



DeKalb County
Soil and Water Conservation District

1350 West Prairie Drive • Sycamore, Illinois 60178 • (815) 756-3234

June 17, 2026

OPEN LETTER from the DeKalb County Soil and Water Conservation District, Encouraging Local Stewardship Through Best Management Practices

DeKalb County has always taken pride in its rich agricultural heritage and the stewardship ethic shared by the farmers and landowners who care for our landscape. But the high-intensity rain events we've experienced in recent years have made one thing unmistakably clear: the way we manage our soil and water today will determine the health of our rivers, streams, and communities for decades to come. These storms are no longer rare. They are becoming a defining feature of our climate, and they place enormous pressure on our fields, drainage systems, and waterways.

When heavy rainfall hits bare or compacted soil, erosion happens fast. Sediment washes off fields, carrying nutrients with it, clouding our streams, filling drainage ditches, and degrading habitat. Once that soil leaves the field, it's not coming back. It represents lost productivity for farmers and long-term water quality challenges for the entire county. That's why maintaining and expanding the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) is more important now than ever.

Practices such as reduced tillage, grassed waterways, filter strips, cover crops and well-maintained buffer zones are proven tools that help keep soil where it belongs. They slow runoff, increase infiltration, and protect both surface water and groundwater. Many farmers in DeKalb County are already leading the way by adopting these practices, and by following their conservation plans on their highly erodible ground as required by the Farm Bill. But given the scale of the storms we now face, we need broader participation and consistent maintenance to ensure these systems work as intended.

Fortunately, our county and many of our municipalities have already adopted watershed-based plans that outline practical, science-driven strategies for reducing erosion and improving water quality.



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These plans were created with input from local stakeholders, including farmers, conservation professionals, and community members. They provide a roadmap for how we can work together, across property lines and political boundaries, to protect our shared resources.

Now is the time to put those plans to work.

A watershed-based approach recognizes that what happens on one field or one parcel of land affects everyone downstream. When farmers and landowners implement BMPs, they're not just protecting their own soil; they're contributing to the health of the entire watershed. Likewise, when the county and municipalities use the watershed plans to guide infrastructure decisions, stormwater management, and conservation investments, they help ensure that individual efforts add up to meaningful, long-term improvements.

DeKalb County has the tools, the knowledge, and the community spirit to meet this challenge. What we need now is commitment; including a commitment to maintaining existing BMPs, expanding their use where needed, and aligning local decisions with the watershed-based plans that have been already adopted. By doing so, we can reduce erosion, protect our waterways, and strengthen the resilience of our agricultural landscape.

Our soil is one of our most valuable resources. Let's work together to keep it where it belongs.

Signed,

Dean Johnson, Executive Director

Paul Kuhn, Dan Kenney, Lynn Martz, Anita Zurbrugg and Rick Bend,
Board of Directors