Urban and Small Farms Program Steering Committee Meeting

Friday, June 25, 2021 @ 9:00 am

Meeting to held in-person with virtual option available.

Snyder 234, Talwar Leadership Ctr

1600 E. Washington Blvd, Fort Wayne, IN 46803

Minutes

Present: Joelle Neff, Greg Lake, Brooke Rudicel, Tim Bomba, Sharon Partridge, Tom Miller, Elli Blaine, Nellie Peffley, Josey Kahn, Don Rekeweg, Courtney Taylor , Terri Theisen, Lindsey Bloom, Art Franke, Leigh Rowan, Jessica Merkling, Julie Good, Jain Young, Stephanie Wulpenry, John Mishler.

1. Deliverables and Achievements: Joelle went over the accomplishments of 2021 to date.
	* Technical Assistance: Collected 60 soil samples for 17 different small farms, urban farms, and community gardens. When appropriate heavy metals tests were taken. Provided interpretation for each. Each client (17) received a nutrient management recommendation from Scott Thompson or James Wolff.
* Education:
	+ March 16th was Coffee and Nutrient Management. There were 23 participants, 7 of which were urban/small farm operators.
	+ The Coffee and Erosion webinar took place on February 16th. There were 12 participants. Participants learned about the different types of erosion and solutions for them as well as current erosion research in Indiana.
	+ The Live from Avilla webinar took place on April 13th. There were 13 participants. This was a virtual event that demonstrated converting planting equipment to no-till farming.
	+ The Coffee and Plant Science webinar took place on April 20th. There were 17 participants. Participants learned about weed biology, ecology, and control options as well as the basics of cover crops for row crop farming, gardening, and the organic industry.
* The Coffee and Water Quality webinar took place on May 18th. There were 23 participants. Participants learned about what people think about the rivers, what we know about the rivers, and what we can do to improve and enjoy the rivers around us.
* Website completed in December 2020, and continually updated.
* Discussed soil health display design with Exhibit Farm from February 2021-May 2021.
* Sharon Partridge led an educational session at Indiana Tech about the importance of testing soil for heavy metals in urban environments.
* Joelle Neff and Ben Taylor partnered with Purdue Extension to teach first grade students at Washington Elementary (a largely underserved community in Fort Wayne) how to take soil samples and about the different soil textures.
* January 19th was Coffee and Soil Testing. James Wolff taught the group of 28 participants how to interpret a soil test.
	+ Partnerships
		- Met with Jain Young of Heartland Communities to determine ways to support the Burmese Incubator Farm Project.
		- Promoted several local groups through social media including: Windrose Urban Farm, Atoms Acres Family Farm, 3 Rivers Co-op, the Fort Wayne Farmer’s Market, the Indiana Small Farm Conference, Hoffman Organics, Farm Bureau’s Young Farmers & Ag Professionals, the YLNI Farmer’s Market, Johnnie Mae Farm, Fort Wayne Farm Show educational events, Josh’s Jungle LLC, Kurtz Produce, McComBees Apiaries, Parent Road Produce, Plant Happiness LLC, and Plowshares Food Hub.
		- Purdue Extension programs were also promoted through the Allen County SWCD’s social media and website.
		- Participated in and promoted the City Nature Challenge on May 1st.
		- Sponsored the Regenerative Agriculture session for the Indiana Small Farms Conference.
		- Provided scholarships for half the price of a trip to Clay Bottom farm for 25 Burmese farmers. (Jain talked about the tour and how the participants learned a lot of practical information.)
1. Other Updates
	* Mobile Education: The education trailer has been purchased with money from a DeKalb County grant. The trailer customizing will be done by next Spring. The soil health display has been ordered and a down payment of $13,500 has been made. Looking for sponsors for the displays to help offset the cost.
	* Farm Tours: Stephanie and Elli with the IASWCD Urban Soil Health Program gave Joelle a tour of Allen County and the local farmers. Joelle, Greg, and Mikila did a tour of the Marion County demonstration farm with a market garden that highlights soil health. They also visited Michael Ledbetter’s urban farm in Indianapolis.
2. Upcoming Events
	* Coffee and Farmer’s Markets: July 20, 2021
	* Garden and Plant Sale at PFW: June 26, 2021
	* Coffee and Urban Agriculture: Aug. 17, 2021
	* Coffee and Tillage: Sept. 21, 2021
	* Riverboat Tours: Summer thru Fall, 2021
