



United States Department of Agriculture



# Natural Resources Conservation Service



## Wisconsin Report 2014



## Healthy Land is Productive Land

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is committed to helping private landowners care for the land, use it productively, and excel as stewards for the future. America's working lands produce food and fiber, clear air and water, wildlife, and healthy soil. Farming can be one of the most environmentally compatible uses of land that there is.

## The Leader for Conservation on Private Lands

NRCS is the leader in helping people make sound choices for healthy land and water. Through voluntary incentive-based programs, NRCS works one-on-one with you to provide the technical expertise and financial assistance to make conservation work on private lands.





## Greetings!

It has been an exciting, and challenging, year for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with the advent of a new Farm Bill, which was passed on February 7, 2014. This new Farm Bill reinforced congressional support for, and interest in, getting conservation on the ground. In fact, this Farm Bill marked the first time in history Title II (Conservation Title) surpassed Title I (Commodity Title) of the Farm Bill.

One new conservation program created in the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), will bring record levels of conservation practice installation through public-private investments.

Other highlights of the 2014 Farm Bill include continued investments in our base Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and our Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). There are also continued investments envisioned for Easements (both wetlands and working lands), and a recoupling of Conservation Compliance with crop insurance. We encourage you to visit [www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov) for information regarding all of NRCS-Wisconsin technical tools, services, and financial assistance.

As you will see in the pages ahead, we have had many great accomplishments in this exciting year, and there are many people to thank for them:

- The farmers in Wisconsin who stepped up to enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program, adding new acres of conservation; and the thousands of farmers and landowners seeking only conservation technical assistance to remedy an erosion problem, improve their water quality, conserve their water, or enhance wildlife habitat, thank you;
- The many partners in conservation that we work with, particularly the Land Conservation Committees and Departments, collaborating to make the most of our dollars and provide the best technical assistance and programs possible, thank you;
- The NRCS staff, who shoulder an overwhelming workload, but they gain the satisfaction of seeing the work that they do build healthier land and water. In 2014, we provided \$48 million through all programs to farmers for conservation efforts. To all of you, thank you!

I am proud to share with you the 2014 Wisconsin Report from NRCS, highlighting some of our conservation accomplishments. I welcome your comments and feedback, and look forward to another great year.

