GRAND LAKE/WABASH WATERSHED ALLIANCE

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~Press Release February 25, 2010~

Tillage Transect Winter 2009-10

The tillage transect for the Ohio portion of the Upper Wabash River Watershed was completed for the winter season of 2009-10. This is a drive-by transect, with a site every half mile throughout the watershed. This is the third year this tillage transect has been completed. Using this transect and past transects, seasonal conclusions were made.

The watershed project encourages no tillage and reduced tillage practices. This is in accordance with the endorsed watershed action plan. This plan includes two objectives directly related to tillage and cover crops. These objectives are: 4,000 acres of cover crops and 5,000 acres of conservation tillage. Other objectives in the watershed action plan include more agricultural, residential, construction and lake related best management practices.

Cover crops are known to increase organic matter in the soil. Organic material is vital for good crops and improves the fertility of the hard clay soils in our area. Cover crops also provide a growing crop for winter manure application. The watershed project recommends avoiding winter manure application, but if it must be done, it is best to apply on a growing crop. For more information on best management practices related to winter manure application, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District.

The tillage transect summary for the Ohio portion of the Upper Wabash River Watershed is as follows:

- Over half of the watershed had no fall tillage. This is similar to past years. This includes hay fields and areas which have a cover crop, including wheat.
- Just over two percent of the watershed was strip till. This is a small amount, but has increased.
- Reduced fall tillage covered 17 percent of the watershed. These fields have 15 to 30 percent field cover. Field cover is the amount of field covered by vegetation left from the previous crop or the current growing crop.
- Fall mulch tillage covered another 19 percent of the watershed. These fields have greater than 30 percent field cover.
- Almost 10 percent of the watershed had been fall plowed. This is any field with less than 15 percent cover. This is an increase from previous transects, but may be due to crop rotation. Often hayfields or fields with certain pest problems are fall plowed.

For more information about the tillage transect or other watershed related topics and questions, please contact the watershed coordinator, Laura Walker laura.walker@mercercountyohio.org or 419-586-3289.

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