



Whiteside County SWCD Education Foundation 2019 Poster Contest

The Whiteside County Soil & Water Conservation District is again sponsoring a poster contest. The 2019 theme is: "**Life in the Soil: Dig Deeper**".

Many people don't realize that soil, especially healthy soil, is full of life. Millions of species and billions of organisms make up a complex and diverse mix of microscopic and macroscopic life that represents the greatest concentration of biomass anywhere on the planet. Bacteria, algae, microscopic insects, earthworms, beetles, ants, mites, and fungi are among them. Altogether, their value has been estimated at \$1.5 trillion a year worldwide.

Estimates vary, but if you could weigh all the organisms in the top six inches of soil on an acre of land, you'd find they would weigh between 2,500 pounds to more than 5,000 pounds, depending on how healthy the soil is. That is a LOT of life.

What these low-lying creatures lack in size, they make up for in numbers. Consider bacteria, the soil microbes with the highest numbers, for example. You can fit 40 million of them on the end of one pin. In fact, there are more soil microorganisms (microbes for short) in a teaspoonful of soil than there are people on the earth. These microbes, which make up only one-half of one percent of the total soil mass, are the yeasts, algae, protozoa, bacteria, nematodes, and fungi that process soil into rich, dark, stable humus.

Like other living creatures, the organisms in the soil also need food and shelter. Some feed on dead organic matter, and some eat other microbes. As a group, they cycle nutrients, build the soil and give it structure. The healthiest soils are those with a diversity and abundance of life. Farmers with the healthiest soils nurture that life by creating a diversity of plant life above the soil surface, with year-round ground cover, no tillage, and minimal pesticide use.

These farmers understand that tillage, the turning of the soil that has been the standard for growing crops for years and years, is disruptive to soil microbes and destructive to the soil system. Instead, they disturb the soil as little as possible. And, they grow a diversity of living plants in the soil as much of the time as practical, covering the soil and offering food to soil microbes through living roots. Those soil organisms, in turn, cycle nutrients back to the plant, allowing it to grow and flourish.

(The information above was provided by Natural Resources Conservation Service. For more information go to: www.nrcs.usda.gov)

The poster contest is grouped by grade level: K-1, 2-3, 4-6, 7-9 & 10-12. One student poster will be chosen from each grade level to be sent to the Illinois State Soil & Water District Office in Springfield in July 2019. State winning entries will advance to the national contest.

Contest Rules: Any media may be used to create a flat or two-dimensional effect (paint, crayon, colored pencil, charcoal, stickers, paper or other materials on regular posters (no computer only special category).

- Poster size must be between 8.5" x 11" and 22" x 28"
- Posters should be packaged so they remain flat when sent for judging.
- All posters must be created by an individual student rather than a team of students.
- The 2019 Stewardship title "**Life in the Soil: Dig Deeper**" must be on the front of your posters. This is the only title eligible for the national poster contest.
- Each entrant must sign the entry form to be eligible for judging.
- Although younger students will most likely receive help in planning from parents or teacher, NACD encourages each student to do as much of the work as possible by him/herself. Entries completed by students in their hand writing and coloring will score better than those designed, drawn and colored by adult assistance.

Prizes: Are yet to be determined.

The deadline for the poster contest is 4pm March 22, 2019. For any further information please feel free to contact: Tricia Paxson, Whiteside County SWCD - Phone: 815.772.2124 ext. 3 - Email: whitesidecountyswcd@hotmail.com