

Officials get tour of conservation farming

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Hoping to show taxpayer money well-spent, the Black Hawk County Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners took two supervisors and a county engineer for a rain-soaked ride Friday.

The commissioners hadn't planned the rain, but the rivulets of rain water carving fields and forming puddles proved instructional.

"It helps to come out and really see what's going on, see what the money is being used for," County Supervisor Jack Roehr said.

That was what Conservation District Chairwoman Jeannette Winegarden had hoped to hear when the commissioners planned the tour.

"A lot of times legislators appropriate money and they never see results," she said, gazing at fields strewn with erosion-reducing stalks and stubble. "We've got results."

The conservation committee tries to convince farmers that conservation farming is practical, sometimes simple and in the best interests of agriculture. Sometimes it's as easy as planting crops on the contour of the land. On other fields, a series of terraces have to be built, drainage pipes laid or

waterways bulldozed.

Money to share the cost of the projects comes from federal and state funds.

Live — although wet — demonstrations were visible along the tour's route through the county. Pipes and waterways carried water into grass-filled ditches. Many fields had crop stubble left on the surface to slow the damage wind and water can do.

The goal is slowing and controlling the water, Winegarden said. "You can't stop it, but you can control it."

Slowing water down and leaving decaying crops on the surface of the field helps keep precious soil on the fields, not floating or blowing away.

"You see all this good black soil and it's going down the Mississippi, going all the way down to the Gulf (of Mexico)," County Supervisor Leon Mosley said.

The county has budgeted \$2,800 for the conservation district in each of the last two years, Winegarden said. The committee has asked for \$2,800 in the fiscal 1994 budget.

The money would pay for a newsletter about soil and water conservation practices and other educational projects.