



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Down on the farm for Field Day: How the MWRD, Illinois Farm Bureau and partners are collaborating to protect water



Participants at the MWRD's annual Field Day in Fulton County braved storms and humidity and boarded hayrides to visit sites with soil scientists to learn best practices reducing nutrient loss on farm fields.

Despite humidity, heavy central Illinois rains and a pandemic, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and partners returned to Fulton County, Illinois for an in-person Field Day to demonstrate innovative practices that farmers can take to reduce nutrient loss on farm fields.

As part of the annual event, agricultural professionals team up with water experts and soil scientists from the MWRD and partners from the Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Sustainable Technology Center and Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council (NREC) to showcase a variety of techniques that can increase crop yields while reducing nutrient runoff that can plague downstream water quality. About 50 farmers and other participants boarded hayrides through the MWRD site in Fulton County to view several demonstrations that included cover crop inter-seeding, denitrifying bioreactor improvements, drainage water management and multipurpose riparian grass buffers.

"Just as water flows across streets and sidewalks and funnels through pipes and sewers, water can also run off farm



The MWRD was represented by aides to MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore and staff from the Maintenance and Operations and Monitoring and Research Departments.

fields into area waterways and move downstream with nutrients that come with it," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "That is why we are proud to host our annual Field Day and invest in studying improved nutrient loss reduction strategies."

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. Years later it became the ideal site to develop and test best management practices to reduce non-point source nutrients.

"The Fulton County research site has evolved in a sweet spot for rural-urban collaboration," said Illinois Farm Bureau Director of Environmental Policy Lauren Lurkins. "This land reclamation project site is unique because its focal point is showing how to use the solids *(continued)*

Down on the farm for Field Day, *cont.*



MWRD Environmental Soil Scientist Essam El-Naggar presents a study on grass buffer strips and how it can be used to serve as an interceptor of nutrients from runoff and leachates. The MWRD collects and analyzes samples of water that passes through the 60-ft grass buffer strip.



processed from treating wastewater to create fertile soil – a win-win for everyone in the Chicagoland area. It’s been an expanding, effective partnership and we hope to see the success of these best management practices spread beyond Illinois borders.”

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 water quality in the Mississippi River basin, and improve land management throughout these communities. Based on these goals, the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs) was established in 2015 to reduce total phosphorus (25 percent) and total nitrogen (15 percent) loads by 2025 with the long-term goal of a 45-percent reduction of the loss of these nutrients to the Mississippi River.

To tackle these Illinois NLRs goals, point sources like the MWRD, which transformed an average of 1.24 billion gallons of wastewater each day in 2020 and discharged it as clean water into area waterways, joined forces with non-point sources representing the agricultural industry. In addition to recovering clean water, the MWRD recovers nutrients, like phosphorus and nitrogen, each day and converts it into products like fertilizer and compost for beneficial reuse.

“From farm fields to Chicago area water reclamation plants, we are all working together to achieve improved water quality for our region, nation and international waters,” said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan.



Scene from MWRD Field Day 2021 held in Fulton County between Cuba and Canton, Illinois in the shadows of the iconic Spoon River.

“We are excited to display these innovative techniques at our Fulton County Field Day and explore ways we can protect the planet.”

Besides representatives from the Illinois Farm Bureau and the MWRD, participants came from the Cook County Farm Bureau, Fulton County Farm Bureau, Illinois Department of Agriculture, University of Illinois, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, in addition to many Illinois farmers, agriculture experts and water quality protectors from around the state.

To learn more about the Fulton County Farm Bureau Nutrient Stewardship Field Day and watch video content to hear more about the techniques introduced, visit <http://www.ilfb.org/Fulton>.

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.