Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District

Newsletter edition 58
Spring 2026

The Conservation ChALLENge

SPRING: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU

With new Federal funding allocated, producers of all size farms are encouraged to apply for funding to restore the land and secure the U.S. food supply. You can read more from the USDA here:

https://www.usda.gov/farming-and-ranching

A number of opportunities exist, and conservation is the key to stop erosion of topsoil while increasing yields. Save your hard-earned money while building your soil and increasing the value of your land.

2026 Annual Meeting

The 81st anniversary of Allen Co. SWCD was celebrated at Salomon Farm Park on March 5. A lovely dinner catered by Ceruti's was followed by a brief business meeting where Mark Muntzinger was elected as Supervisor.

If you would like a copy of the full Annual Report (with financials and details), please call the office or email us.

In order to sign up for any program, go to:

https://www.farmers.gov/

Steps:

1. Create your www.Login.gov account
2. Complete "Identity Verification"
3. Link your FSA Customer Record

Farmer Bridge Assistance: go to **www.usda.gov/farmers-first**

Farmer First Actions Taken by the Trump Administration

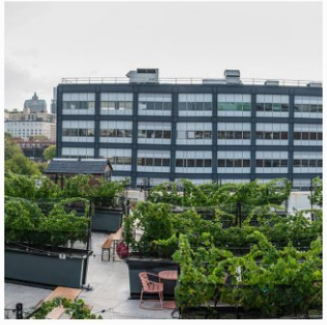
The Trump Administration Delivered $12 Billion in Farmer Bridge Aid

What's Inside?

This 58th edition of the Newsletter brings you updates on the funded projects of the District.

If you have questions about conservation or resource concerns, please contact Julie Good directly at (260) 702-8426.

For Urban Agriculture *search for this site:*



Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

USDA assists urban, small-scale, and innovative producers with growing, processing and selling. We provide technical and financial assistance for a variety of growing operations, including community farms and gardens, rooftop, indoor, and vertical farms, and hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities.

Learn More →

IN THIS ISSUE

Enroll now! 1
District Projects 2-3
Cover Crop Field Day. . . . 4



SUPERVISORS

Chad Shaw, Chairman (elected, term ends 2027)

Tom Miller, Vice Chair (appointed, term 2028)

Jain Young, Treasurer (elected, term 2028)

Tom Crowe, Secretary (appointed, 2027)

Mark Muntzinger (elected, 2029)

Associate Supervisors

Don Rekeweg
Dick Crowl

STAFF

Director: **Julie Davis Good**

Office Manager: **Suzi Eloph**

Grants Manager: **Courtney Taylor**

Watershed Project Managers:

- **Ron McQueen**
- **Maiya Rizzo**
- **Autumn Straessle**
- **Tori Kidd**
- **Michael Ryan**
- **Grace O'Hara**

Conservation Technicians:

- **Mitchel Lemon**
- **Lydia Ade**

PROJECT 1: SMART SOILS INITIATIVE

The "Smart Soils Initiative" is in its 3rd year of continuous funding from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). This project provides data-driven information to producers, retailers, and the public about conservation practices. The "data" is acquired through new technology, via drone imagery and soil moisture sensors. Early outcomes demonstrate that conservation practices improve crop health, moisture retention, and - often - yield. The Project Lead is Ron McQueen, assisted by Autumn Straessle and Mitchel Lemon.

The goal of this project is to reach every type of farm with technical assistance. We provide drone imagery, GIS layers, soil moisture information, and visual graphs to demonstrate the impact of conservation practices. For the first term, this project was limited to the Western Lake Erie Basin, however in January 2026, we received a new grant — "Smart Soils Initiative 2" — to extend into the Headwaters of the Wabash, including both the Eel and Little River sheds. The expanded funds come from Indiana's Clean Water Indiana. More information is available here: https://www.in.gov/isda/divisions/soil-conservation/clean-water-indiana/



Figure 1. A clear difference between "covered" and traditionally tilled land during Spring rains

The practices supported by "Smart Soils" are the **4 Principles of Soil Health**:

1. **Maximize continuous living roots**
2. **Minimize disturbance**
3. **Maximize soil cover**
4. **Maximize biodiversity**

If you are interested in using "Smart Soils" on your farm, contact Ron McQueen, **rmcqueen.swcd@gmail.com**.

