

Natural Resources Conservation Service Wisconsin Report



Helping People Help the Land

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Greetings

Welcome from the State Conservationist

In this fiscal year (FY) 2015 Wisconsin Annual Report, you will see snapshots of Wisconsin's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) approach in helping people help the land to use it productively for future generations. You will meet many Wisconsin landowners and farmers who have had success in partnering with us. You'll learn about our program and outreach successes, along with highlights of the work we do strongly focused on meeting responsibilities in a cost-effective, timely, and accountable manner.



Jimmy Bramblett, State Conservationist

It has been an exciting and challenging year for NRCS with the continued use of the new 2014 Farm Bill. This new Farm Bill reinforced congressional support for, and interest in, getting conservation on the ground. One new conservation program created, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), is bringing record levels of conservation practice installation through public-private investments.

Other highlights of the new Farm Bill include continued investments in our base Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and our Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). There are also continued investments envisioned for Easements (both wetlands and working lands), and a recoupling of conservation compliance with crop insurance. We encourage you to visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov for information regarding all of NRCS–Wisconsin's technical tools, services, and financial assistance.

NRCS–Wisconsin has had many great accomplishments in this productive year, and we couldn't do it without our partners. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them.

- The farmers in Wisconsin who stepped up to enroll in the CSP and EQIP, adding new acres of conservation; and the thousands of farmers and landowners seeking conservation technical assistance to remedy an erosion problem, improve their water quality, conserve their water, or enhance wildlife habitat, thank you;

- The many partners in conservation that we work with, particularly the Land Conservation Committees and Departments, collaborating to make the most of our dollars and help provide the best technical assistance and programs possible, thank you;
- The NRCS staff, who shoulder an overwhelming workload, but they gain the satisfaction of seeing the work that they do build healthier land and water. In 2015, we provided \$51 million through all programs to farmers for conservation efforts. To all of you, thank you!

This year, NRCS celebrates 80 years of being pioneers in conservation, working with landowners, local and state governments, and other federal agencies to maintain healthy and productive working lands. We can be proud of our conservation heritage, as leaders and believers, we will continue to change and grow to meet our new challenges as an agency.

I am proud to share with you the FY 2015 Wisconsin Annual Report from NRCS, highlighting some of our conservation accomplishments. I welcome your comments and feedback, and look forward to another great year helping people help the land.



Jimmy Bramblett, State Conservationist



Sign up online for **Client Gateway**

A secure online portal for individual landowners and land managers to track payments, request assistance, sign documents, and request conservation assistance anytime, anywhere

www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway

Background



Wisconsin NRCS History

The First in the Nation for Conservation

Our agency was born in 1935, during a time of hardship and desperation, when the very soil that put food on our tables was literally blowing in the wind.

Erosion was such a serious problem in the 1930's that it awakened the nation to heed the message of a man named Hugh Hammond Bennett to save our soil. We began to realize then, and we must not ever forget, how the protection of our soil and water is the foundation of the health and wealth of our country.

It took only 70 years, from the time of the first infusion of white settlers, to the early 1930's, for traditional farming methods to reduce the land around Coon Creek, Wisconsin, and elsewhere in the state, from pristine to the brink of agricultural uselessness.

Wisconsin became the home of the first erosion control demonstration project in the country, the wildly successful Coon Creek Watershed in Vernon County. It was 22 miles long, nine miles wide, 92,000 acres over three counties, with outlet directly to the Mississippi River. There, the science and art of soil conservation to protect our land, water, food, and nation, began.

Helping People Help the Land

Thanks to the vision of early conservation leaders, our prosperity as a nation aware of conservation, is flourishing. The conservation legacy in this state, from our Coon Creek Watershed beginnings, lead to today's establishment and success of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) NRCS.

The NRCS is committed to helping private landowners care for the land, use it productively, and excel as stewards for the future. America's working lands produce food and fiber, clear air and water, wildlife, and healthy soil. Farming can be one of the most environmentally compatible uses of land that there is.

NRCS is the leader in helping people make sound choices for healthy land and water. Through voluntary incentive-based programs, NRCS works directly with farmers and landowners to provide technical expertise and financial assistance to make conservation work on private lands.

The conservation practices NRCS promotes, everything from practices that manage excess nutrients and waste on farms to practices that promote soil health, among a host of others, are helping to protect our natural resources for the long term while at the same time improving Wisconsin farms. Taking care of the landscape in concert with agricultural productivity is our goal.

NRCS celebrates 80 years of working with farmers and landowners, local and state governments, and other federal agencies to maintain healthy and productive working lands.