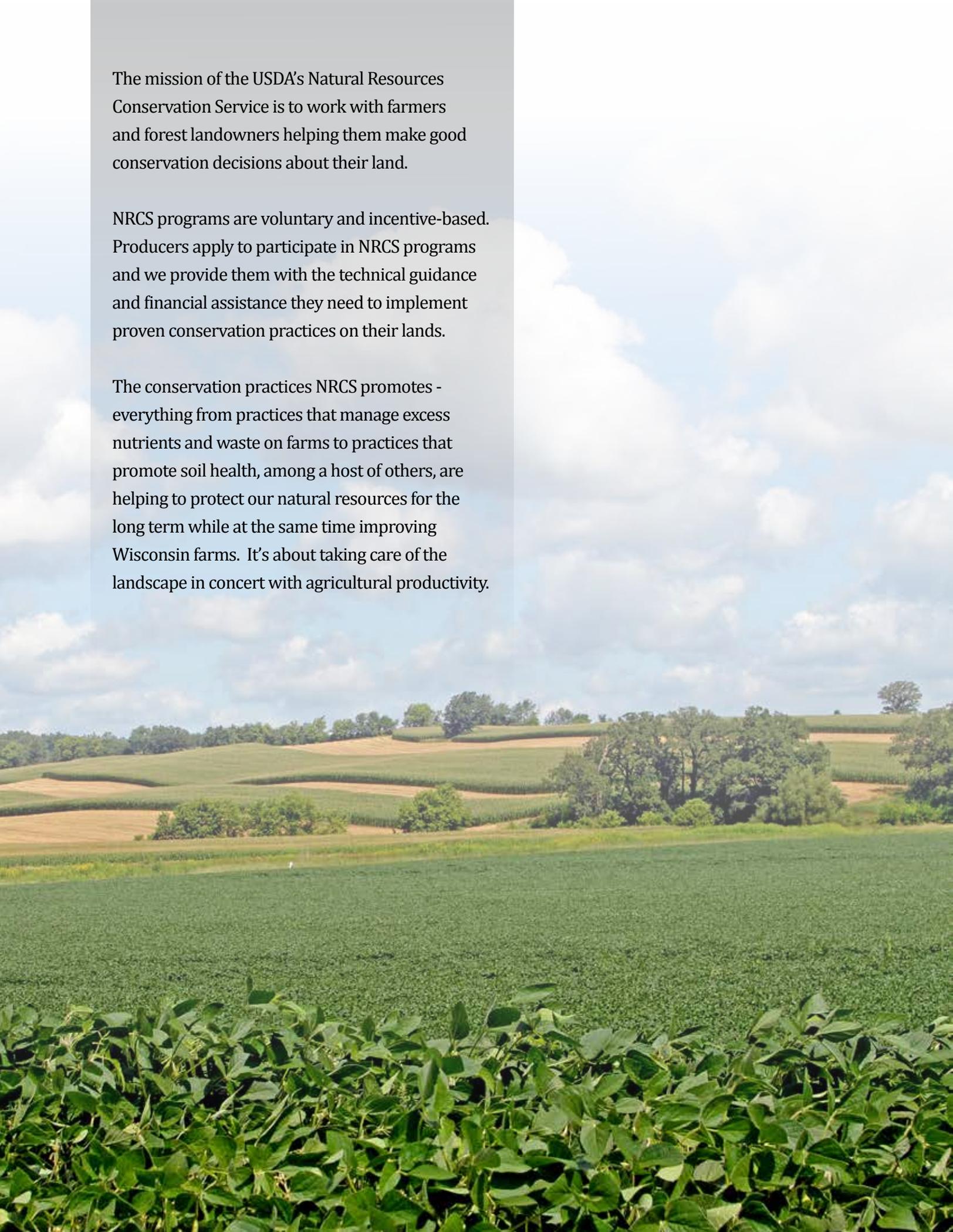
State Conservationist



The mission of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is to work with farmers and forest landowners helping them make good conservation decisions about their land.

NRCS programs are voluntary and incentive-based. Producers apply to participate in NRCS programs and we provide them with the technical guidance and financial assistance they need to implement proven conservation practices on their lands.

The conservation practices NRCS promotes - everything from practices that manage excess nutrients and waste on farms to practices that promote soil health, among a host of others, are helping to protect our natural resources for the long term while at the same time improving Wisconsin farms. It's about taking care of the landscape in concert with agricultural productivity.



# Conservation Technical Assistance

NRCS has assisted Wisconsin landowners in conserving resources on private lands for over 75 years. Technical assistance is the help provided by NRCS to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources. It helps landowners make sound resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands. This technical assistance is the primary mission of NRCS.

Every county in Wisconsin has a conservation team to assist in conservation planning. These plans are specific on-farm resource assessments and serve as the foundation for participation in other programs. Having a conservation plan allows interested parties to participate in financial assistance and easement programs. Conservation Technical Assistance is a voluntary program carried out by NRCS in cooperation with local county conservation professionals.

## Conservation Accomplishments of ALL NRCS Programs\* Highlights for FY 2014

- Conservation Plans Written on 274,582 acres
- Wetlands Created, Restored or Enhanced on 559 acres
- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans Written = 77
- Land with Conservation Applied to Improve Water Quality = 413,871 acres
- Land with Conservation Applied to Improve Agricultural Irrigation Water Management = 1,131 acres
- Land with Conservation Applied to Improve Irrigation Efficiencies = 2,490 acres
- Cropland with Conservation Applied to Improve Soil Quality = 361,224 acres
- Cropland with Conservation Applied to Improve Soil Health and Sustainability = 58,145 acres
- Cropland with Applied Soil Health Management System = 12,245 acres
- Stewardship activities Applied that Improve Environmental Quality = 69,572 acres
- Non-Federal Land with Conservation Applied to Improve Fish and Wildlife Habitat Quality = 27,626 acres
- Forest Land with Conservation Applied to Protect and Improve Vegetative Condition = 21,909 acres
- Grazing Land with Conservation Applied to Improve Resource Base = 21,582 acres
- Grazing Land with Conservation System Applied to Achieve a Sustainable Forage-Animal balance = 11,122 acres

\*Source: Performance Results System (PRS) report for NRCS Wisconsin October 2014

Conservation Plans consider all these important resources.



SOIL



WATER



AIR



PLANTS



ANIMALS



ENERGY



HUMANS

# Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a new, comprehensive and flexible program that uses partnerships to stretch and multiply conservation investments and reach conservation goals on a regional or watershed scale.

RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance to producers through partnership agreements and through program contracts or easement agreements.

Through RCPP, NRCS and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved.

Funding for RCPP is allocated to projects in three different categories:

- Critical Conservation Areas - eight geographic areas across the Nation - 35% of funding
- National - for nationwide and multi-state projects - 40% of funding
- State - projects in a single state - 25% of funding

Wisconsin enjoyed a very successful initial launch of the new RCPP, with great response from numerous Wisconsin conservation partners. Proposals included four in the Critical Conservation Areas, four in the National pool, and two State proposals. These projects will bring federal assistance to bear on Wisconsin priorities and leverage funds from many sources to focus on a critical conservation need.

Wisconsin State Resource Priorities:

- Water Quality Degradation
- Soil Erosion
- Soil Quality Degradation
- Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife
- Degraded Plant Conditions
- Livestock Production Limitation
- Excess Water and Insufficient Water
- Air Quality
- Insufficient Energy



# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers that promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality. EQIP offers financial and technical help to eligible participants to install or implement structural, agronomic or management conservation practices on their land to protect soil and water quality.

Farmers develop a conservation plan, if they don't already have one, for the acreage affected by the EQIP practices. Conservation practices must meet NRCS technical standards. NRCS evaluates and ranks each application, with higher priorities given to the practices that address local resource concerns, and provide the most environmental benefit.

Financial Assistance FY14 = \$24.9 million\*

Number of Contracts FY 14 = 1300

Number of acres = 132,262

\*Includes all initiatives and special funding

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## ***New Local Working Groups Established in 2014***

Local Working Groups offer an avenue for interested individuals and groups to advise NRCS on local resource priorities for programs and funding. In 2014, new Local Working Groups were formed, pulling together two or more counties united by geography, similar land use, resources and type of agriculture. The larger grouping allowed greater access to funding for the group. Each of the 20 Local Working Groups held a public meeting to gather input on resource concerns, and identify funding priorities.



# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

## Top 40 Practices by Financial Investment - Installed FY 2014

Practice	Count of Practices	FY 2014 Dollars
Waste Storage Facility	39	\$3,525,645
Cover Crop	255	\$1,092,044
Nutrient Management	353	\$953,589
Heavy Use Area Protection	78	\$756,509
Streambank and Shoreline Protection	75	\$671,544
Waste Transfer	47	\$660,687
Fence	163	\$643,711
Grade Stabilization Structure	71	\$427,800
Irrigation System, Sprinkler	16	\$398,641
Pumping Plant	31	\$373,734
Comprehensive Nutrient Management CAP	39	\$301,000
Integrated Pest Management	35	\$297,283
Lighting System Improvement	2	\$296,667
Grassed Waterway	158	\$295,674
Prescribed Grazing	174	\$270,840
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan	35	\$249,635
Mulching	218	\$246,553
Irrigation Pipeline	10	\$200,041
Seasonal High Tunnel for Crops	28	\$183,846
Access Road	34	\$181,591
Obstruction Removal	118	\$142,653
Roofs and Cover	3	\$135,635
Vegetated Treatment Area	26	\$134,850
Forage and Biomass Planting	58	\$133,849
Subsurface Drain	40	\$131,337
Waste Treatment	2	\$128,665
Stream Crossing	54	\$125,223
Underground Outlet	57	\$114,007
Roof Runoff Structure	31	\$98,189
Stream Habitat Improvement	29	\$97,941
Forest Stand Improvement	52	\$97,055
Critical Area Planting	231	\$95,616
Tree and Shrub Establishment	39	\$93,221
Waste Facility Closure	10	\$88,577
Lined Waterway or Outlet	15	\$87,998
Tree and Shrub Preparation	45	\$69,184
Conservation Cover	26	\$61,294
Brush Management	52	\$60,904
Residue and Tillage Management	27	\$55,340
Forest Trails and Landings	16	\$44,617

# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

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Access Road	34	\$181,591
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Roof Runoff Structure	31	\$98,189
Stream Habitat Improvement	29	\$97,941
Prescribed Burning	29	\$39,089
Seasonal High Tunnel for Crops	28	\$183,846
Pipeline	28	\$37,369
Residue and Tillage Management	27	\$55,340
Vegetated Treatment Area	26	\$134,850
Conservation Cover	26	\$61,294
Diversion	23	\$21,271
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	21	\$12,735
Spoil Spreading	20	\$39,176
Forest Management Plan	20	\$22,758
Irrigation System, Sprinkler	16	\$398,641

# Landscape Initiatives

NRCS recognizes that natural resource concerns transcend farm, county, and state boundaries. The most effective way to increase protection of natural resources is to target conservation to the most vulnerable or valuable areas and to apply a systems rather than a practice-by-practice approach to conservation. By approaching large-scale resource concerns on a landscape level, this science based approach puts conservation in the right places.

