USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Indiana NRCS 2017 Annual Report

THE USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) PROVIDES INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS TO RESTORE, ENHANCE AND PROTECT INDIANA'S LANDS.

NRCS is an agency that does work no one else is doing. Each day we work with our conservation partners and private landowners in Indiana to improve the health of our communities by protecting and improving our soil, water, forestry, energy, and wildlife resources. We are doing this in ways where farmers do not have to sacrifice production for conservation, or profitability for sustainability.

Our voluntary Farm Bill programs provide technical and financial assistance to help our customers address natural resource concerns such as soil erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat, and much more. We work with farmers and landowners whether they have one acre or thousands to develop conservation plans and provide advice that helps them manage natural resource concerns on their land.

I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS investments and successes in fiscal year 2017.

- Jill Reinhart, Acting State Conservationist

Indiana NRCS FY17 Investments on Private Agricultural Lands

Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Contracts 1,240
Acres 172,272
Dollars $21,741,789

Conservation Stewardship Program
Contracts 261
Acres 90,944
Dollars $1,496,831

Regional Conservation Partnership Program
Contracts 46
Acres 10,108
Dollars $1,069,490

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
Wetland Reserve Easements
Contracts 46
Acres 2,960
Dollars $11,100,000

Voluntary Conservation Works
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Going Beyond the Dollar

Indiana has the third largest Amish population in the nation. Although communities are spread throughout the state, the largest population is found in northeast Indiana. The Amish continue to use more traditional farming methods handed down from their ancestors, such as horse drawn equipment including plows.

Resource concerns on Amish farms are very similar to those found on modern conventional farms, but because this group is often reluctant to participate in government programs they do not typically seek assistance from NRCS or other conservation partners.

As with any non-traditional customer, it can be challenging for staff and partners to reach out through our typical avenues. Because of the dense population of Amish within the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) watershed, the Adams County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has worked with NRCS on a contribution agreement funded by GLRI to hire an outreach specialist whose job is to build relationships work directly with Amish farmers in the Western Lake Erie basin.

"I have found the Amish are open and receptive to technical assistance once we have made a connection and have developed a relationship," said Darrell Brown, Amish Outreach Specialist and retired NRCS employee.

NRCS and the SWCD work together to hold field days and pastures walks and meet with farmers one-on-one. They provide soil maps and aerial photos of their land; assistance with soil and manure samples; cover crop seed recommendations, no-till and seeding equipment, demonstration areas, and other information to address resource concerns. Making the connection between what the soil tests show about nutrient levels in fields and the nutrient levels of the manure applied is important, especially in terms of the economic value of the manure applied as well as the cost of spreading manure or over-applying phosphorus when soil tests show it is not needed. These efforts are paying off as we see increased adoption of no-till and other soil health practices in the area. Word is spreading about the value of NRCS' technical assistance.

Another resource concern in the area are the numbers of confined feeding operations that fall under the minimum number of animals required for permits. These facilities do not have adequate manure storage nor do they have enough acreage or the proper equipment to apply the amount of manure that is generated. Because of this, many farmers are required to haul their manure off-site. A positive solution for Amish farmers is two community lagoons where excess manure can be stored. This allows for the manure to be applied at the appropriate time and at the appropriate rate.

Another innovative solution is a horse drawn no-till drill and highboy seeder that is available for loan from the SWCD which gives staff more time to interact with farmers and build strong relationships.

Indiana NRCS and the Adams County SWCD are committed to continuing to find new, innovative methods to reach the Amish communities and provide technical assistance for their natural resource concerns and land management goals.

National Landscape Conservation Initiatives

NRCS uses Landscape Conservation Initiatives and National Program Initiatives to accelerate the benefits of voluntary conservation programs. These Initiatives are funded with EQIP, CSP and WRE dollars.

GLRI — Great Lakes Restoration Intiative
Contracts 39
Acres 8,728
Dollars $664,499

JOINT CHIEFS — Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Project
Contracts 42
Acres 3,947
Dollars $640,677

MRBI — Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative
Contracts 24
Acres 4,522
Dollars $595,602

MONARCH — Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project
Contracts 2
Acres 21
Dollars $4,958

NWQI — National Water Quality Initiative
Contracts 2
Acres 688
Dollars $157,780

WLEB — Western Lake Erie Basin Initiative
Contracts 23
Acres 14,572
Dollars $844,738

WILDLIFE — Wildlife Initiative
Contracts 38
Acres 1,043
Dollars $302,083

WREP — Wetland Reserve Easement Program
Contracts 5
Acres 290.5
Dollars $800,000

Technical Assistance Programs

CRP — Conservation Reserve Program

	Planned	Applied
Plans Written....	863	542
Acres	20,466	17,811

Emergency Watershed Protection Program

EWP
Financial Assistance...$1,040,726
Technical Assistance....$32,929
Completed Projects.....3

National Program Initiatives

ENERGY

On-Farm Energy Initiative
Contracts 5
Acres 55
Dollars $20,719

ORGANIC

Organic Initiative
Contracts 14
Acres 653
Dollars $139,524

SPECIALTY CROPS

Specialty Crop Initiative
Contracts 60
Acres 281
Dollars $541,393

Special Audiences

BEGINNING FARMER

Beginning Farmers
Contracts 82
Acres 6,639
Dollars $1,307,469

LIMITED RESOURCE

Limited Resource Farmers
Contracts 8
Acres 476
Dollars $44,871

SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers
Contracts 2
Acres 83
Dollars $24,282

Earth Team Volunteers

NRCS is proud of the dedicated Earth Team volunteers and staff who have committed their time and talents to conserving and protecting our natural resources.

