

# Turnout and Enthusiasm High for *Cover Crops, Tillage and Trout Field Day*

By Kevin Strauss, CRWP

Turnout was high when the Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP) in partnership with Rice Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), St. Olaf College, University of Minnesota Extension, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency hosted *Cover Crops, Tillage, & Trout: How Are They Connected?* field day outside of Northfield, Minnesota on Monday September 16<sup>th</sup>.

“This field day was all about connections – how the cropping practices on the field are connected to the fertilizers and sediment that enters the stream and how the fertilizers and sediment in the stream water are connected to the plants and animals that live in the stream. Community members and a variety government agency representatives and non-profit organizations learned how they’re connected to the economic well-being of farmers and how they can support them as they work to improve water quality in our area,” said Alan Kraus, CRWP Conservation Program Manager.

Participants were welcomed to the Helgeson Farm by host Roger Helgeson whose property has been in his family for several generations and is right on Rice Creek, the only self-sustaining trout stream in Rice County. Many acres of his property are rented to his neighbor and local farmer John Becker and the gathered group heard first-hand how he integrates cover crops and no-till and strip-till planting into his farming practices. Becker is a certified Minnesota Ag Water Quality farmer and he shared how he achieved that feat by working with his CFS Crop Consultant to use the TruTerra Insights nutrient management planning program by Land-O’Lakes SUSTAIN™. Dr. Paul Jackson, St. Olaf Associate Professor of Chemistry & Environmental Studies spoke about the ongoing research into trends in nitrate in farm fields’ tile drainage lines and Rice Creek that he and Professor Kathy Shea, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies, are finding thus far in a project that will cover three years of testing. Rice SWCD’s Teresa DeMars and the University of Minnesota Extension’s Claire LaCanne shared results from a simple way to test soil health biology followed by a Rainfall Simulator demonstration by Dean Thomas, Soil Health Technician from Fillmore County SWCD in conjunction with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.

Then the more than sixty attendees tried their hands at a Stream Table with the US Fish and Wildlife Service presented by Fish Habitat Biologist Heidi Keuhler and learned how tile drainage water can be better managed to avoid nutrient losses from Keegan Kult, Executive Director of the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition; attendees collected insects in the stream with St. Olaf College, University of Minnesota Extension and CRWP; and they observed an Electro-fishing demonstration conducted by Craig Soupir, Area Supervisor and his staff at the Waterville Area Fisheries of the Minnesota DNR where they saw great examples of Brook Trout and Black Nosed Dace.

It was a jam-packed afternoon of learning and community-building with participants walking away with a folder of great information and better understanding of farming practices and how those practices can help to improve the habitat for trout and other wildlife in our area. If you’d like to learn more about all of CRWP’s clean water projects, visit [www.crowp.net](http://www.crowp.net).

Sponsors for the event included the McKnight Foundation, Compeer Financial, Fishers and Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin, Minnesota DNR, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Rice County SWCD, St. Olaf College and Cannon River Watershed Partnership. Apples for part of the lunch were donated by Fireside Orchards of Northfield.

**Media Contact:** Kevin Strauss, Cannon River Watershed Partnership, 507-786-3913, [kevin@crwp.net](mailto:kevin@crwp.net)



Participants learned how stream insects help us estimate how clean the water is, since some insects species can tolerate water pollution and others cannot. Participants then caught bugs with aquatic bug nets.



MN DNR Fisheries staff caught Brook Trout in Rice Creek. Cleaner creek water should mean more trout in the stream.



Participants watched how a Rainfall Simulator demonstrates how soil protected by cover crops and no-till or strip-till farming techniques absorbs and holds on to more water and resists erosion, leading to cleaner streams and more profitable farms.