



**ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
PARTNER ON SOUTHERN ILLINOIS COVER CROP FIELD DAY**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — In-person field days have returned this spring with the 2021 Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program Field Day lineup recently debuting in Jefferson and Franklin counties.

Cover crops and soil health strategies were top of mind for farmers attending the first spring field day event, hosted in partnership with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). The event location, Wayne Fitzgerald State Recreation Area, Whittington, is home to a cover crop pilot program.

“Cover crop interest is growing in Illinois and has been for some time,” said Leon McClerren, president, Franklin County Farm Bureau. “Our farmers are interested in learning how to be better stewards of our soil and natural resources. Here in southern Illinois our soils are fragile, and it’s our priority to implement strategies that help maintain the soil profile for future generations.”

The event provided an opportunity to discuss cover crop strategies and water infiltration benefits. After seven years of cover crops, Mike Kash of Belle Rive has seen the percentage of organic matter on his fields increase. To add nitrogen, Kash plants a 13-way mix of cow peas, sunn hemp, cahaba vetch, yellow sweet clover, crimson clover, sorghum sudan grass, millet, oats, rapeseed, turnips, sunflowers, buckwheat and phacella.

Kash is piloting a new cover crop program at Wayne Fitzgerald State Recreation Area on farm acres he leases from IDNR.

“One of the great things about doing this in our state parks is it becomes a demonstration site for all the agriculture groups,” said Bob Caveny, manager of Farm Programs, Office of Land Management, IDNR. “It’s also open to the public, so people can come look at the crops and see how regenerative agriculture can be incorporated into their own system.”

Funded with an IFB Nutrient Stewardship grant, the field day included presentations by Mike Kash; Lauren Lurkins, IFB director of environmental policy; Stacy Zuber, soil health specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Ted Liefer, site superintendent at Wayne Fitzgerald State Recreation Area; Mike Chandler, IDNR ag/wildlife and habitat lease management program manager; Bob Caveny, IDNR farm programs manager; and Talon Becker, University of Illinois Extension commercial agriculture educator.

Twenty-one projects are currently part of a collaborative effort under the IFB Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program, which supports the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs). Primary goals for the NLRs include reducing nitrate-nitrogen losses by 15 percent and reducing total phosphorus losses by 25 percent by the year 2025.

The 2021 IFB Nutrient Stewardship Field Day series also includes spring cover crop events hosted by Sangamon County and Richland and Lawrence counties. Summer field days will kick off in June and continue through August across the state.

IDNR’s cover crop pilot is part of a USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program project. USDA awarded more than \$8 million to the Illinois Working Lands, Water and Wildlife Conservation Partnership to protect working farmland, improve water quality and increase and enhance wildlife habitat. IDNR and an alliance of partner organizations are planning and coordinating the projects. Illinois partners have pledged more than \$11.2 million in matching funds, including more than \$1.7 million in financial and technical assistance from IDNR. Part of IDNR’s work is to implement soil health practices on IDNR-owned and managed lands leased for ag production.

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About Illinois Farm Bureau:

The Illinois Farm Bureau is a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation, a national organization of farmers and ranchers. Founded in 1916, IFB is a non-profit, membership organization directed by farmers who join through their county Farm Bureau. IFB has a total membership of more than 386,291 and a voting membership of 79,159. IFB represents three out of four Illinois farmers.

About the Illinois Department of Natural Resources:

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is committed to managing, conserving and protecting Illinois’ natural, recreational and cultural resources, furthering the public’s understanding and appreciation of those resources and promoting the education, science and public safety of Illinois’ natural resources.