Earth Team Volunteers perform tillage transect in southern Indiana.

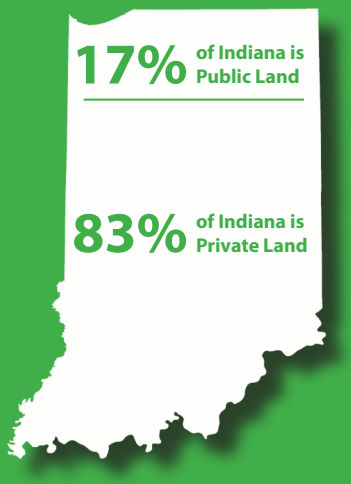
During Fiscal Year 2017, more than 1,500 Indiana Earth Team volunteers donated 11,060 hours. Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved NRCS approximate $267,000 and supported conservation in every single field office in Indiana.

TOP FIVE MOST CONTRACTED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

1. Cover Crops
2. Brush Management
3. Forest Stand Improvement
4. Water and Sediment Control Basins
5. Waste Storage Facility

TOP FIVE NATURAL RESOURCE CONCERNS IN INDIANA

1. Excess Sediment and Nutrients
2. Invasive Plants
3. Wildlife Habitat
4. Energy Efficiency
5. Livestock Management



14.7
Millions of acres in Farms

57,700
Number of Farms in Indiana

255
Average size of Indiana Farm

2nd
in U.S. for tomatoes

3rd
in U.S. for chicken and eggs produced

4th
in U.S. for peppermint, turkeys, cantaloupe, spearmint, snap beans

WORKSHOP LEADS TO HEALTHIER PASTURES

When Scott Hiler attended his first pasture management workshop, he didn't anticipate one day he would be hosting one on his own farm, but that is exactly what he was doing five years later.

The Hiler farm has been in the family for nearly 65 years. Scott took over the cattle farm from this grandparents almost 20 years ago. Prior to attending the Scott County Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS workshop in August 2012 Scott was grazing 8-10 cows on around 22 acres of land.

During the program, he listened as Robert Zupancic, NRCS Grazing Specialist spoke on several soil health and grazing management topics. 2012 was a tough year for most Indiana farmers - one of the worst droughts in history and many farmers were thinning or selling herds. Afterwards, Scott talked with Zupancic and they scheduled a farm visit to discuss ideas to improve his pastures and livestock. Problems that concerned Scott included soil erosion, almost no water infiltration and weeds. Scott credits the workshop and his visit with the Zupancic as the motivation he needed to make some changes in his operation.

Scott now manages his grazing acres in a way that allows him to have a total of about 50 head of cattle on 35 acres. That's a lot of cows and a lot of manure, so to do it successfully, he moves them every two days among 13 paddocks, on a 26-day rotation. When he started this management technique, he carefully watched the grazing heights in each paddock and made adjustments as needed.

With a rotational grazing system, Scott is now able to graze exclusively from mid-April through mid-September and then he utilizes a fall sacrifice lot to allow time for pastures to recover before grazing again before moving cattle off to another sacrifice lot for the winter. In the sacrifice lots, he uses a conservation practice called heavy-use areas which are built with geotextile fabric and stone overspread with lime that stabilize the soil and prevents a muddy feedlot.

Scott Hiler's pastures are much healthier and productive since he began his rotational grazing system.

When asked about the benefits he has seen with this type of management, Scott says "The cows don't want to go out of the lot because they always have something to eat. I like knowing what is growing in the pasture and because the cows see us often, they are easier to work with and move."

Scott had his soil tested recently (another recommended soil health management practice for pasture land) and he says the test results are proof the system is working. Organic matter ranged from 3.5 to 4.5 percent, pH levels were just under 7 percent and nutrient values were generally in a medium to high range. That means little additional nutrients are recommended for application to this fields. Nutrients are naturally added as part of the rotational system, and the sacrifice lots are scraped after feeding for manure application onto cropped fields. This allows Scott to reduce the amount of commercial fertilizer on his land.

Scott continues to work with the NRCS's grazing specialist and district conservationist staff to make adjustments to his operations. He wants to help others who raise livestock in the area so he is serving on a watershed steering planning committee to encourage farmers to install conservation practices that will protect the environment and improve their bottom line.

Scott has advice for farmers who want to start a rotational grazing system. "First, talk with your local NRCS field staff, especially the grazing specialist. Second, don't overgraze – the further you take the forage to the ground, the longer it's going to take to grow back. And most importantly, don't give up – be willing to make changes. It's paid off for me!"

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