



CONSERVATION TODAY

Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District & USDA

Summer 2025



Free Private Well Testing Available For Residents Of Sibley And Nicollet Counties!

Sibley & Nicollet Soil and Water Conservation Districts have received funding from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Clean Water Fund to address water quality concerns in private wells. This new program provides residents of Sibley and Nicollet counties who have a private well that is primarily used for drinking water with free well testing. A cost share program for water treatment devices is also available for residents with elevated test results who meet certain financial criteria requirements.

Each well testing kit screens for five key contaminants: nitrate-nitrogen, arsenic, manganese, lead & coliform bacteria. These tests cover a wide range of health risks—from natural mineral levels (like manganese and arsenic) to bacterial contamination. The tests will then be analyzed by MVTL, Inc. in New Ulm, ensuring accurate results.

Private wells aren't regulated by public health departments, so safe water isn't guaranteed, you *must* test it yourself. Certain contaminants, like nitrates or coliform bacteria, may not be visible, smelled or tasted, but can have serious health effects, especially for infants, pregnant women, or immunocompromised individuals.

Request a test kit by contacting the Sibley SWCD office or the Nicollet SWCD office. Test kits are available for pick up and can be self-delivered to MVTL in New Ulm. Residents can also sign up to be included in future testing events, at which SWCD staff can facilitate delivery of the test to the lab.

If your well test results show elevated levels of any of the parameters, you may also be eligible for cost share on a well water treatment system. Cost share is available to those who meet certain income requirements or financial need criteria. More information about cost share can be found on the Sibley SWCD Website: <https://www.sibleyswcd.org/safedrinkingwaterprogram>.

Protect your health!

Test your well water for:



Testing is even more important if young children drink the water.



Sibley SWCD

Joel Wurscher,
District Manager

Jeremy Buckentin,
District Technician

Jack Bushman,
Water Resources
Coordinator

Tara O'Brien,
Conservation Technician

Hayley Thies
Operations Specialist

SWCD Board

Kathleen Thies - District 1

Paul Wiemann - District 2

Loren Evenson - District 3

Wayne Grams - District 4

Robert Nielsen - District 5

Board Meetings

Second Tuesday of
each Month
4 p.m.,

USDA Conference Room



USDA - NRCS

Jacob Stich,
Team Lead

Chris Engh,
District Conservationist

Nicole Baumann,
Agronomist

Office Hours

Monday - Friday
8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.



The Effects Of Purple Loosestrife On Wetlands

Purple loosestrife is a perennial herb that grows two to six feet tall and five feet in diameter. It grows in clumps as it matures, with whorled leaves and heart-shaped bases. A native to Eurasia, purple loosestrife was first introduced to the United States in the 1800s. Used as a decorative plant for decades, it has found its way into wetlands, negatively impacting native plants. Most states have made it illegal to sell, and in Minnesota, it is considered a prohibited noxious weed and a prohibited invasive species by the Minnesota Department of Ag. Purple loosestrife blooms from July through September, eventually dispersing small seeds in their place. The seeds are then transferred from water, wind, wildlife, and human activity, finding their way into our wetlands and other bodies of water. Purple loosestrife has now become one of the most destructive invasive species in North America. Due to its aggressive and invasive nature, purple loosestrife displaces native plants, leaving native vegetation competing for light, space, nutrients, and reducing plant diversity. Wildlife habitat is affected because purple loosestrife eliminates shelter, food sources, and nesting sites for native wildlife. Physical structures are altered, overwhelming the ability to store and filter water in wetlands, changing water quality, and increasing flooding. Purple loosestrife decomposes faster



than native species, disrupting the ecosystem and allowing nutrients to be released earlier in the season. Invasive species such as purple loosestrife can threaten our natural resources. Possessing, importing, purchasing, transporting, or introducing these species without a permit is considered unlawful. If you suspect the presence of purple loosestrife or any invasive species in your area, you can contact your local invasive species specialist at the Department of Natural Resources. For the southern region, you can contact Eric Katzenmeyer in Hutchinson at 320-753-0334.

JOIN US at the COUNTY FAIRS!

