather conditions.

Farmers, pilots, gardeners and others need accurate up to date weather. Temperature, wind, humidity and other weather conditions can determine what outside activities can safely be accomplished.

Dave Barnes, owner of Barnes Welding, approached the district about moving the station out to the Waterville Airport. It is a better location with no buildings or trees to interfere weather readings. Weather Underground is a good site, and can give you up to date information and forecasts. Dave has agreed to maintain the station so it is readily available to anyone wanting exact weather conditions.

www.wunderground.com/us/wa/waterville/zmw:98858.1.99999 will take you directly to the Waterville Airport site. You can move around the site to see even more weather info, both current and past.

Why doesn't Everyone Direct Seed?

Carol Cowling

Reading Amanda Ward's article in this newsletter, you may wonder why everyone doesn't direct seed? Over time, direct seeding, or no – till, can save money in labor and fuel, simply by eliminating an added step of plowing each year. But the purchase of the specialized seeding equipment can be prohibitive. A new drill can cost over \$100,000.

Direct Seed tillage isn't appropriate for all soil types. The soil in some parts of Douglas County has a lot of clay in it, and requires tillage to prevent it from becoming packed and unusable. South Douglas has had three different pieces of equipment available to farmers to try no or reduced tillage since 1997. The John Deere 750 drills, Flexicoil, and ripper went over almost 21000 acres. Used by 55 farmers (some tried all three) the equipment has been sold. Some farmers went on to purchase their own equipment. Others decided it would not work in their fields.

Direct seeding provides excellent erosion control and soil moisture conservation. There may be a delay in the soil warming in the spring, which can delay planting of crops. Direct seed relies heavily on herbicides to control weeds. The cost of the herbicides can override the savings on the reduced labor and equipment. Over time, weeds can become resistant to chemicals used for control. The residue left in the fields can harbor disease.

The transition time from conventional to direct seeding is 4-5 years. During that time, yields may be reduced until the new practice is established.

As you can see, which method or combination of methods a farmer uses depends of factors – science, history, experience, cost and tradition. But all serious farmers care for the land they cultivate for current and future generations.

County Committee Members Bring Local Knowledge to FSA

By Michel Ruud

Agency Seeks Nominees for 2016 Elections

You have a chance to influence federal farm programs with your local knowledge. FSA is seeking nominations for farmers and ranchers willing to represent your peers on the agency's county committees. All county FSA offices will accept nominations through August 1, 2016 for this fall's elections.

Farmers and ranchers on FSA county committees make decisions which impact program payments. They can settle appeals of agency decisions. Also, they are responsible for hiring FSA managers at the county level.

FSA encourages all interested agricultural producers, including women and minority growers, to seek nomination. Eligible candidates must participate or cooperate in any Farm Service Agency program and be of legal voting age. Even if you are not currently participating in FSA programs, you are considered eligible to vote if you have farm records on file with the agency.

Each county committee draws its members from local administrative areas. Nominated by local farmers and ranchers, candidates must live in the county's local administrative area they will represent and must be eligible to vote in the county election. Members serve on staggered three-year terms so that one-third of the seats are up for re-election each year. If you would like to nominate a candidate, or yourself, contact your local FSA office or check the LAA map on the FSA website www.fsa.usda.gov/wa to find out which local administrative areas are up for election.

Elected county committee members receive an hourly wage for their attendance and representation at county committee meetings.

Elections will take place in the fall and newly elected committee members begin their terms in January 2017. FSA will send ballots to all eligible voters. Additional information and nomination forms may be requested from any FSA office. Nomination forms may also be obtained online.

South Douglas Looking for Supervisor

South Douglas Conservation District currently is looking for a supervisor to fill a vacant appointed position. The term of office will be from appointment to May 16, 2019. The applicant must be a registered voter in the State of Washington. An application is online at the Washington Conservation Commission website.

The five member Board of Supervisors meets on the first Monday of each month, except August. The supervisors set policy and direction for the Conservation District, serving without compensation. (We will reimburse for travel to the monthly meetings) They oversee conservation practices in southern Douglas County, promoting education and participation in protecting natural resources. Currently, the district is involved in developing the Firewise Program in Douglas County, water quality projects, and conducts a cost share program for its cooperators. Your time would involve monthly board meetings as well as community contact to identify resource needs and provide assistance, whether technical, financial or educational.

If you are interested in becoming a supervisor, please call the office, 745-9160. Ideally, this supervisor would be involved in the orchard industry. The other board members are from the Waterville area and involved in dryland farming. However, anyone who is a landowner or occupier within the district boundaries is eligible. Deadline for the application is July 31, 2016.

Spring Development VS. WETLAND

By Michelle Mires - NRCS

The Natural Resources Conservation Service can assist you with cost share dollars, design and Wetland determinations that maybe required if you want to develop a spring to use as a water source for livestock. The NRCS has some responsibilities when it comes to dealing with spring developments and wetlands. NRCS is regulated by the following:

The Food Security Act – to determine/delineate wetlands and wetland exemption categories on Ag land.