NRCS is targeting conservation assistance to critical resources through a number of landscape scale initiatives. In Wisconsin, the initiatives are allowing NRCS and partners to focus staff and financial assistance on water quality issues in selected priority watersheds.



## Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative

The Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative (DALCI) targets additional funding for erosion control and fish and wildlife habitat projects in the four-state area of Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota. In year two of the five year initiative, Wisconsin had applications for \$4.9 million, With \$1.7 million in funding, 150 applications funded.

## Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Lower Fox Phosphorus Reduction Priority Watersheds

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, a special sign up for farmers in the Lower Fox in the Green Bay area focuses on reducing phosphorus entering Lake Michigan. In FY14, Wisconsin obligated \$ 3,161,559 in 65 contracts covering 5,900 acres to farmers for phosphorus reduction in these targeted areas.

## Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

NRCS is working with conservation partners to combat invasive species, protect watersheds and shorelines from non-point source pollution, and restore wetlands and other habitat areas. NRCS is also working with Federal and local partners to measure the effects that conservation practices have on water quality. The overall strategy is to accelerate conservation practice implementation in each focus watershed, so that water quality actually improves downstream.

In FY14, Wisconsin obligated \$930,415 in 20 EQIP contracts covering 4,282 acres in these watersheds.

## Great Lakes Demonstration Farm Network

In collaboration with the Great Lakes Commissions and the Brown and Outagamie Land Conservation Departments, NRCS established a network of demonstration farms in the Lower Fox Watershed. In 2014, these farms installed leading edge conservation practices that reduce phosphorus runoff. These farms showcase the practices by conducting field days and tours for area farmers.

## **DALCI Success Story**

### **Pool, Riffle, Run . . . Pool, Riffle, Run ~ The Rhythm for Restoring Streams**

There is an art to restoring a stream which has been degraded through many years of pasturing, agriculture and sediment deposition. Getting the right combination of depth, flow, bottom, overhead cover, and bank shape takes skill and finesse.

Tony Pillow, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician and Brent Bergstrom, Project Director, Sauk County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department have been working to restore Bear Creek in southern Sauk County. They have provided the design and construction guidance for the instream and stream bank practices. Tony's mantra is Pool – Riffle – Run as the combination for best trout habitat. Pools are deep, 3 feet or more, with LUNKERS (wooden underwater structures) for best trout habitat.

With over 4.25 miles of contiguous stream restoration, Bear Creek may now be poised to jump to Class I status. In the two years prior to the restoration, monitoring showed an average of 71 brown trout per 100 yards; two years after showed a 40 percent increase, to 100 fish per 100 yards. That adds up to about 1,150 brown trout per mile of stream.

The key to Bear Creek success is putting together a corridor of adequate length to support the fishery. Once the first landowner's project got underway, neighboring landowners saw and wanted their segment of stream restored too.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provided the means to restore such a long stretch of stream. Over the course of three years, NRCS District Conservationist Chris Miller tapped into several EQIP funds for \$436,000 in contracts with three different landowners, between 2011 and 2014. Additional funds came from Sauk County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Dept., Trout Unlimited, other grants, as well as hundreds of hours of volunteer labor from the Aldo Leopold Trout Unlimited Chapter.



*Restoring a natural shape and flow involves reshaping streambanks, flattening the slopes to dissipate the high water energy after storms to avoid undercutting and sloughing of the banks. Inserting rock weirs will create pools behind, then riffles and a run of faster water to recreate the ideal trout habitat.*



*Caddis fly larvae prove that the water and conditions are right to produce invertebrates to feed the burgeoning fishery.*

## GLRI Success Story

### *From the Concrete to the Hypothetical - Putting the Pieces Together*

Dan Brick of Brickstead Dairy knows the stakes. He is fully aware of the water quality issues swirling around the dairy industry in Northeast Wisconsin. He is a conservation and community leader, and is committed to finding win-win solutions to maintain both environmental quality and the agricultural heritage of the area. He is working on the leading edge of many different fronts, from the concrete to the hypothetical.

