

DAVIDSON

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Davidson County Agriculture Center - 301 East Center Street
Lexington, NC 27292
Telephone: (336) 242-2075

Published quarterly to provide information to the land users.

CONSERVATION

Update

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Davidson SWCD Welcomes a New Supervisor

Kevin S. Briggs of Thomasville was elected as a District Supervisor in the November Election. His term begins December 5, 2016. Mr. Briggs is a project manager with Bolder Outreach Solutions and served one term from 2010-2014 with Forsyth SWCD prior to moving to Davidson County.

High Rock FFA Team Competes at National FFA Convention



Members of High Rock FFA recently represented North Carolina in the Environmental and Natural Resources Career Development Event at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Team composed of Alicia Greer, Joey Mitchell, Richard Tysinger, Gracie Ward, and team advisor Lisa Loflin finished in 7th Place from a field of 41 teams and received a Gold Emblem. The Team qualified for the National Competition by finishing as the highest scoring FFA Team at the North Carolina Envirothon last April.

Team members also competed against 160 students for individual awards. Joey Mitchell and Gracie Ward received Gold emblems, Richard Tysinger received a Silver emblem, and Alicia Greer received a Bronze emblem.

The National FFA Environmental and Natural Resources Career Development Event is a competitive event that allows students to apply classroom knowledge to real-life situations. The Competition includes a written exam, identification of wildlife and environmental equipment, evaluating a soil profile, using Geographic Positioning Systems, conducting an environmental analysis, planning for waste management, interpreting and applying soil test results, and developing solutions for a scenario dealing with an environmental or natural resources problem and presenting those solutions in a persuasive manner to a panel of judges.

The Team received financial support from the Davidson County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, Carolina Farm Credit, and the Davidson SWCD Board of Supervisors.

How Healthy is Your Soil?

Soil health has become a topic generating much interest from farmers, gardeners, commercial horticulturalists, and others across the United States. Healthy soil produces greater yields, maximizes profits, and provides many environmental benefits that reach far beyond the field. Maintaining or improving soil health is important and possible for anyone who uses the soil. Healthy soil performs the following five essential tasks that help to sustain life on Earth.



1. It regulates water by allowing for infiltration and reducing runoff.
2. It sustains plant and animal life.
3. It filters and buffers potential pollutants.
4. It cycles nutrients that are essential for life.
5. It provides physical stability and support that allows for plant growth and human structures.

So, how can I determine how healthy my soil is? Grab a shovel, head to the field, garden, or lawn and look for the following signs of a healthy soil. A shovelful of healthy soil should have ten or more earthworms in the top foot and much evidence of their activity. The topsoil should be significantly darker than the subsoil with lots of roots and plant residue. You should be able to easily push a wire flag to a depth of 8 inches or more. The soil should be crumbly and feel spongy as you walk on it. There should be no evidence of erosion. Water should infiltrate easily into the soil and the soil should remain moist for a long period without ponding. When seeds are planted, they should sprout uniformly and the plants should look healthy and grow well.

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There are also several laboratories that can perform a quantitative soil health analysis. Cornell University and Woods End Laboratories are two of the leading providers of tests that can help you track the health of your soil. Cost for these test start at approximately \$50 and go up from there depending on what you test for. There is still debate on which tests provide the most valuable information.

Beginning a program to improve your soil health starts by making sure that the soil has the proper pH and nutrient levels for the plants you grow. This can easily be accomplished by having soil samples analyzed by the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. NCDA's soil testing is available free of charge from April through Thanksgiving. From Thanksgiving through the end of March there is a charge of \$4.00 per sample. This analysis allows you to apply the necessary amounts of nutrients and to adjust the pH to meet the needs of the plants you grow.

What can you do if you find your soil needs additional help? You can greatly improve the health of your soil by following these four principles.

- 1. Disturb the soil as little as possible.** Minimizing tillage and compaction (machinery traffic or animal traffic) provides an environment that allows the microscopic organisms that improve soil health to thrive.
- 2. Use diverse plants to support a diverse soil ecosystem.** A diverse mix of plants provides the diverse carbohydrates that are needed to support a healthy soil ecosystem. Crop rotations and multi-species cover crops are the keys.
- 3. Keep a living root growing throughout the year.** Living roots provide the easiest source of food for the microbes that are necessary to maintain a healthy soil. Crop rotations and the use of cover crops can provide the needed boost.
- 4. Keep the soil covered as much as possible.** This helps to conserve the moisture that is necessary for microbe survival, reduces the impact of raindrops, suppresses weed growth, and allows for nutrient recycling. Managing crop residue and planting crops to add biomass help to meet this objective.

The District is working to promote these activities through cost-sharing programs and a multi-species cover crop demonstration plot that is being conducted on Piney Grove Farm on Sink Road. A workshop and field day covering multi-species cover crops and soil health will be held on March 29, 2017.

Call of stop by the District Office for more information. You can also learn more by visiting the Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Health Website at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health/>

~ Reminders ~

All programs and services provided by the Davidson Soil and Water Conservation District are available to you at no cost.

Test your soil prior to planting. Come by our office to pick up a free soil test kit.

Pick up an application in our office to become a member of the Voluntary Agriculture District.

For more information about any of the above, call our office at 336-242-2075

Thank you for your interest in soil, water, and natural resource conservation.

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