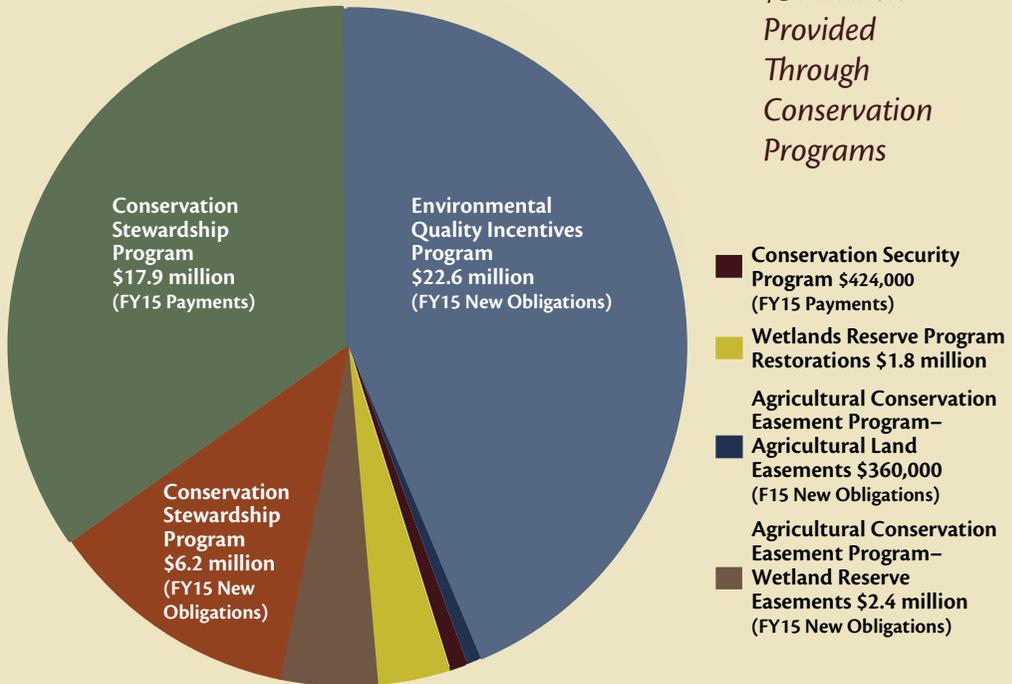
State Resource Priorities

- Water Quality Degradation
- Soil Erosion
- Soil Quality Degradation
- Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife
- Degraded Plant Conditions
- Livestock Production Limitation
- Excess Water and Insufficient Water
- Air Quality
- Insufficient Energy

Accomplishment Highlights

Budget Overview

FY 2015 NRCS–Wisconsin Program Dollars



Local Working Groups

Local Working Groups, a subcommittee of the State Technical Committee, offer an avenue for interested individuals and groups to advise NRCS on local resource priorities for program funding. Local Working Groups are comprised of two or more counties united by geography, similar land use, resource, and type of agriculture.

In 2015, each of the 21 Local Working Groups met to gather input on resource concerns, and identify EQIP funding priorities for the upcoming year. Over 600 participants attended Local Working Group meetings which was an increase of 100 from the previous year. Collaboration was excellent, continued learning took place, and partnerships were developed and strengthened.

Technical Assistance

NRCS offers technical assistance to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources to help landowners make sound resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands.

Every county in Wisconsin has a conservation team to assist in conservation planning. Having a conservation plan allows landowners to participate in financial assistance and easement programs. Conservation Technical Assistance is a voluntary program carried out by NRCS, partnering with local county conservation professionals.

Conservation Performance Results

NRCS assists landowners in conserving resources on private lands by providing technical assistance and financial assistance available through voluntary incentive-based programs. Highlights of our accomplishments are listed below.

- 2,190 Conservation Plans written on 324,518 acres
- 682 acres of wetlands created, restored, or enhanced
- 59 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans written
- 426,436 acres with conservation applied to improve water quality
- 1,089 acres with conservation applied to improve agricultural irrigation water management
- 1,786 acres with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiencies
- 374,621 acres of cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality
- 39,245 acres of cropland with conservation applied to improve soil health and sustainability
- 10,105 acres of cropland with applied soil health management systems
- 445,196 acres of conservation applied to improve environmental quality
- 17,686 acres of non-Federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat
- 24,192 acres of forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve vegetative condition
- 17,801 acres of grazing land with conservation applied to improve resource base
- 7,723 acres of grazing land with conservation systems applied to achieve a sustainable forage-animal balance

Data Source: Performance Results System (PRS) October 2014

Conservation Programs



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides voluntary conservation programs that promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality to help install or implement structural, agronomic, or management conservation practices to protect soil and water quality.

