

'Agroecology' Day Looks Deep Into Dirt

Ida's Notebook

by
Ida Risser



My husband got me away from writing articles, typing Sale Reports, and freezing and canning fruit and vegetables to go along with him to Tioga County. We were just a few miles from the New York state line and five miles from a hard-top road. The roads and housing are certainly very different from Lancaster County.

He bought a camper and put it on ground that our children bought. It is a completely wooded area that they have cut a driveway into. It was two days of hard work.

The three days were similar to camping as there is no electricity, running water, or heat. We used a battery for light and we had sleeping bags. He brought his boat along and so of course, we went fishing each day.

The first evening we stopped at Hills Creek Lake. Here we only caught seaweed. Some children nearby caught a few small

fish.

The next morning we drove to Cowanesque Lake. Here, for the first time, we were required to pay to launch our boat. As my husband has been carrying a Golden Age Passport from Yellowstone Park in his wallet for years, we were entitled to a 50 percent discount. Here we only caught a few small fish.

The next day we tried Hammond Lake which is operated by the Baltimore District. I was amazed that they controlled the use of water so far from Maryland. It was quite foggy early in the morning and only a few boats were on the lake with us. No one seemed to be catching fish but at least we had our lunch with us, and so we fed ourselves if we could not feed the fish.

We came home to buckets of tomatoes and big cucumbers. But, I was glad to be back to familiar surroundings.

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — What's Penn State's agronomy department doing to protect water quality, develop alternative fuels, provide food for earth's 6 billion people, and more?

High school classes and the public can find out at the College of Agricultural Sciences' "AgroEcology Day," Friday, Sept. 29, at Penn State's Agronomy Farm.

"Visitors can see what soil scientists and agronomists are doing to improve our quality of life and talk with the scientists who conduct the research," said Steve Fales, head of agronomy.

High school class tours run from 10 a.m. through noon. Students can eat lunch with the presenters (bring a bag lunch), then have free time to explore. Tours for the public begin at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Each tour lasts about two hours and includes nine presentations:

- "Bringing 'Dead Soil' Back to Life." Learn how scientists removed hazardous pollutants from soils at the Drake Chemical site in Lock Haven, then restored the "dead soil" so plants could thrive.

- "Soil: It's a Jungle in There!" Underground, billions of soil microbes are constantly at work, feeding and protecting plants. Learn about creatures found in backyard soils.

- "Crop Insects: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly." Minimizing the harmful effects of "bad" insects without hurting "good" ones helps the environment and boosts crop production.

Learn how farmers can selectively target harmful insects.

- "Living Mulch." "Living mulch" is a low-growing crop grown in the same field as a tall crop. Living mulch helps soils retain water and significantly reduces runoff, soil erosion and pesticide loss from sloped fields. Usually a legume, living mulch also converts nitrogen from the air into fertilizer, helping to feed the crop.

- "Keeping Fertilizer Where It Belongs — Out of Our Water." Nitrates from fertilizers can pollute drinking water and damage fish habitats. Learn how scientists went underground to examine the water under various crop rotations and fertilization and tillage treatments.

- "Native Grasses for Energy, Clean Water and Feed." Native grasses that once sustained vast herds of bison on the prairies may now sustain U.S. agriculture well into the future. Learn how these grasses can be used to make energy, protect water, feed cattle and increase wildlife diversity.

- "White Mold: Scourge of Farm Fields and Gardens." Learn what scientists are doing to reduce white mold, a soybean disease that also can turn vegetable gardens into a mushy mess.

- "Crop Rotations Benefit Everyone." Rotating crops from field to field each year helps dairy farmers keep weeds in check, use less fertilizer, cut down on pests and diseases, and increase soil quality. Hear about the long-term benefits of crop rotations that have been in place since 1969.

- "Frankenfoods." Biotechnology and Genetically Modified Organisms." In

the future, foods will last longer, taste better, and be more nutritious. Learn how scientists are improving crops through biotechnology without creating " Frankenfoods."

Parking and admission for AgroEcology Day are free. For more information, call Steve Fales at (814) 865-6541 or visit the World Wide Web at www.agronomy.psu.edu/AgEcoDay.html.

High school teachers can reserve space for their classes by calling Kate Butler at (814) 865-2119.

The event will be held at Penn State's Agronomy Farm, Gate B, The Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center, Rockspring, nine miles southwest of State College on Rt. 45.



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