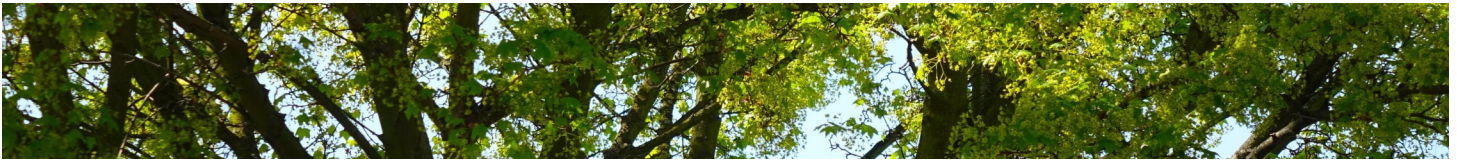
Come visit us and check out our booth for the
Lower Minnesota River West Watershed



SIBLEY COUNTY
July 30th -
August 3rd

NICOLLET COUNTY
August
6th - 10th

MCLEOD COUNTY
August
14th - 17th



Bringing Conservation To Your Community

This spring, the Sibley Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) had an amazing opportunity to share conservation education with students at Sibley East Elementary School. Over 200 students met with Sibley SWCD staff and Soil Scientist, Stuart Veith from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to discuss various conservation topics.

Third graders had the opportunity to learn about trees. They discussed the similarities between trees and people. They learned how to tell the age of a tree by counting the rings, what the different layers of rings are called, and what function they provide. Students also enjoyed learning about the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) by participating in a fun activity. Afterwards, third graders were given trees to take home and plant. The red oak and silver maple trees were generously donated by After Burner Auto Body and Towing, located in Arlington.

Fourth grade focused on watersheds. Sibley SWCD staff taught the students what a watershed consists of. Students were given the chance to learn about the different types of water pollution and how it occurs using a watershed model, called the Enviroscape. They also learned ways to prevent pollution by using best management practices (BMPs). Students played a water cycle game with staff, which taught them how the water cycle works.

Fifth grade learned about soil erosion. They got to do a hands-on soil experiment that demonstrated how soil erosion works and got to feel the difference between sand, silt, and clay. Staff brought a soil horizon model to show the different layers of soil. They also learned how soil affects our water using the watershed model.

Both fourth and fifth grade were lucky enough to have our guest, Soil Scientist, Stuart Veith, demonstrate how a tabletop rainfall simulator and a slake test work. We were extremely grateful to have Stuart's assistance in conservation education, which was greatly appreciated. Each fourth and fifth grader also received a packet of native wildflower seeds to take home and plant.



Sibley SWCD's Senior District Technician, Jeremy Buckentin, explains soil erosion during an experiment.



NRCS Soil Scientist, Stuart Veith, demonstrates the slake test to students.



Why Soil Matters More Than You Think

Soil is essential to life on Earth. Home to billions of organisms, including bacteria, fungi, insects, and earthworms, it is one of the most biodiverse habitats on Earth. It is the foundation for ecosystems, climate regulation, human health, and agriculture. Soil provides a basis for food production and security. About 95 percent of the food we eat relies on the soil. It cycles and stores nutrients and minerals, supporting plant growth, which is essential for crops and livestock. Soil can help regulate and filter water by removing contaminants and regulating flow to prevent flooding. It mitigates climate change by storing the second-largest amount of carbon after the ocean. The amount of carbon the soil stores is more than all terrestrial plants and the atmosphere combined. Carbon dioxide is captured and stored in the soil. Greenhouse gases are then released back into the atmosphere from degraded soils. Soil protects the environment by filtering out a surplus of heavy metals and nutrients, acting like a buffer before they reach groundwater or rivers.

Sadly, we are losing soil at a rate ten times faster than it is being created. It can take hundreds to thousands of years to form an inch of topsoil. Most soil loss results from wind and water erosion. However, soil degradation is being accelerated by human activity. Soil erosion is the displacement of the top layer of soil from its original location. Nutrient-rich topsoil is essential for growing crops. Erosion strips away the nutrients, which decreases soil fertility and, therefore, reduces agricultural yields. Erosion causes the soil to leach pesticides and fertilizers into our water, negatively impacting our habitats and ecosystems. Erosion can often cause pollutants and contaminants to enter rivers, lakes, and streams. This causes sediment to enter our waterways, degrading water quality and increasing the costs of water treatment. Clogged waterways increase pollution and harm aquatic life.

From organisms to humans, more than 50,000 species rely on healthy soil to survive. Soil impacts the food we eat and the water we drink. Soil matters because it is the key to our survival!



Soil erosion leading to a water feature in Sibley County.



BENEATH THE SURFACE

DIGGING DEEPER INTO SOIL HEALTH



When: Wednesday, August 20, 2025

Where: Lafayette Community Center
540 7th Street
Lafayette, MN 56054

Time: 9:00 am - 11:00am

Join Us!

Dig deeper into soil health with Soil Health Specialist Stephanie McLain and Soil Health Coordinator Rebekah Veldboom. We will discuss the logistics of cover crops and no-till/strip-till. Learn from two local producers about timing, cost efficiency, equipment, and services available.