Farmers develop a conservation plan for the acreage affected by EQIP practices. Conservation practices must meet NRCS technical standards. NRCS evaluates and ranks each application, with higher priorities given to the practices that address local resource concerns, and provide the most environmental benefit.

Special EQIP Opportunities

Honey Bee—NRCS helps farmers and landowners implement conservation practices that will provide safe and diverse food sources for honey bees. Pasture management, wildlife habitat, and appropriate cover crops are used as tools to improve the health of our honey bees, which support more than \$15 billion worth of agricultural production.

On-Farm Energy—NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. Audit data is used to develop energy conservation recommendations. The Landscape AgEMP assesses equipment and farming processes. The farm headquarters AgEMP assesses power usage and efficiency in livestock buildings, grain handling operations, and similar facilities to support the farm operation.

Organic—NRCS helps certified organic growers and producers, and also those working to achieve certification, to install conservation practices to address resource concerns on organic operations.

High Tunnel Systems (Hoop House)—NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops. Supporting conservation practices such as grassed waterways, and diversions are available to address resource concerns on operations with high tunnel structures.

Cover Crops—Cover crops are grasses, legumes, forbs or other herbaceous plants that are established for seasonal cover and conservation purposes. They are used to reduce wind or water erosion by establishing cover after a minimal residue crop, to use up excess nutrients in the soil profile, for weed suppression, to provide nutrient for the next crop, to increase carbon sequestration, and improve soil structure. Cover crops may be used on all lands needing vegetative cover for natural resource protection and improvement. They are an excellent tool for helping to improve soil health.

FY 2015 EQIP Funding Highlights

- Provided \$22.6 million in financial assistance (includes all initiatives and special funding).
- Established 1,097 contracts.
- Enrolled 85,803 acres.
- Obligated \$1.3 million in 91 contracts covering 3,374 acres for the honey bee initiative sign-up opportunity.
- Obligated \$930,000 in 107 contracts covering 13,174 acres for the cover crops special sign-up opportunity.



Conservation Programs

EQIP Top 40 Obligated Practices by Financial Investment (includes all initiatives and special funding)

Practice	Practice Count (Number)	FY15 Obligation (Dollars)
Waste Storage Facility	61	5,784,793
Cover Crop	513	2,337,026
Waste Transfer	80	1,283,480
Fence	246	1,008,064
Heavy Use Area Protection	110	887,436
Streambank and Shoreline Protection	72	881,327
Waste Facility Closure	35	716,784
Prescribed Grazing	288	627,722
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan CAP	66	604,516
Pumping Plant	55	595,670
Conservation Cover	115	553,328
Forage and Biomass Planting	115	506,525
Grade Stabilization Structure	56	472,460
Nutrient Management	86	419,592
Irrigation System, Sprinkler	10	382,309
Grassed Waterway	187	379,773
Mulching	228	363,258
Pipeline	132	323,567
Access Road	50	305,348
Seasonal High Tunnel for Crops	38	295,257
Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	5	255,045
Brush Management	68	245,199
Lighting System Improvement	15	236,954
Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility	5	218,665
Vegetated Treatment Area	36	183,435
Lined Waterway or Outlet	18	177,839
Subsurface Drain	30	172,204
Waste Treatment	2	160,764
Early Successional Habitat Development and Management	32	157,848
Anaerobic Digester	1	150,000
Stream Crossing	73	135,727
Forest Stand Improvement	42	121,305
Roofs and Covers	7	114,854
Prescribed Burning	23	98,888
Aquaculture Pond	3	97,312
Irrigation Pipeline	6	89,408
Wetland Restoration	15	89,264
Spoil Spreading	41	82,084
Obstruction Removal	67	80,085
Forest Management Plan	72	71,889

EQIP Top 40 Obligated Practices by Practice Count

(includes all initiatives and special funding)