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act: Inform landowners of the potential need to a 404 permit if developing a wetland.

Wetland Protection Policy (Executive

order 11990) – General Manual, Part 410: Avoid, minimize or mitigate wetland loss as a condition for providing assistance with livestock spring developments.

If you follow these steps when planning the development of a spring for livestock it will ensure your compliance with wetland regulations.

Determine if the production of an Ag commodity WILL be made possible as a direct result of developing the spring: a certified wetland determination will be required. To start the wetland determination process stop in the FSA office and fill out a new 1026.

If production of an Ag commodity is not made possible as a result of the development, the wetland Conservation

Provisions of the Food Security Act do not apply.

If there is no surface water connectivity between the spring development and the “waters of the US ARMY CORPS of Engineers has no jurisdiction. IF there IS connectivity the landowner will need to contact the COR and obtain the permits needed.

NRCS is always subject to Wetland Policy. The National Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) has a sequencing steps of – avoid, minimize, mitigate. Here are a couple of examples of minimize and mitigation - If all of the water from the spring is not needed for the livestock leave some water to avoid drying the whole area, or install an overflow from the trough that will create or maintain a wet area.

2016 Envirothon



Team work was of utmost importance during the 2016 NCW Envirothon

Douglas County Agriculture Exhibit

By Carol Cowling

South Douglas sponsors a contest at the NCW Fair each year. Last year the age classes changed to follow the 4-H age groups. First place in each division is awarded \$100 for the education provided to fair goers.

Junior - Grade 3-5; Intermediate - Grade 6-8; Senior - Grade 9-12

Topic must relate to agriculture in North Central Washington.

Exhibit to be a poster, clearly presented for all fairgoers to understand.

Double spaced, typed report, covering the exhibit themes, attached to the exhibit. Name on the back.

The object of this exhibit is to tell the story of agriculture in North Central Washington. Theme examples could be growing, marketing, diseases, harvesting, pests, crops, equipment, exporting, fertilizing, conservation practices or anything to do with agriculture.

For more information see page 22 in the Fair Premium Book

By Tiffany Bishop – Yakima Basin Environmental Education Program

Bridgeport High School’s team took first place at the North Central Washington Envirothon challenge, hosted Wednesday, April 20th at Beebe Bridge Park in Orondo. Seven teams from three schools competed in five disciplines of natural science knowledge: wildlife, soils, forestry, aquatics, and the ever-changing “current issue” – invasive species. Each five person team worked together to provide support to each individual’s specialty category. For example, the wildlife test might have contained a question covering invasive species, or how they are transported through river systems. The team answered all the test questions together, and the combined test scores resulted in

the winner. Bridgeport will represent North Central Washington at the state competition in May, as will Okanogan High School and Quincy High School, as their respective county representatives. The North Central Washington Envirothon was sponsored by Foster Creek Conservation District, with volunteer support from South Douglas Conservation District, Okanogan Conservation District, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Waterville Farm Service Agency, Stevens County Conservation District, Washington State University, and the Yakima Basin Environmental Education Program.

NCW Fair

August 25-28

It's almost fair time. The NCW Fair in Waterville is a great way to end the summer. Animals, kids, needlework, rodeo, friends, entertainment, exhibits of all kinds and food and carnival rides – a typical county fair. This year challenge someone to enter something in the fair. Go on line at www.ncwfair.org or (like us old timers) pick up a catalog to see what you might enter. Maybe you have some tomatoes you are proud of, or have some sewing, or hay or jam or baking - the list is almost endless. The fair highlights the agriculture of the area, as well as providing family entertainment. Both Conservation Districts have booths highlighting natural resource conservation within the County.

Growing your own vegetables is a safe and economical way to eat your 5-10 servings a day, and the best varieties can be entered at the fair. Working on a craft can give you satisfaction that playing a video game never can and you can get a ribbon at the fair to boot! Sticking closer to home and learning to make it yourself is what our grandparents did to make ends meet during hard times. They were part of the fair community that needs to be reestablished.

Badger Mountain Residents... Chipper coming!

By Carol Cowling

As part of the grant South Douglas has with Bureau of Land Management, we are planning a chipping day on Badger Mountain early fall. But we need to know how many of you may be interested in participating. We do not have a specific day in mind yet –it depends on when the chipper can come and how many residents want help. Contact me if you have a pile of sagebrush or tree limbs you need to get rid of. Between the insects and dryness, this will be a fall project.

South Douglas website is finally live!

Not perfect yet, but the website is now functioning. You can see our agenda, 2016 minutes, weed book, programs we offer and history. We are continuing to add more pictures and information so keep watching.

