Natural Resources
Conservation Service
South Dakota 2018 At-A-Glance

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In 2018, farmers and ranchers with the assistance of employees and partners developed conservation plans on over 750,000 acres of South Dakota cropland and over 1.1 Million acres of rangeland.

Conservation practices were applied on almost 900,000 acres of cropland and 1.2 million acres of grasslands.

Through conservation plans, more than 39,000 conservation practices were applied across South Dakota. More than 100 different types of conservation practices were implemented last year, including practices such as transitioning to a no-till system, diversifying crop rotations, use of cover crops and nutrient management planning as well as rotational grazing systems with water development and fencing.

Implementation of these practices is facilitated by many USDA conservation programs:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSStP)
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

In 2018, conservation programs brought about $100 million to over 1,000 new contracts and 2,700 existing contracts with South Dakota agricultural producers.
In partnership with other groups, NRCS also provided educational outreach at nearly 500 events across the state bringing greater understanding of conservation to 46,000 attendees in 2018.

There are 149 Earth Team Volunteer Voices for Soil Health. 102 Voices have offered to mentor other producers for the South Dakota soil health movement.
Notables

- SD NRCS allotted time and effort to train employees especially for customer service and career development through professional societies. A State Technical Competence Guide was established. USDA opened up hiring nationally, which allowed SD NRCS to increase staff from 235 to 246. With the overall goal of bringing the workforce to 286.
- We increased recruiting activities with more outreaching for hiring veterans and building our employee leadership skills.
- Communications has been a key focus with increased interpersonal communications and improving our conservation delivery structure.
- Utilized Earth Team volunteers across the state with offices at 100 percent coverage.
- Coordinated Light Detention and Ranging (LIDAR) coverage statewide.
- Wetland Compliance Team reduced the backlog of requests considerably to less than 150 requests, no more than 5 months old.
- In April of 2018, SD NRCS was second in the nation for the percentage of EQIP dollars obligated. This was due to our efforts to have plans written and ready to go prior to ranking and funding.
- Quality assurance reviews allowed staff to visit more offices and create improvements across the state.
“In 2019, we look forward to building upon the conservation achievements of 2018 in partnerships with individuals, organizations, and agencies.”
Our partnership with the conservation districts at the association level and the district level is stronger than ever with continued group partnership activities that strengthen our counties.

Resource concerns were a key area of focus. Collection of more data that helps identify resource concerns.

The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD) Non-Operator Landowner (NOLO) Project sent out letters to 21,000 people. The survey should create more of a dialogue and generate more interest in conservation.

We focused on connecting our partners with GovDelivery for instant automatic notifications. Continued communicating with our partners and customers using traditional media and increased outreach using social media.

Recognized hard working people in South Dakota through awards such as the Olin Sims Award, Environmental Stewardship Award, Cooperative Conservation Award, and the South Dakota Conservation Leopold Award.

Added new partners and projects with the South Dakota Wildlife Habitat Foundation and Mid-Missouri Burn Association, along with a weather station on the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe.

Conservation Collaboration Grants or Agreements have empowered partners to hire additional people to help make a difference.
Soil Health

Key Areas of Focus in 2018

- Improving the Cropping Systems Inventory of more than 26,000 crop fields statewide including the fall cover crop inventory.
- Partnerships to address salinity were formed helping landowners create a better soil analysis.
- New soil health specialists, along with our partners, collaborated to test inter-seeding of cover crops.
- We worked with partners to provide Soil Health Buckets to educators, increasing the lesson plans, and training employees and producers.
- Refreshing the skills and drive of our soil health team and taking it to the next level.
- The EQIP Soil Health Initiative was successful and continues to build with cover crops and water for livestock.

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Water Quality & Quantity
Strategic Plan Goal 2

Highlights

- NRCS and partners targeted efforts with much success in the Big Sioux and Lower James River Watersheds. The National Water Quality Initiative helped implement innovative practices along the riparian areas that improved the health of stream banks.
- We have an active Wetland Mitigation Bank. Credits are available from the first site and more sites are being evaluated.
- Purchased a 3D printer to create landscape models for producers to be able to visualize the “before and after” outcomes of agricultural waste management systems.
- Improved the quality of water through livestock water treatment systems for the better health of livestock.
Notables

- Partners showed the impact of working lands utilizing the Sage Grouse Initiative in EQIP.
- Scientific studies show that soil health fields using cover crops produces successful nesting habitat.
- We improved the management of easement programs and improved seeding mixes by adding diversity and focusing more on pollinators.
- We increased the landowner story telling of how wildlife is benefiting from soil health farms and fields.
- Worked with partners to create a Monarch Butterfly Strategy to help that species recover and also increased pollinator habitat in general.
Highlights

- Communities are taking more of an interest in local foods and growing their produce through regenerative practices. A chef in Rapid City, SD, who works at a regional hospital is saving money and providing healthier choices by using local foods.

- Increased local food success stories has more people talking about local foods. Master gardeners are key local partners.

- The NRCS and partners were involved in many events such as hosting the Grass–Fed Exchange with attendees from across the country.

- Worked with several Tribes such as the Rosebud, Pine Ridge, Cheyenne River, and Sisseton Wahpeton Reservations on local Food Sovereignty Projects.

- The Inter Tribal Agriculture Council is working with NRCS on outreach on the importance of local foods.
Share The Successes

We look forward to what the new year brings and want to thank all of our partners and employees for all of their hard work in 2018. Let’s continue to move the needle of conservation.

Moving the Conservation Needle

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