Practice	Practice Count (Number)	FY15 Obligation (Dollars)
Cover Crop	513	2,337,026
Prescribed Grazing	288	627,722
Fence	246	1,008,064
Mulching	228	363,258
Grassed Waterway	187	379,773
Critical Area Planting	156	55,827
Pipeline	132	323,567
Conservation Cover	115	553,328
Forage and Biomass Planting	115	506,525
Heavy Use Area Protection	110	887,436
Watering Facility	110	68,743
Nutrient Management	86	419,592
Waste Transfer	80	1,283,480
Stream Crossing	73	135,727
Forest Management Plan	72	71,889
Streambank and Shoreline Protection	72	881,327
Brush Management	68	245,199
Obstruction Removal	67	80,085
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan CAP	66	604,516
Waste Storage Facility	61	5,784,793
Grade Stabilization Structure	56	472,460
Pumping Plant	55	595,670
Access Road	50	305,348
Forest Stand Improvement	42	121,305
Spoil Spreading	41	82,084
Underground Outlet	40	58,155
Seasonal High Tunnel for Crops	38	295,257
Residue and Tillage Management—No-Till/ Strip Till/ Direct Seed	36	29,482
Vegetated Treatment Area	36	183,435
Waste Facility Closure	35	716,784
Tree & Shrub Establishment	35	64,302
Structures for Wildlife	35	14,464
Stream Habitat Improvement	30	71,330
Subsurface Drain	30	172,204
Early Successional Habitat Development and Management	32	157,848
Tree & Shrub Site Preparation	25	42,350
Roof Runoff Structure	24	36,490
Prescribed Burning	23	98,888
Conservation Crop Rotation	20	32,364
Diversion	18	21,205

Data Source: NRCS Resource Economics and Analysis Division

Conservation Programs



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) uses partnerships to multiply conservation investments and reach goals on a regional or watershed scale, promoting coordination between partners to deliver assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance through partnership agreements and program contracts or easement agreements.

NRCS and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved. RCPP encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales.

Wisconsin secured 4 agreements and 7 projects for full proposal submission to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat, and protect agricultural viability. Below are RCPP agreements, funded through EQIP.

- **American Bird Conservancy in Wisconsin:** Obligated \$95,000 in 19 EQIP contracts covering 908 acres.
- **City of Oconomowoc:** Obligated \$24,000 in one EQIP contract covering 479 acres.
- **Dane County Land & Water Resources Department:** Obligated \$75,000 in seven EQIP contracts covering 263 acres.
- **Sauk County Conservation, Planning, & Zoning Department:** Obligated \$69,000 in 17 EQIP contracts covering 897 acres.



Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. CSP provides assistance to landowners who practice good stewardship on their land and are willing to take additional steps over the next five years.

FY 2015 CSP Funding Highlights

- Established 769 new contracts.
- Provided \$6.2 million in financial assistance.
- Enrolled 348,385 new acres.

FY 2010–FY 2015 CSP Funding Highlights

- Enrolled 991,251 total acres as of 9/2015.
- Established 2,505 active contracts as of 9/2015.



Through CSP, participants take additional steps to improve resource condition including soil quality, water quality, water quantity, air quality, and habitat quality, as well as energy. NRCS coordinates its implementation of CSP with the other premier Farm Bill working lands program, EQIP. CSP and EQIP work in a complementary manner to address conservation issues associated with agricultural operations. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help land stewards install additional conservation practices. Eligible lands include private or tribal cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forest lands, and other land in agricultural use.

Landscape Initiatives

NRCS recognizes that natural resource concerns transcend farm, county, and state boundaries. The most effective way to increase protection of natural resources is to target conservation to the most vulnerable or valuable areas and to apply a systems, rather than a practice-by-practice approach to conservation. By approaching large-scale resource concerns on a landscape level, this science based approach puts conservation in the right places.

NRCS is targeting conservation assistance to critical resources through a number of landscape scale initiatives. In Wisconsin, the initiatives are allowing NRCS and partners to focus staff and financial assistance on targeted resource concern issues in selected priority watersheds.

Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative

The Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative (DALCI) targets additional funding for erosion control and fish and wildlife habitat projects in the four-state area of Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota. In FY 2015, Wisconsin obligated \$1.4 million in 114 EQIP contracts covering 4,310 acres.



Lake Superior Landscape Restoration Partnership

This partnership is located in Northern Wisconsin's Beartrap-Nemadji and Bad-Montreal Watersheds to improve the Lake Superior basin. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, NRCS offers special funding to help farmers improve farm and livestock operations while improving water quality. The NRCS provided additional funds to help forest landowners improve timber quality, and wildlife habitat for deer and grouse. In FY 2015, Wisconsin obligated \$795,000 in 42 EQIP contracts cover 4,203 acres.



Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

NRCS and partners are helping producers in selected watersheds in the Mississippi River Basin voluntarily implement conservation practices that avoid, control, and trap nutrient runoff; improve wildlife habitat; and maintain agricultural productivity. Two projects were prioritized including the Rush River in Pierce County and Sixmile Creek Watershed in Dane County. In FY 2015, Wisconsin obligated \$246,000 in 11 EQIP contracts covering 1,641 acres.