PROJECT 2: ON-FARM DEMO AGREEMENT

The On-Farm Demo Project is an agreement across six counties in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB): Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Noble, Steuben, and Wells. The goal is to establish demonstration farms across the Basin and promote enhanced water quality. Demonstration farms showcase the implementation of conservation practices such as cover crops and no-till (or reduced till). This project aims to facilitate widespread adoption of conservation farming. Annual Field Days at mentor farms bring conservation to life for more farmers, encouraging questions and pilot plots on those farms. Lead on this effort is Grace O'Hara, M.S.



Figure 2. Mitchel Lemon installed Muntzinger Farm's On-Farm Demo sign; shows commitment to the project.

This project carries out priorities of the funding source, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), that includes resilient agricultural systems, soil health and water quality improvement. Partnering agencies such as NRCS help with technical and financial assistance to help create effective management plans. For additional information and for maps of demo farms: **https://www.glri.us/**

PROJECT 3: FLOURISH FORT WAYNE

"Flourish Fort Wayne" serves Fort Wayne zip codes facing contamination of soil and challenges to food access. The program supports residents in planning, remediating, and growing gardens by providing resources, free compost delivery, raised beds, and starter bundles of tools.

Five community events occurred through Fall and Winter. Four focused on outreach and building connections with the community. The final event, the "Spring Gardening Workshop", was held at Purdue University FW, featuring guest speakers, hands-on activities, and local educational partners.

Nearly 100 urban residents expressed interest in technical support for planning, and over 40 site visits to plan gardens were scheduled. Final efforts focus on completing those site visits and delivering raised beds, compost, burlap, and soil to participants.

As the funding ends, if you have contacts that might carry forward this excellent work with gardening support for urban residents, contact **FlourishFortWayne@gmail.com**.

This project was supported through the Minneapolis Foundation who awarded funds to build Thriving Communities in the Great Lakes watershed. The grant was for one year only, and the impact has been substantial.



Figure 3. Spring Gardening Workshop held at Purdue University FW in February



Fig.4. SWCD staff at the Spring Workshop; from left: Julie Davis Good, Michael Ryan, Lydia Ade, Autumn Straessle, Maiya Rizzo and Tori Kidd

PROJECT 4: SMALL FARMS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



October 2025

NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Small Farms Program is partnering with Indiana Small Farms Conservation (ISFC) and the State NRCS to provide on-site technical assistance and financial assistance for adoption of conservation practices on small and specialty crop farms throughout Indiana. Allen County SWCD is responsible for serving 7 counties in the Great Lakes Watershed in northeast Indiana. The onsite technical assistance includes soil testing, plant recommendations, cover crop seed, and loan of a small farm equipment trailer for low-till and invasives removals. The other priority (providing financial assistance) is accomplished through NRCS conservation programs, like EQIP and CSP.

INDIANA SMALL FARMS CONSERVATION

Allen County SWCD staff will be assisting District Conservationists within our region. This includes farm evaluations, application facilitation in the federal database, and recruit of new customers to NRCS programs.

As of March 1, 16 new clients resulted in 6 site visits and 4 EQIP applications. As the weather warms, soil tests will be the focus of site visits. Michael Ryan leads this project; for more info:

mryan.swcd@gmail.com

Cover Crop Field Day

Have you ever wondered...

What are the benefits of cover crops?

Where do I start?

Please join us to learn about all things cover crops:

Benefits | Planting timing | Seed selection | Termination

March 26, 2026

Registration starts at 9:30 am

9720 Homestead Rd
Roanoke, IN 46783

Parking & shuttle bus

Arise Church
12220 Lower Huntington Rd
Roanoke, IN 46783

Western Lake Erie Basin n Farm DEMO
Conservation through Education

To **RSVP** email
allenswcd@gmail.com
OR
call 260-484-5848, ext. 3

Allen County Soil & Water Conservation District

Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District

2720 Dupont Commerce Court,
Suite 101
Fort Wayne, IN 46825

Phone: (260) 484-5848
Extension 3 (NRCS also)

email: **allenswcd@gmail.com**

Allen County Soil & Water Conservation District

PLEASE PLACE STAMP HERE

NEW DEADLINES FOR FSA PROGRAMS:

Listen to your phone messages for a call from FSA about ***Bridge Funding*** *recently funded through President Trump's "Farmers First" program.* *(see page 1)*