Agenda

- Conservation Connections: Project overview
- Introductions: NRCS staff & Farmer Connectors
- NRCS overview
- Program & resource basics
- Farmers share NRCS experiences
- Upcoming Events & Projects
- Questions and Conversations with NRCS Staff
Conservation Connections
Historically Underserved Farmers

- **Beginning Farmer and Rancher**
  - Not operated a farm/ranch for more than 10 years

- **Limited Resource Farmer**
  - With direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years, and
  - Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.

- **Socially Disadvantaged**
  - American Indians or Alaskan Natives
  - Asians
  - Blacks or African Americans
  - Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
  - Hispanics

- **Veteran**
Introductions:
NRCS Agency Staff & Farmer Connectors

Wisconsin NRCS:

- NRCS Angela Biggs, State Conservationist
- Eric Allness, Assistant State Conservationist – Partnerships
- Melissa Bartz, Assistant State Conservationist – Programs
Introductions: NRCS Agency Staff & Farmer Connectors

Kirsten Jurcek
Brattset Family Farm (Jefferson)

Robert Pierce
Half the 40 Acres (Madison)

Mariann Holm
Holm Girls Dairy (Elk Mound)
What is the Natural Resources Conservation Service?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the primary federal agency authorized to work on private lands to help landowners protect their soil, water and other natural resources.

- Technical agency of USDA
- Voluntary technical and financial assistance for farmers and landowners
In 1933, the Soil Erosion Service (which was later named the Natural Resources Conservation Service), was established. To fight soil and wind erosion, dust storms, and loss of cropland.
In 1935, the Soil Conservation Service became an agency of USDA to work with farmers on new ways to farm that would save the soil.

Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Coon Valley, Wisconsin
Coon Creek Watershed

Coon Creek Watershed Erosion Control Demonstration - 1934
Voluntary Conservation on Private Lands

Private lands account for 70 percent of the total land in the United States, 80 percent in Wisconsin.
State Office: Madison

Area Offices:
- Area 1 (NW) – Altoona
- Area 2 (NE) – Appleton
- Area 3 (SW) – Richland Center
- Area 4 (SE) – Juneau

Field Offices: 54

Tribal Office: 1
Farm Bill Legislation

Basis for most USDA and NRCS conservation programs and policies.

Current Farm Bill
Enacted on December 20, 2018
2018 Farm Bill

Projected 10 Year Farm Bill Spending in Billions

- Title I: Commodity Programs
- Title XI: Crop Insurance Subsidies
- Title II: Conservation Programs
- Title IV: Nutrition
- Everything Else: $6.7B

NRCS Wisconsin (FY 2020)

Funding Impact

- $13.6 MIL. Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
- $19.3 MIL. Conservation Stewardship Program
- $31 MIL. Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- $63.9 MILLION provided through conservation programs to private lands.

Conservation Results

- 660,472 acres of conservation applied to improve environmental quality.
- 463,551 acres with conservation applied to improve water quality.
- 399,841 acres of cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality.
NRCS Mission & Vision Statement

Our Mission: We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.

Our Vision: A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.
Priorities

- Implement and deliver the 2018 Farm Bill to our nation’s farmers, ranchers, and private forests landowners.

- Streamline our processes and program delivery to best serve our customers.

- Better understand our customer needs and improve overall customer service.

- Increase internal mentoring, training opportunities, and experiences that collectively involve staff, customers and partners.

- Expand focused outreach efforts to increase agency awareness among populations of Young, Beginning, Small, Veteran and Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers.

- Elevate the importance of soil health across our agency's outreach and communication efforts to further enhance and promote the delivery of soil health principles to staff, customers and partners.
Soil health matters because:

1. Healthy soils are high-performing, productive soils.
2. Healthy soils can reduce production costs and improve profits.
3. Healthy soils protect natural resources on and off the farm.
4. Franklin Roosevelt’s statement, “The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself,” is as true today as it was 75 years ago.
5. Healthy soils can reduce nutrient loading and sediment runoff, increase efficiencies, and improve pollinator and wildlife habitat.
The Five Principles Of Soil Health

1. **SOIL COVER: Keep plant residues on the soil surface.** Look down, what percentage of your soil is protected by residue? Erosion needs to be minimized before you can start building soil health.

2. **LIMITED DISTURBANCE: Minimize tillage as much as possible.** You will start building soil aggregates, pore spaces, soil biology, and organic matter.

3. **LIVING ROOTS: Keep plants growing throughout the year to feed the soil.** Cover crops can add carbon to the soil, providing a great food source for micro-organisms. Start small to find the best fit for your operation.

4. **DIVERSITY: Try to mimic nature.** Use cool and warm season grasses and broad leaf plants as much as possible, with three or more crops and cover crops in rotation. Grassland and cropland plant diversity increases soil and animal health.