National Water Quality Initiative

The National Water Quality Initiative is committed to improving impaired waterways throughout the nation. Three watersheds were prioritized including the Pigeon Lake-Pigeon River in Waupaca County, Horse Lake-Horse Creek in Polk County, and Big Green Lake in Big Green County. NRCS manages the initiative by making funds available to farmers and forest landowners in the selected watersheds to accomplish needed conservation practices to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff on agricultural lands. In FY 2015, Wisconsin obligated \$158,000 in nine EQIP contracts covering 586 acres.



Landscape Initiatives (continued)

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

NRCS, along with 11 other Federal Agencies, are supporting and participating in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). This initiative addresses urgent issues such as cleaning up Great Lakes areas of concern, preventing and controlling invasive species, reducing nutrient runoff that contributes to harmful or nuisance algal blooms, and restoring habitat to protect native species.

NRCS and the Great Lakes Commission established the Great Lakes Demonstration Farm Network, and are partnering with four farms in the Lower Fox Watershed in northeast Wisconsin. These farms are installing leading edge conservation practices that reduce phosphorus runoff. The demonstration farms showcase the practices by conducting field days and tours for farmers. NRCS and the Great Lakes Commission continue to advance the completion of the “Fox P Trade” project which is analyzing supply and demand for phosphorus credits, and evaluating the best approach for the establishment of a nutrient credit trading program for the Lower Fox Watershed. The trading guidebook is anticipated to be completed in 2016. In

FY 2015, Wisconsin obligated \$2.8 million in 64 contracts covering 7,018 acres to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff in the Lower Fox Watershed through a special GLRI-EQIP phosphorus reduction program sign-up.

In FY 2015, Wisconsin obligated \$1.1 million in 27 contracts covering 2,241 acres to improve water quality in Lake Michigan through a special GLRI-EQIP nearshore health program sign-up. Funding for installation of core conservation practices that reduce sediment and nutrient runoff were focused in targeted sub-watersheds in the Manitowoc-Sheboygan and Milwaukee watersheds in eastern Wisconsin.



Easement Programs



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands, wetlands, and their related benefits.

FY 2015 ACEP Funding Highlights

- Wetland Reserve Easements: Obligated \$2.4 million in eight easements covering 485 acres.
- Agricultural Land Easements: Obligated \$360,000 in two easements covering 329 acres.



Wetland Reserve Easements: Provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a Wetland Reserve Easements. For acreage owned by an Indian tribe, there is an additional enrollment option of a 30-year contract.

Agricultural Land Easements: NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing Agricultural Land Easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land. In the case of working farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland, and shrubland.

Success Story Highlights



Managed Grazing Suits Beginning Farmer

Carlos and Kathy Tennessen, and daughter Amanda, are beginning farmers, just getting started with managed grazing. Their small operation on 59 acres feeds 35 head of beef.

They out wintered cattle with bales for the first time this year. Last year, the cattle were in the barn, and the Tennessens found themselves spending enormous amounts of time feeding animals and cleaning barns. With grazing, even in winter, the cattle feed themselves and no barn cleaning is needed.

Good fencing is essential, as is an all-weather watering system, all designed by Adam Abel, NRCS Soil Conservationist, Appleton Area Office, with financial assistance through EQIP. Cattle are moved every two or three days, to allow good quality forage to recover and regrow quickly. Enough forage is available to be baled to provide hay throughout the winter months. Manure management, soil erosion, and runoff are no longer an issue on the farm.

“Working with NRCS has been a really good experience. We went with NRCS to visit another well-established beef grazer, and we were sold.” The farm visit convinced Carlos and Kathy they could make NRCS programs work for them too. NRCS provided financial and technical assistance to help the Tennessens start grazing.

Now the Tennessens are hosting pasture walks to help others who are interested see the ease and potential in successful managed grazing.

Read complete success stories on our website!
www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/wi/newsroom/



Dairying in the Fox River Watershed

Brothers Paul and Ken Hoelzel operate a dairy farm in the Fox River Watershed, milking 360 cows, and farming 800 acres, half of which is owned, and half rented. For 10 years, the Hoelzels have succeeded in nutrient management planning. Diane Ott, their crop consultant, and has worked with the Hoelzel family for over 30 years to assist them in putting conservation to work on their dairy farm.

“The Fox River is not far, and the heavy rains in 2013 showed the need for improved manure storage,” said Diane. Through GLRI, the Hoelzels were able to begin a new manure management regimen to significantly reduce runoff and phosphorus going into the Fox River.

Their previous manure storage system consisted of a small, aging concrete pit and an earthen pit, which allowed only six months of storage. The new concrete pit, installed with the help of NRCS, provides a full year of storage, 3.5 million gallons, so manure can be spread when conditions are right for minimum risk of runoff. The new system includes a vegetated treatment area with underground tank and pump for transporting manure from barn to pit.

