

Views from VanDeWalle

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Southeast Nebraska Soil Health Conference

On Tuesday, March 3, Nebraska Extension will be hosting the Southeast Nebraska Soil Health Conference in Hickman in southern Lancaster County. The conference theme is “Feeding Our Below and Above Ground Livestock”. It is an opportunity for both crop and livestock producers to learn new ideas about cover crops and soil health that can have positive impacts on their farming operation.

The conference will be at the new community center in Hickman on 115 Locust Street. Feel free to join us starting at 8:00 AM for registration, coffee, donuts, and an opportunity to view table displays from numerous exhibitors. My colleague, Nathan Mueller has information about the conference at croptechcafe.org/southeastnesoilhealth to download and print the program.

Here is information on the speakers and topics at the 2020 Southeast Nebraska Soil Health Conference. Randy Pryor will be host or moderator for the conference. The first speaker will be Paul Jasa, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Extension Engineer, who will talk about a systems approach to soil health. Jasa has conducted long-term soil health research at the UNL Rogers Memorial Farm in Lancaster County. Gary Lesoing, Nebraska Extension Cropping Systems Educator for Richardson, Pawnee, Nemaha, and Johnson counties and the Nebraska Sustainable Ag Research and Education (SARE) program coordinator, will provide an update on cover crops and soil health research. Dr. Ray Ward, president and co-owner of Ward Laboratories, Inc. in Kearney since 1983, will explain the important role that organic matter plays for nutrient and water storage. Native soils had organic matter levels about twice as high as most of our soils are today. Some producers have made great strides in improving the soil organic matter but the majority of the soils need additional improvement. Ward will explain the importance of nutrient cycling to build soil organic matter.

The keynote speaker is Dr. Dwayne Beck, manager of the South Dakota State University (SDSU) Dakota Lakes research farm since 1990. His work on developing and promoting diverse no-till cropping systems has made a huge difference in South Dakota to dramatically improve farm profitability while also doing a better job of protecting soil and water resources; enhancing wildlife habitat; reducing net carbon dioxide emissions and other positive impacts. Beck will reflect on “Where We Are Heading” and “Not Forgetting the Basics”.

Mary Drewnoski, UNL Beef Systems Specialist, will talk about cow-calf grazing of cover crops. After that, the Nebraska Corn Board and the Southeast Nebraska Corn Growers Association will provide a short update. The conference program will wrap up with a soil health panel discussion. The panelists include Tyler Burkey from Milford, Blake Huls from Cortland, Rodney Wiese from Wilber and Steve Mills from Greenwood. We encourage attendees to ask questions and listen as the panelists share tips about improving soil health in their operations.

Over twenty agribusiness displays will be on-site along with representatives for nearly 35 different sponsoring organizations and companies. Nebraska Corn Board is a major sponsor of the program along with the Lancaster County Farm Bureau and SARE. Registration prior to the conference is encouraged for an accurate meal count. You can register online at croptechcafe.org/southeastnesoilhealth/ or to Lancaster County Extension at 402-441-7180. For certified crop advisers, continuing education units will be available.