



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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For immediate release

July 2, 2018

Field Day highlights MWRD agricultural work in nutrient reduction



Dr. Richard Cooke of the University of Illinois College of Agricultural Consumer and Environmental Sciences gives a presentation on woodchip bioreactor installation.



Visitors sit on haystacks atop trailers as they rode through the MWRD's test site in Fulton County to see best practices in managing nutrients.

Central Illinois farmers toured the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago's (MWRD) demonstration site in Cuba, Illinois, where new practices are being examined to reduce nutrients from running off into waterways.

The agricultural professionals teamed up with water experts from the MWRD as part of the annual Field Day event, where they learned different techniques that can increase crop yields while reducing nutrient runoff that can plague water quality downstream.

"Our work with the Fulton County Farm Bureau and area farmers will prove to be a beneficial partnership, one that will be extremely important in supporting our effort to gather and disseminate research to the agricultural community," said MWRD Board of Commissioners President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Water quality is not just the responsibility of area farmers or municipalities; it's a burden we all need to shoulder and projects like this one help to ensure we're working together and using resources to do just that."

The MWRD partnered with the Illinois Farm Bureau, the Fulton County Farm Bureau and the University of Illinois College of Agricultural Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) to provide several test demonstration sites that address nutrient reduction strategies. These best management practices in nutrient reduction will help clean water downstream thanks in part to the recovery of phosphorus and nitrogen.

Recovering these nutrients is critical because when entering waterways nutrient runoff can lead to hypoxic conditions as far away as the Gulf of Mexico, where algal blooms threaten aquatic life. Test sites at Field Day included woodchip bioreactors, drainage water management and runoff reuse systems, vegetative buffer strips, and cover crop interseeding.

"This project began as part of a grant from the Illinois Farm Bureau to highlight nutrient loss reduction research and practices and grew thanks to research funds from the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council," said William Carlberg, *(continued)*

Field Day highlights MWRD agricultural work in nutrient reduction *(continued)*



MWRD scientists stand in a farm field in Fulton County.

president, Fulton County Farm Bureau. “Today, it’s a full-fledged, mutually beneficial partnership with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District that we’re happy to continue.”

Earlier this year, the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council (NREC) awarded a \$350,000 grant to research partners at the University of Illinois and the MWRD to address nutrient loss reduction strategies and protect regional and national water quality. The four-year study will evaluate drainage water recycling as an effective management practice to reduce nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from escaping to local waterways while optimizing crop yield at reduced fertilizer application rates. Fertilizer application on cropland is a major source of nutrients that is impairing the quality of water downstream once it runs off the surface or drains off the land.



“By using biosolids to restore strip-mined lands at the Prairie Plan site in Fulton County, MWRD demonstrated creativity and leadership in dealing with past environmental challenges,” said MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore. “The nutrient loss reduction practices that are being tested and refined at the Prairie Plan site will give farmers the tools they need to overcome the environmental challenges of today.”

“It’s a pleasure to continue working with a group like the MWRD,” said Lauren Lurkins, director, Natural and Environmental Resources, Illinois Farm Bureau. “They’ve been involved in the fight to reduce nutrient losses and improve water quality from the very beginning, and their willingness to continue funding research and working with farmers and the Illinois Farm Bureau proves how committed they are – how committed we all are – to preserving our natural resources for the generations to come.”

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrld.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for used water treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.