

Conservation Districts Provide Community Education to Increase Conservation Education

By: Andrew Laswell

Local conservation districts have been handed the task of assisting the public with conservation education. These districts have taken this task and ran with it; through countywide field days and educational workshops Kentucky's communities are becoming educated about how that they can become stewards of the land that they have the blessing of tending.

Frederick Douglass once said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." This does not mean that we cannot educate adults, but many times our educational efforts must start at an early age. This theory is utilized to develop an education program for school age children. Conservation districts across the state utilize working relationships with other agencies to promote conservation education.

One way that conservation districts educate our children is through administering the Jim Claypool Art and Conservation Writing Contest in our schools. This contest provides valuable education on soil, water, forestry and wildlife. Students then are able to transform the knowledge that they have gained into artwork and essays. This year the theme is "The Wild Side of Kentucky," which has been very well received so far. The contest will end in December, and local, area and state winners will recognized in 2016.

In addition to contests many districts have school education programs where that district employees give presentations on conservation education. One good example of this is in Laurel County. District employee David Coffey attends the 4-H Eco-Adventures camp and provides education on soil conservation. This camp brings together representatives from the Laurel County Conservation District, Kentucky Division of Forestry, University of Kentucky Forestry, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, local producers and Eastern Kentucky PRIDE. Each representative manned a station which was rotated through during the four day camp.

The Laurel County Conservation District demonstrates the effects of rainwater impact, as well as runoff, and how it is affected by different tillage types. These activities are provided to students of several elementary and middle schools.

Other districts take advantage of the Department of Agriculture Mobile Classroom. Several districts across the area provide the funding for the classroom to be brought to a local school for students to rotate through. In many situations the local resource conservation and



Laurel County Employee David Coffey Conducts a Demonstration on Runoff. Photo courtesy Laurel Co. Conservation District



Students Take Advantage of the state of the art mobile classroom. Photo Courtesy of Whitley Co Conservation District

development council partners with the district to make this happen. While in this classroom students learn many valuable lessons in addition to soil erosion. Students also learn where our food comes from, what all can be made from agricultural products and even get to make an item from agricultural products

While educating our youth is very important our districts also have the duty to educate our communities, as well as our producers. Many districts implement a field day to bring producers and the community together to educate them, as well as interact and make connections. The Pulaski County Conservation District hosted its 10th annual field day this year. This field day is held in cooperation with the University of Kentucky Extension Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and others depending on the location of the field day. Each year the location is rotated to different areas of the county and includes a farm tour with about three stops followed with a meal. Typical outreach is about 150 people. While on the tour participants have the opportunity to look at conservation practices as well as equipment available for rent through the district.



While these are general ways that Kentucky's conservation districts provide conservation education to the children and community, they are in no way all inclusive. The conservation districts do many behind the scenes activities that help to provide public outreach but never make it to be recognized. Our conservation districts do a great job in providing this education to individuals to help them become stewards of the land through a multi-faceted approach utilizing area schools and area farms to reach individuals all across the each county.