Diane, who is an NRCS-certified Technical Service Provider, developed a comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan to incorporate the new manure storage facilities, improved nutrient management, and erosion control practices.

In addition, Paul and Ken invested in energy reduction practices identified through an EQIP Energy Management Plan. The Hoelzels are also enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), with many enhancements for wildlife, water, and soil quality. According to Lynn Sculczewski, NRCS District Conservationist for Outagamie County, Paul and Ken don’t make a lot of noise, but they are very big on conservation.

Success Story Highlights



Hard Work Pays Off

Greg Nettekoven was born into a farm family; and he and his wife, Karon, have grown to love farming. Greg is a second generation farmer who grew up working on his family's 760 acres of tillable land. The Nettekoven family farm, established in the 1940s, started with milk cows, and eventually led to raising beef and hogs. Spending days in the sunshine tending to livestock and tilling fields as a child, grew into a passion for farming and conservation of the land. Greg and his wife, Karon, took over the farm in 1988, turning the beef and hog operation into working the land to grow vegetable crops, including peas, sweet corn, and beans. He and his wife have changed their operation over the years, from livestock to maintaining crop diversity with a corn, bean, winter wheat, and alfalfa rotation that includes cover crops.

The Nettekovens interest in soil health, and a goal of revitalizing their land sparked a connection with the NRCS, leading him into a cooperative agreement enrolling his 800-acre farm in CSP, and participating as one of four accessible Great Lakes Demonstration Farms, in the Fox River Watershed, as part of GLRI. The initiative places leading-edge conservation practices on the ground to reduce phosphorus entering Green Bay and Lake Michigan. "Many farmers think about implementing conservation practices, but need help with resources and advice, and that's where NRCS comes in. CSP is a great planning tool to help farmers think through applying conservation enhancements. NRCS has great people with expertise on staff to direct questions and needs in the right place, examples of what has worked well before, and having a local service center connection in almost every Wisconsin county is priceless," said Greg.

Greg says of the experience, "It's amazing in the spring to walk my healthy land and see crops sprouting, thinking wow, I did that. It's very rewarding."



Got Soil? Make it Healthy

George Van Wychen has been farming since 1977, and planting cover crops for 15 years. “I have a passion for healthy soil. I don’t want to see brown creeks and runoff from tilled fields in the spring,” said George. “I am proud of my farm and want to show what we’ve done with cover crops, erosion control, and building healthy soils here.” George’s son, Nick Van Wychen, is equally committed to building the soil and keeping the water clean. Nick is an outdoorsman and an environmentalist, as well as a farmer. That’s why the Van Wychens agreed to serve as one of four Great Lakes Demonstration Farms in the Fox River Watershed Phosphorus Reduction Initiative.

These Farms demonstrate the best, leading-edge conservation practices to reduce phosphorus entering Green Bay and Lake Michigan. The NRCS and the Great Lakes Commission (GLC), in collaboration with the Brown County Land and Water Conservation Department and Outagamie County Land Conservation Department, have organized the successful Farm network.

Brent Peterson, project manager for the Lower Fox Demonstration Farms Network, points out that these are innovative farmers, conservation leaders as well as community leaders. That’s why they were selected and that’s why they are working so hard to show how conservation can improve this watershed. Great minds have come together to work on these problems, and there are great ideas being tested. “The momentum is really growing,” said Jim Jolly, Brown County Conservationist. “These farmers are committed; they are really invested in making this work.”

The Van Wychens will continue building the health of the soil and sharing what they’ve learned to help others see the benefits of good conservation.

Success Story Highlights



Flashinski Family Farm Flourishes

Heather and Mark Flashinski bought their 80-acre farm in Cadott, Wisconsin, in 2006. As new owners, Mark and Heather had plans and goals for their acreage to address their natural resource concerns on the farm. They wanted to revitalize the woods on the property and create more wildlife habitat. Working with the NRCS has been an important part of their plan. Tammy Lindsay, District Conservationist and staff from the NRCS Chippewa Falls Service Center, developed a conservation plan with the Flashinskis to address their concerns. What was permanent pasture, is now productive pasture through planting native legumes and managed rotational grazing.

Through CSP, Heather and Mark agreed to undertake additional conservation activities and improve, maintain, and manage existing conservation practices on their farm. "When I learned about all the practices suggested through CSP, I wanted to do all of them because there are so many great things for the environment," Heather said. "But we concentrated on only a few for now." One of the CSP conservation enhancements included improving pasture by planting a mix including legumes, which increase forage quality and improve soil fertility. Another enhancement included monitoring the key grazing areas on their farm to improve grazing management. By monitoring plant productivity and measuring forage heights, determinations can be made for grazing land management systems. Another enhancement included establishing a windbreak to create new wildlife habitat, and provide a shelter for many animal species.