Guest Speakers:

- ✓ Stephanie McLain, NRCS
- ✓ Rebekah Veldboom, South Central TSA
- ✓ Keith Hartmann, Local Producer
- ✓ Mike Anthony, Local Producer

For more information call 507-702-7077 or email tara.obrien@sibleyswcd.org



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Sibley County Service Center / Minnesota

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USDA TO DELIVER MORE THAN \$30 BILLION FOR DISASTER RECECOVERY ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS

USDA is fully committed to expediting remaining disaster assistance provided by the American Relief Act, 2025. On May 7, we launched our 2023/2024 Supplemental Disaster Assistance public landing page where the status of USDA disaster assistance and block grant rollout timeline can be tracked. The page is updated regularly and accessible through fsa.usda.gov.

The Act includes Supplemental Disaster Relief Program funding to provide assistance to producers for necessary expenses due to losses of revenue, quality or production of crops due to weather related events in 2023 and 2024. Producers with indemnified losses have a target sign-up start date of July 7, 2025. For uncovered losses (shallow losses), including producers without crop insurance, September 15, 2025, is the target date for sign-up to begin.

USDA REMINDS PRODUCERS TO COMPLETE CROP ACREAGE REPORTS FOR FALL-SEEDED CROPS

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers in Sibley County to complete crop acreage reports by the November 15 deadline for fall-seeded small grains.

"To make sure you're eligible for many USDA programs, you need to file an accurate crop acreage report by the applicable deadline," said Jennifer King, FSA county executive director.

November 15, 2025	Apiculture, Fall-Seeded Small Grains
January 2, 2026	Honey
January 15, 2026,	Apples

To complete your acreage report, please call the Sibley County FSA office to schedule an appointment. FSA can work with producers to file timely acreage reports by phone, email, online tools and virtual meetings.

Jennifer King
County Executive Director



Farm Service Agency

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Digging into Continuous Living Cover: Options for Sibley County Farmers

By Great River Greening – Summer 2025

Keeping Fields Productive Year-Round

Heavy spring rains and dry late summers have become common challenges across Minnesota, and Sibley County is no exception. For farmers wanting to get more from their land during the off-season and build long-term productivity, Continuous Living Cover (CLC) offers flexible options suited to a variety of operations.

Why Use Continuous Living Cover?

CLC simply means keeping living roots in the ground for as much of the year as possible. These crops can improve water infiltration, reduce soil loss, and help soil hold moisture during dry summers while reducing runoff from heavy rains. CLC crops also support more consistent yields and help make good use of shoulder seasons by adding forage, feed, or oilseeds to your rotation. For livestock operations, classic options like alfalfa are always reliable. In contrast, newer crops such as winter camelina are gaining traction—offering early-season ground cover and potential income from emerging markets like biofuels and specialty oilseed products.

"CLC are an exciting new tool to manage soil health and profitability on Upper-Midwest Farms. On farms in my area of Southern Minnesota, CLC will launch us into the future by providing pollinator habitat, covering the soil year-round, and producing up to 50% more oil in a camelina/soybean relay rotation. This new system provides two cash crops in one year. Demand is strong for these crops as the market is calling for the low carbon intensity feedstocks that I produce on my farm" Ben Penner – Ben Penner Farms.

CLC Options and Economic Opportunities

Crop Category	Examples	Commercial Applications
Perennial Grains	Kernza® (IWG), Perennial rye, Perennial oat	Food Products, Animal Feed/Forage, Grazing, Potential use for cellulosic biofuels
Winter Annual Oilseeds	Winter camelina, Pennycress	Potential for food products and Animal Feed/Forage, Alternative protein, Oil derived-biofuels
Other Winter Annuals	Hybrid winter rye, Winter wheat, Winter barley	Food products, Animal feed/forage, Grazing
Pasture/Forage/Biomass	Alfalfa (perennial legumes), Switchgrass	Animal feed/forage, Grazing, Potential use for cellulosic biofuels

Adapted from "Putting Down Roots: Analyzing the Economic and Environmental Benefits of Continuous Living Cover for Minnesota's Farmers, Water, and Climate" (2023).

Ready to Explore?

There are cost-share programs, contracts, and other opportunities available to support you as you explore these crops. **Great River Greening**, an environmental nonprofit dedicated to sustainable land management and ecological restoration, works closely with SWCDs, NRCS, and contractors to connect you with resources, programs, and other farmers who are already adopting these crops.

Get Started Today

Scan the QR code to learn more about Great River Greening and sign up for our **Growers Support Services** to explore how CLC can benefit your farm.



Special thanks to our funders, the **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)** and **Cargill**.

Sibley SWCD
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