One page we would like to add, or include on the home page, are pictures of farming, people, weather, or landscapes within South Douglas CD's boundaries. If you have some good pictures we could use, let me know. We can't pay, but we can give you credit for the photos.



www.SouthDouglasCD.org

So Long Dave Linville!!

Dave has been an appointed supervisor for South Douglas Conservation District. His expertise in all things agriculture and government programs has been invaluable on our board. Unfortunately for us he has taken a new job that involves

a lot of travel and he can no longer be a supervisor on our board. He will remain as an associate supervisor and will attend meetings when he can.

We wish him luck in his new career!!

VSP Update

By Wendy Neet

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is an alternative approach to the Growth Management Act for counties to use in order to protect critical areas, instead of enacting further regulation on agricultural lands. VSP allows the county to work with local stakeholders to develop voluntary, site-specific stewardship plans. One of the benefits of the VSP planning process is that it's a local, grassroots planning effort. It also integrates programs that already exist in the county, such as the Multiple Species General Conservation Plan (MSGCP).

How does this affect you? Douglas County residents will have a one time "opt in" into VSP. This will allow you to continue to operate as usual as an alternative to traditional approaches to critical areas protection. Traditional approaches to the Growth Management Act can include:

permits, fees, and potential removal of land from production. VSP allows Douglas County to continue to have a viable agriculture community while still being protective of important critical areas.

If you are interested in joining our work group to develop the VSP work plan, or would like to learn more about VSP, please stop by the Foster Creek Conservation District office on the third floor (east end) of the Douglas County Courthouse in Waterville. The District is planning a series of public meetings to discuss how the VSP affects you, the first planned for mid-July. Input from farmers, ranchers and those affected by the GMA is critical for the success of this approach.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list as an interested party, or if you have any questions about VSP please contact Wendy Neet at (509) 423-5990, or email wneet@fostercreekcd.org.



By Carol Cowling

Vets on the Farm is a relatively new program in Washington State. Veterans transitioning back to civilian life and careers can face challenges. This program can provide veterans in our community an opportunity to combine their military

service and skills with an education in conservation which can lead to farming or agriculture based employment.

Spokane Conservation District is in its second year of the program. They partner with WSU Extension and their community college to provide the needed skills for farming. Local farms and other ag based industries act as mentors and the veterans are interns learning on the job. Areas of concentration will include small scale production agriculture, livestock management, equipment maintenance, custom farm work, etc. In Douglas County it could be in an orchard, wheat field, cattle ranch or any agriculture based business.

Watching the "Ground Operation: Battlegrounds to Farmfields" movie was inspiring. Veterans that wanted to work in sustainable agriculture to provide food for not only their family but also for profit talked about their struggles and experiences to begin farming. As older farmers

retire and their kids move to the city, we are going to need more farmers and agriculture based businesses to provide us with the food we need.

Conservation Districts across Washington State are involved in agriculture. They know the farmers already farming. Several districts are planning on starting the program. Washington Conservation Commission, where we get most of our funding, is studying the possibility of providing funding for administrative time. A statewide program is being developed as a non-profit organization that will accept tax deductible donations going directly to the program.

Starting the program will be the challenge. Are you a veteran? Are you interested in agriculture as a career? Would you be willing to mentor a veteran beginning a career in ag? Please give me a call if you have an interest in participating. We are just beginning in Douglas County.



West Nile Virus

By Carol Cowling

Don't forget to vaccinate your horses for West Nile Virus. It was found in a horse in Northern Douglas County last year. West Nile is carried by mosquitos that have feeding on birds that carry the virus. Crows, jays, ravens, magpies and raptors, such as hawks and owls, tend to become sick and die. While the Department of Health no longer tests the birds for the virus, if you find a dead bird, dispose of the bird safely – using gloves or an inverted plastic bag to pick it up and throw in your outside garbage can.

Humans can get West Nile, but the risk is low. About 1 in 5 show any symptoms, and of those only 1 in 150 have severe symptoms. Dogs and cats can also be infected, but again, it is rare. While many horses will not show indicators, one out of three infected will die.

While there is a vaccine for your horse, there isn't one for you. Regardless of the threat, avoid mosquito bites:

- **Stay indoors at dawn and dusk, when the mosquitos are most active. When you do go out, wear a long sleeve shirt, long pants and a hat if you are going where you know you are likely to be bitten. Use a mosquito repellent.**
- **Outdoors, empty anything that holds standing water – old tires, buckets or plastic covers.**
- **Change the water in your dog dish, birdbaths and troughs twice a week.**
- **Recycle unused containers, such as bottles, cans or buckets, that could hold water.**
- **Fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers. Not only will this dry up areas that mosquiteos like, but will conserve water.**



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Please contact Carol Cowling, if you would like to be added to our mailing list.

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INSIDE...
Direct Seed Program
SDCD Website up and running
West Nile Virus

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