Heather says "NRCS is easy to work with and they are willing to share their expertise." Today, the Flashinski farm provides direct-from-the-farm grass-fed beef and other naturally grown foods that are good for one's health and for the environment.



Addition of Bee-Friendly Prairie Habitat

James MacDonald owns 120 acres of rural land in Green County, Wisconsin. Through the NRCS EQIP, James expanded relic prairie on his land, including planting 3 acres of native pollinator mix through EQIP financial assistance. His prairie is in blossom all summer, with plants blooming at different times. “There are hundreds of prairie plants and they sort of pass off who’s in bloom, so from the end of the snow until the snow falls again there’s always something in bloom,” said James.

MacDonald says between his neighbors, there are about 100 hives within two miles of his property, so many bees use his prairie for food. James had a good idea of what bee-friendly mixes he wanted to plant so NRCS provided financial assistance, as well as technical assistance in site visits and checking to ensure his seed mix was adequate.

You don’t have to own a lot of land to help out the bees. You can do your part to plant flowers and other pollinator-friendly plants at home to attract honey bees and help their population thrive.

EQIP assistance provided to landowners, like MacDonald, will provide guidance and support to farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that will provide safe and diverse food sources for honey bees. For example, appropriate cover crops or pasture management may provide quality forage and habitat for honey bees and other pollinators, as well as reduce erosion, increase the health of their soil, and inhibit invasive species.

“The 2014 Farm Bill keeps pollinators as a high priority, and these conservation efforts are one way NRCS is working to help this important species in Wisconsin,” Bramblett said.



International Year of Soils

Soil is a living and life-giving natural resource. As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. By farming using soil health principles and systems that include no-till, cover cropping and diverse rotations, more and more farmers are actually increasing their soil's organic matter and improving microbial activity. As a result, farmers are sequestering more carbon, increasing water infiltration, improving wildlife and pollinator habitat—all while harvesting better profits and often better yields.

NRCS joined groups across the world to celebrate the International Year of Soils in 2015. The 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly designated 2015 for the yearlong soils celebration as a way to increase understanding of the importance of soil for food security and essential ecosystem functions. Soil health was promoted all year to farmers, landowners, and partners, workshops were held across the state, materials were distributed at conferences and career fairs, farm tours were held focusing on our soils, and much more.

Our educational campaign called “Unlock the Secrets in the Soil” has provided farmers with important information about caring for their soil resource. Healthy soils are important for several reasons. These soils are more productive and farmers optimize production, improving their bottom line. Environmentally, keeping the soil healthy keeps nutrients on the farm, not in the local waterways. It also holds water for living plants and reduces the chance of flooding by allowing the water to infiltrate into the soil.

Healthy soil is essential as global demands rise for food, fuel, and fiber. Soils also play a crucial role in food security, hunger eradication, climate change adaptation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. As America's agency for soil conservation, classification and studies, NRCS is excited that 2015 brought worldwide attention to the importance of soil.

Outreach

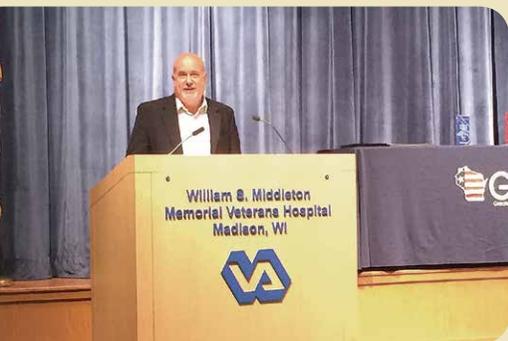


Communicating Our Message

Outreach is part of NRCS's daily business. We work to ensure that programs and services are made accessible to all customers, while placing special emphasis on those who may be under-served. Historically, underserved audiences have included minorities, tribes, women, the disabled, new farmers, veteran farmers, limited resource farmers and small-scale farmers. Outreach involves understanding customers and their needs, learning how best to communicate with various groups, earning the trust and acceptance of customers, and developing partnerships and working relationships. FY 2015 outreach activity highlights are below.