3. Discussion
* Demonstration Plot – “Establish at least one demonstration/test plot to use as an education center on best management practices such as residue management or cover crops.”
	+ Discuss possible locations:
	+ Type of demonstration/test plot, mobile vs static: Similar to Kevin’s garden in Indy. Cover Crop on existing garden. No-till demonstration on existing garden. Stephanie suggested several micro-sites as opposed to one large site. Could work with gardeners to maintain them. Coordinate signage and educational handouts/programs with gardeners. Jain would be interested in hosting a cover crop demo site. Marissa is doing no-till at her gardens. Master Gardeners might be interested in establishing a demo site at the Extension office or Salomon Farm Park. Stephanie suggested checking with the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo. They have a field near the sky lift that would be a good demo site. Master Naturalist’s might be interested in pollinator gardens. Tim suggested that it would be nice to have the demo gardens use a suite of practices rather than just one. Stephanie suggested that we send out a survey to solicit more ideas.
	+ Joelle has a list of possible locations for the demo plots. Stephanie added a few more sites. The current list is Fort Wayne heavy and Terri suggested branching into nearby counties.
	+ The demo sites need to provide access to the public for field days. So site logistics are important.
	+ John mentioned that Merry Lea (Goshen College) already has a lot of demonstration areas and a robust education program. John offered a tour of his facilities. Stephanie suggested a multiple day retreat to Merri Lea for the steering Committee.
	+ Stephanie suggested that we establish a point-of-contact in each county and standards for the plots.
	+ Nellie mentioned that the CCSI program might be able to help with demo plot costs.
* Upcoming Coffee and webinars
	+ New Ideas and possible speakers:
		- Extending the Growing Season. Richard Barens from Tanglewood Berry Farm and/or Nathan Fingerle from River Ridge Farm and Store.
		- Making a business plan. Purdue Extension. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and alternatives to CSAs (on-line sales). Certification. Documentation.
		- Marketing. Using social media. Options and costs.
		- Cover Crops (in the Fall). Possible speakers, Elli, Mike Werling, Kevin from Marion County, Bree Ollier from Hendricks County. Speakers who can speak to how to terminate cover crops on a small scale.
		- Dan Perkins from Good Earth Farm.
		- Stephanie suggested looking for speakers/topics in the SARE program.
		- Food deserts.
		- Funding. How to fund your farm. Programs that are available. How to apply. Purdue has grant writing workshops. Stephanie can help with this topic. Possible speaker from Farm Raise. NRCS/FSA.
		- Jain suggested that the coffee and … sessions be interpreted for the Burmese community.
		- Do workshops at the Rose Ave. farm.
		- DeKalb and Noble might have equipment that can be used for demos.
		- Introduce the growers. Who is doing what?
		- Integrated Pest Management. Terri knows a possible speaker.
* Farm Tour for peer-to-peer learning – “Host at least one bus and/or vehicle caravan tour annually to nearby successful facilities to provide peer-to-peer training, such a CCSA hub farm, aquaculture facility or local produce farm.”
	+ Topics: Growing plants with solar. Watershed health and how this relates to farmers. Trip to Merry Lea.
	+ Locations: Joelle suggested that we limit the workshops to just one or two farms at a time.
* [IASWCD Urban Soil Health Program](http://wordpress.iaswcd.org/for-districts/statewide-initiatives/urbansoilhealth/) Working Groups. Elli explained the IASWCD program and how they will be forming soil health working groups. Anyone interested in participating is invited to contact Stephanie Wulpenry. She is the local specialist. Working groups will provide assistance, education, and knowledge sharing. Elli provided a handout about the program which is attached to the minutes. This is currently set up to be a five-year program and it is just getting started.
	+ The IASWCD program offers support to local groups (like the Steering Comm.) to assist with events, promotion, and education.
	+ Greg mentioned that our program is working in cooperation with the IASWCD program to prevent duplication.
1. Set date for next Steering Committee Meeting: Joelle will send out a Doodle Poll for input on the next date/time.