



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Field Day 2022: MWRD and partners convene in Fulton County to advance nutrient loss reduction studies

Water and soil experts at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) melded their talents with downstate farmers and agricultural researchers to unveil new measures being assessed on how to best capture and recycle nutrients to protect downstream water quality at the Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB)/MWRD Collaborative annual Field Day in Fulton County, Illinois.

The MWRD established a program at its Fulton County test site near Cuba, Ill. to foster collaboration with agricultural producers and academic researchers to test and showcase management practices to reduce nutrient runoff from farm fields.

“Regardless of where you live in Illinois, we are all connected by our waterways” said MWRD Commissioner Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda. “Through this partnership, we can learn best practices for nutrient loss reduction strategies that improve water quality here in Illinois and as far away as the Gulf of Mexico.”

About 60 people attended the MWRD’s annual Field Day including IFB, Cook County Farm Bureau, Fulton County Farm Bureau, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Agriculture, and the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council. MWRD staff and leadership, including Commissioner Corral Sepúlveda and MWRD Commissioner Chakena D. Perry, welcomed guests before the tour of research and demonstration sites led by researchers from the University of Illinois in collaboration with MWRD’s scientists.

“As we make efforts to remove and recover nutrients from the wastewater treatment process and invest in green infrastructure to capture more stormwater runoff, we are encouraged by the innovative approaches of our agricultural partners to capture nutrients on farm fields,” said MWRD Commissioner Perry. “The partnership between the MWRD, Illinois Farm Bureau, research institutions, and universities gives us a better understanding



MWRD Commissioner Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda speaks to scientists, farmers and clean water experts gathered near Cuba, Illinois for Field Day to share best research practices in capturing and recycling nutrients to better improve agricultural production while also protecting the nation’s water quality.

of the strategies that are most effective and practical in addressing nutrient loss reduction.”

University of Illinois professors and research scientists presented on approaches to reduce phosphorus losses, soil erosion through practices such as slow-release fertilizer captured from municipal wastewater treatment, a bioreactor and biochar-sorption system to capture nutrients, and water-lifting devices for combining drainage and subirrigation systems to keep nutrients in the field.

The MWRD has been proactive in addressing nutrient reduction to improve local water quality and contribute to goals of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs) to reduce nutrient discharge to the Mississippi River, committing to meet stringent phosphorus discharge limits at its water reclamation plants (WRPs). Phosphorus enters the WRPs in the raw sewage and originates from several sources including human waste, animal waste, fertilizers, detergents, and cleaning agents. Phosphorus also enters downstream waterways from fertilizers applied to farm fields that can run off following rain events. *(continued)*

Field Day 2022: MWRD and partners convene in Fulton County, *cont.*



Scenes from Field Day 2022 at Fulton County, which has become an ideal site to develop and test best management practices to reduce nutrient discharge from farmlands.

“Illinois Farm Bureau has committed nearly \$2.4 million to nutrient stewardship efforts, including the Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program,” said Raelynn Parmely, Environmental Program Manager, IFB. “The Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program is a cornerstone of our NLRs work here at Illinois Farm Bureau. The program includes a wide range of projects, such as the field day in Fulton County. We are proud of the seven-year track record showing efforts in over 120 projects with more than 70 Illinois counties.”

The MWRD voluntarily established a program at its Fulton County test site to foster collaboration with the agricultural sector to develop and expedite nutrient reduction practices.

This unconventional collaboration was borne out of the USEPA’s goals to reduce the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico, restore and protect local and regional wa-

ter quality in the Mississippi River basin, and improve land management throughout these communities. The 13,500-acre property is located in between Canton and Cuba, Illinois, about 190 miles southwest of Chicago and 40 miles southwest of Peoria. It was originally purchased in 1970 to restore strip-mined land, and approximately 4,000 acres were converted to productive farmland. Known as the “Prairie Plan,” the restoration effort was honored by the American Society of Civil Engineers as the outstanding engineering achievement of the year in 1974.

“We have come a long way in the past 50 years with regards to our work to develop nutrient reduction practices,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “We have been happy to partner on this effort over the years, and based on the progress that has been made, the future looks bright.”

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.