

Conservation Expo Helps Make 'One Thing Perfectly Clear'

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CHURCHTOWN (Lancaster Co.) — Not all things in life are free, but this year's Lancaster County Conservation Expo could make you think differently.

The Expo will offer a free water test for nitrates to those who attend — among many other things to promote soil stewardship and to celebrate the heritage of farming.

The fourth annual Expo, held in conjunction with the Shirktown Threshing Festival at the Bob Shirk Farm in Churchtown, is scheduled Saturday, Aug. 2, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

According to Kevin Seibert, district conservationist and chairman of the Expo, those who attend the free outing at Bob Shirk's farm can bring along a small sample of tap water. Seibert suggests that you allow the tap to run for a minute, then collect a sample of the water in a small, clean baby food jar.

Bring the jar to the Expo. A nitrogen quick test will provide an indication of whether the water is low, medium, or high in nitrate levels — and whether more complete testing of the water source is necessary.

Clean water is a focus of the Expo. The district's annual report, titled "Let's Make One Thing Perfectly Clear," indicates that "Lancaster County owes its economic strength, splendid landscape, rich history, and bountiful food to a thin rich layer of topsoil, adequate rainfall, and ordinary people who are wise stewards of these natural resources in our county."

Travis Martin, of the Lancaster County Conservation District, explained that in the winter edition of the district newsletter, *The Conservation Crier*, a survey was offered to readers to help determine their environmental concerns. There were 100 responses to the survey. The number one concern voiced by readers of the newsletter was water quality.

Groundwater supplies and well water have a clear, distinct relationship to how well the topsoil is managed and what practices are used to maintain it.

"Everyone is a stakeholder in water quality," said Martin. "Our county's going through a transition, and everyone has a responsibility for water quality."

Not only high production farmers, but other businesses as well as homeowners involved in lawn care, people with septic systems, and many other groups and individuals

are responsible for helping to maintain the county's water quality. In the survey, other concerns high on the list included soil erosion and farmland conservation.

Soil erosion can be directly linked to deteriorating water quality. Phosphorous locked up in soil that has eroded helps form algae blooms, taking oxygen out of the water, making water less habitable for waterlife.

Martin said the emphasis of the Expo is to show that we all live in the watersheds outlined on the map. Those who have responsibility for the land should be aware of what watershed they live in — and how to maintain that watershed.

Last year about 500 landowners attended the Expo at the Threshing Festival. Old-time threshing equipment, including steam and diesel, will again be on display. For farmers, events include rotational grazing, farm equipment exhibits from steam to diesel, nutrient management law information, and conservation practices for the farm.

For sports enthusiasts, there will be various group displays featuring present and past accomplishments in the conservation of the county's natural resources, in addition to stream and wildlife habitat improvements and a stream study.

For homeowners, there will be landscaping, natural lawn care, and water testing demonstrations.

For children, there will be games, a stream study, and farm safety information.

One of the highlights of the Expo is information on septic system maintenance. According to Seibert, many people "don't know the proper way to install and maintain septic systems," he said. "They simply don't know how."

The Expo will help to change all that.

The Threshing Festival itself features plenty of good local food and charm. The Expo will be held rain or shine. Admission and parking are free.

The Expo, Martin explained, is a "travelling" type of event, which will be held in different locations in the county in following years. This is the fourth annual festival and the second time it is scheduled for the Threshing Festival.

Directions: from Churchtown on Rt. 23, take Bootjack Road south, turn left onto Little Hill Rd. After one mile, turn right onto Shirktown Road. The Expo is 1/2 mile on the left.



Participants of the Expo and Threshers Festival watch as long-ago farm machinery is demonstrated.



Chotty Sprengle, Lancaster Conservation District, background at right, provides information to families at last year's Conservation Expo.



Here is a future farmer threshing the wheat with a flayer which has now been replaced with modern-day harvesters at the Shirktown Threshers Festival.

Giving Soil A Good Name

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Bruce R. James, a professor of soil chemistry at the University of Maryland, is a man with a mission.

Dr. James wants the world to elevate soil to equal partnership with air and water in the triad of earth systems that have influenced our understanding of ecology, culture, religion, agriculture and the arts throughout history.

He takes great issue with grammar textbook authors and other writers who equate soil with words like "besmirch," "dirty" and "smudge."

By linking the various soil disciplines more closely with the aquatic and atmospheric sciences, he feels strongly that the three major earth systems (water, air and land) could help us to understand ecosystems more clearly and our relationships to them.

To further these concepts,

James last year founded the International Center for Soil and Society, with encouragement from the International Society of Soil Science, based in Vienna, Austria.

From July 5-7, the center was to have its inaugural meeting with high hopes that it will become an annual worldwide event. Up to 50 persons from nine countries were expected to attend.

During the three-day meeting, speakers from a wide range of backgrounds were to guide participants toward the goal of developing new thinking, understanding and appreciation for the role of soil in the earth's ecosystem.

For more information, contact Dr. James by phone at (301) 405-1345, by fax at (301) 314-9041 or by e-mail at bj5@umail.umd.edu.

Use Of Seed Treatment

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There is some concern that the bacteria could be affected by the use of fungicides with an inoculant. But the plants still benefit from the bacteria.

Making use of seed treatments really depends on how frequently soybeans are grown on the land, and many factors can affect the viability of material.

To apply the inoculant, many growers simply use a garbage can or some other container, pour the seed in, and mix the material like a

batch of cookies. The seed should be planted right away. Waiting too long to finally get the seeds in the ground with proper planting depth and good seed-to-soil contact could affect the efficiency of the inoculants.

Inoculants, which are a combination of bacteria and a material to make them adhere to the seed, work on increasing the amount and mass of the nodules. The nodules are critical in nitrogen fixation.

Different varieties of soybeans will also respond in different ways to inoculant use. More work at Penn State is under way to study those differences and other factors in inoculant use.

And in the end, the weather plays a vital role in the quality of stand and yield results. At harvest, yield information will be gathered at the Bitler test plots to compare how effective the inoculant treatments were.