- Participated and exhibited at many events including:
 - Farm Technology Days, the largest WI annual farm show;
 - World Dairy Expo;
 - Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service Conference, the largest U.S. organic and sustainable farming event;
 - Pheasants Forever National Conference;
 - Farm Bureau Conference;
 - Grassworks Grazing Conference;
 - Wisconsin Wetlands Association Conference;
 - Agri-Business Crop Management Conference;
 - Wisconsin Land Water Conference;
 - Food Sovereignty Summit, Collaboration for Sustainability;
 - Professional development workshops for all ages and the under-served on soil health and conservation; and
 - many other field days, general and under-served targeted career fairs, local events and county fairs.
- Hosted many events and farm tours for farmers, partners, landowners, and congressionals. One highlight included Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack visiting for a tour and roundtable on RCPP with various partners.

Special Recognition



🌀 Federal Agency of the Year, Small Category

The NRCS–Wisconsin State Office was selected as 2015’s award winner in the Federal Agency of the Year, Small Category, honoring them with achieving the greatest impact in meeting the agency’s goals, mission, and overall success of the organization.

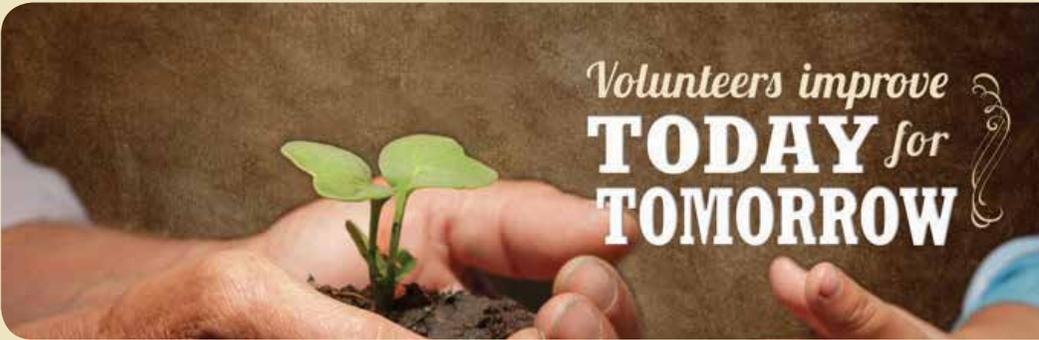
GMFAA representatives; guest speaker, U. S. Congressman Mark Pocan; and representatives from both U.S. Senator Tammie Baldwin’s and Senator Ron Johnson’s offices presented NRCS–Wisconsin State Office with the award during a recognition ceremony held May 4, 2015, at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison. U.S. Congressman, Mark Pocan spoke to Federal Employees about their work efforts, “Personally, thank you so much for what you do; your work is valued and it really does matter...I appreciate all the different services you provide to our country as public employees and what you do for the people to fundamentally and substantially help them.”

🌀 Jason Nemecek, State Soil Scientist of the Year

Wisconsin State Soil Scientist, Jason Nemecek, received the prestigious National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS), Soil Scientist of the Year Award. Jason has 15 years of service with the NCSS soil survey program and the USDA NRCS. Jason’s passion for soil and conservation led him to a degree in Soils and Natural Resource Management from UW–Stevens Point. After graduating, he started his career with NRCS as a soil scientist.

“There will always be a need for soil scientists to collect and improve data, provide technical soil services, and educate landowners and partners on healthy soil practices,” said Jason. Soil data and healthy soil resources promote the NRCS mission of Helping People Help the Land, support Farm Bill conservation activities, and aid landowners in efficiency and productivity on their lands.

Earth Team



Volunteers Make a Difference in Wisconsin

The Earth Team is NRCS's volunteer workforce that is making a difference in every county in the nation. NRCS works with private landowners to improve soil quality, conserve water, improve air quality, and enhance wildlife habitat. Earth Team volunteers work side-by-side with conservation professionals and are an integral part of the conservation partnership.

Earth Team offers many opportunities for people who are interested in volunteering to improve the nation's natural resources. People who are 14-years-old and older can volunteer. Volunteers can work part-time or full-time, work outdoors or inside a local NRCS office, individually or as a group.

In FY15, Wisconsin had 63 volunteers working a total of 3,122 hours!

Scott Mueller, National Earth Team Award Winner

Scott Mueller, Wisconsin Assistant State Conservation Engineer, was recognized as a National Earth Team Award Winner for having done an outstanding job working with volunteers. Mueller, mentored seniors in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He worked directly with Biological Systems Engineering classes at UW-Madison to recruit student volunteers. Seniors are required to complete a Senior Design Project to graduate. The Earth Team volunteer program offers students an opportunity to experience real-world engineering. Gaining this experience with the NRCS-Wisconsin as a volunteer has helped many students secure career positions in the conservation field.

State Map



USDA Service Centers are designed to be a single location where customers can access the services provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development. Service Centers are located in every county across Wisconsin.

Visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/local/ to find your nearest service center.

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Helping People Help the Land

