



Helping People...

...Help the Land.



United States
Department of
Agriculture



Volunteer Provides Conservation Planning Assistance to Landowners

Budgets are tight, workloads are changing, and Indiana, like most states, has the added responsibility of initiative work. As such, the Cass County USDA Service Center utilized an Earth Team Volunteer to help achieve their 2019 conservation goals. By using an Earth Team Volunteer in their office, the service center saved NRCS more than \$3,200 in a two-month period, but more importantly, it allowed the field staff to focus efforts on other high priority tasks.

In May of 2019, the Cass County USDA Service Center acquired Brianna Gramm as an Earth Team Volunteer to assist with the increase in spring conservation planning workload. While volunteering a total of 126.5 hours over the course of her two-month detail, Brianna accomplished a variety of tasks that allowed the service center to stretch available resources and put additional conservation practices on the ground, while improving their customer service.

Throughout her volunteer work, she assisted with numerous field inspections for conservation program compliance of the 51 Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracts that were offered the option to re-enroll in Cass County. These contracts consisted of filter strips, grassed waterways with structures, and several wetland restorations.

Brianna performed numerous conservation planning tasks throughout her time with the service center. She surveyed a farm's ephemeral gully and completed an NRCS specified engineering design for a grassed waterway to be built using Conservation Reserve Program dollars. She also completed the corresponding comprehensive Conservation Plan for the grassed waterway and the remainder of the tract in which it is to be built. In addition, she planned and calculated a seed mix for the adoption of cover crops on the farm to increase its future soil health, resilience,

and productivity. She also participated in an on-farm meeting with a producer to evaluate and plan both new and alternative management systems. The new systems used best management practices for a grazing operation to better utilize the biomass in the pastures and reduce his reliance on stored forage over the winter.

Brianna helped plan a new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) sign-up for a 19.3-acre wetland restoration from the very beginning of the project. She identified the resource concerns that were present in fields that bordered the Wabash River including sediments, nutrients and pesticides entering the surface water, and a lack of wildlife habitat on the farm. She also had to verify, working with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps, that the field was in the floodplain making it eligible for the sign-up.

Brianna strengthen the NRCS/farmer day-to-day relationship by riding with producers as they prepared their field for plantings and making field visits with operators to discuss seeding requirements for prairie grass plantings.

In addition to her conservation planning, Brianna also played an instrumental role in helping to establish priority watersheds for a new multi-county Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI) project. She assisted the committee in determining which conservation practices would best benefit the identified resource concerns in the chosen watersheds.

For more information about the Earth Team Volunteer program, contact your local USDA Service Center or log on to:

www.in.nrcs.usda.gov