5. **INTEGRATING LIVESTOCK:** Fall/winter grazing of cover crops and crop residue increases livestock’s plane of nutrition at a time when pasture forage quality can be low, increases the soil biological activity on cropland, and improves nutrient cycling. Proper grassland management improves soil health.
FOR MORE INFORMATION

NRCS GovDelivery  https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDANRCS/subscriber/new

• NRCS Wisconsin Video  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=172ZFUyBZ8U
• NRCS Wisconsin YouTube Channel  https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCU4UriItF4RVUZPzHRZx5CQ
  o NRCS Wisconsin Annual Report
  o NRCS Wisconsin Success Story Publications
  o Fact Sheets
• NRCS Wisconsin Webpage  https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/wi/home/
Meet the NRCS in Wisconsin

Meet the NRCS in Wisconsin, who we are, what we do, and how we help private landowners put conservation on the ground. Join us in the effort.

In the News
- USDA Seeks Members for Advisory Committee on Urban Agriculture

Events & Deadlines

Highlights
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Conservation Stewardship Program
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Web Soil Survey
NRCS provides one-on-one, personalized advice

NRCS helps people make investments in their operations and local communities

NRCS generates, manages and shares the data, technology and standards to help make informed decisions
Programs

Primarily Working Land

Practices must have a conservation benefit, not just for increased Production
Program and Resource Basics

- Financial and Technical Assistance
- Voluntary
- Competitive
- Program “contracts” = method for implementing
First Step:
Connect with your local NRCS office

- Phone call or email to office
- Anyone can help you
- Site visit and walk your land
EQIP: Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- Provides voluntary conservation to 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.

- Special initiative opportunities include honey bee pollinator, soil health, organics, energy, and high tunnel.

- Special rates are available for socially disadvantaged, beginning and limited resource farmers.
EQIP

- Addresses resource concerns on private lands through implementation of conservation practices
  - Technical assistance key

- Program involving the most conservation partners

- Average 1,300-1,500 new contracts annually with an average of $30 M over the last 3 yr.
EQIP: Common Activities related to:

- **Energy**
  Energy Efficient Lighting System, Farmstead Energy Improvement & MORE

- **Pollinator & Wildlife Plantings**
  Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Conservation Cover & MORE

- **Livestock & Grazing**
  Watering Facilities, Prescribed Grazing, Fence, Forage Harvest Management, Forage and Biomass Planting & MORE
EQIP: Common Activities related to:

- Conservation Activity Plans (CAP)
  Energy, Nutrient, Pest, Pollinator, Organic Transition, Grazing, Prescribed Burning & MORE

- Soil Erosion
  Reduced Tillage, Cover Crops, Contour Farming, Structural Erosion Control & MORE

- Water Quality
  Field borders, Filter Strips, Tree Plantings, & MORE

- Soil Health & Plant Health
  Cover Crops, Crop Rotations, Nutrient and Pest Management & MORE
Conservation Stewardship Program

- Rewards existing conservation on and requires additional conservation activities be adopted
  - Includes cropland, pasture, farmstead and forestland
- 5-year contracts with payments for benchmark conditions and practices and enhancements contracted
- 541 contracts covering 238,000 acres enrolled during FY2020
Conservation Stewardship Program

• Program builds upon conservation practices available in EQIP

• Offers practices, enhancements and bundles of enhancements

  Example
  – Practice: Cover Crop
  – Enhancement: Planting deep-rooted cover crop for soil health
  – Bundle: Multiple Enhancements that complement each other.

• Entire Operation Included
Farmer Share: Kirsten Jurcek

NRCS EQIP Practices Utilized at Brattset Family Farm, LLC

- We work closely with local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Staff applying for conservation cost share funds.

- NRCS EQIP Practices:
  - Forage & Biomass Planting
  - Fencing (perimeter & interior)
  - Water Well
  - Water Lines & Watering Facilities
  - Grazing
Farmer Share: Kirsten Jurcek

NRCS EQIP Water Systems
Farmer Share: Kirsten Jurcek

NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program

• Once graziers have met their grazing conservation goals through assistance of the NRCS EQIP cost share or on their own, they may be eligible for the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program.

• Brattset Family Farm CSP Enhancements
  • Bat Houses
  • Grazing
  • Hay cutting
Farmer Share: Kirsten Jurcek

EQIP Grazing Plans

- Work with existing graziers to enhance grazing infrastructure and methods.
- Plan grazing systems for beginning farmers and farmers wishing to transition to managed intensive grazing.

- Prepare pasture seed mixtures
- Calculate livestock stocking rates
- Layout perimeter & interior fencing
- Layout waterlines & winter watering facilities
- Illustrate grazing paddocks and sacrifice areas

☑ Grazing plans prepared to make producers eligible for NRCS EQIP cost share
Farmer Share: Mariann Holm

Mariann Holm
Holm Girls Dairy
(Elk Mound)
New Program: Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WWIC)

- Focus on women landowners in Wisconsin
- Led by MFAI, WFU, MOSES, RTC
- Variety of workshops, field days, mentoring
- Sign up for more info
Questions?

NRCS - Helping People Help the Land

Productive Lands, Healthy Environment

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resources
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