#### Concrete

The 800 milking cows at Brickstead Dairy produce both milk and manure in abundance. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Dan recently invested in an additional 2.9 million gallon concrete manure storage structure to safely contain manure and milkhouse waste through the winter until it is safe to spread as fertilizer on the 900 acres of crop and hayland.

#### Cover Crops

Cover crops are a key part of Dan's conservation plan to reduce runoff of soil and nutrients from cropland. The cover crops utilize phosphorus, build organic matter, and improve water infiltration and holding capacity. Dan is continuously tweaking the seeding mix, timing and planting to get the best results.



*"We need to do our part here in the dairy industry. "We need to be ahead of the game. In five years, there will be cover crops on every piece of ground."*

*Dan Brick, Brickstead Dairy*

#### Monitoring

Brickstead Dairy is one of four special Demonstration Farms in the Fox River Watershed through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Dan agreed to be a demonstration farm because he wanted the opportunity to do the research and gather the data on nutrients and cover crops. He wanted to see real data on how different cover crop systems are reducing phosphorus in runoff, and also for tile drainage systems. As a demonstration farm, he can help build the data base needed to find out the best cover crop practices to reduce phosphorus loss.

#### Hypothetical

Dan is also participating in the Fox River Watershed Phosphorus Trading Pilot Project, with the Great Lakes Commission and Brown County Land and Water Conservation Department. Phosphorus Trading means that industries that produce phosphorus could buy credits from farmers who are reducing their phosphorus contribution to the watershed. It is lower cost for the industry to meet overall goals and helpful for the farmer. This pilot project is developing a model for how this could work in the real world of the Fox River Watershed.

## Special Initiatives for 2014



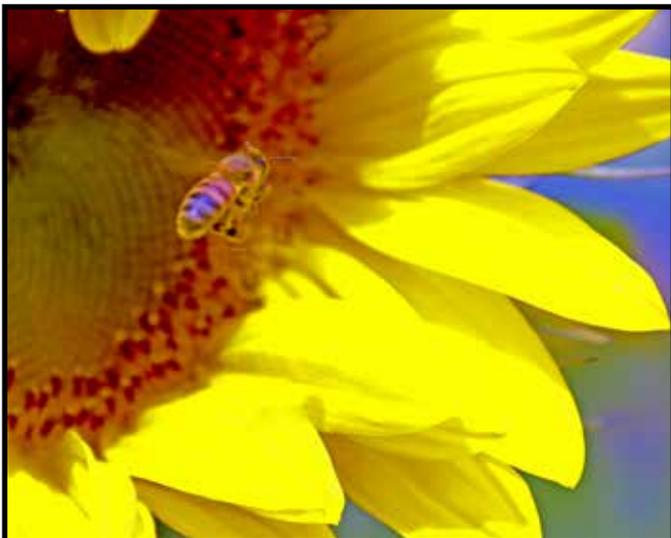
### Young Forest Initiative

The Young Forest Initiative is a special effort with American Bird Conservancy and others to build young forest habitat in 21 Northern Wisconsin counties. EQIP funded wildlife habitat projects for bird species that are in decline.



### Lake Superior Landscape Restoration Initiative

USDA has launched a joint NRCS-Forest Service Lake Superior Landscape Restoration Initiative to fund conservation work in select Lake Superior watersheds. Water quality, soil and forest health, and habitat restoration for Sharp-tailed Grouse, Coaster Brook Trout, and Golden-winged Warblers, are among the goals for the Partnership in the Beartrap-Nemadji and Bad-Montreal watersheds.



### Honey Bee Effort

NRCS provided technical and financial assistance in parts of five Midwestern states to help improve the health of bees, which play an important role in crop production.

The funding focused investment to improve pollinator health and is targeted in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

# Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) encourages agricultural and forest landowners to maintain existing conservation systems and make new conservation improvements such as improved soil health, better air and water quality practices, wildlife habitat management, or energy efficiency improvements.

NRCS coordinates its implementation of CSP with the other premier Farm Bill working lands program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). CSP and EQIP work in a complementary manner to address conservation issues associated with agricultural operations. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help land stewards install additional conservation practices. Eligible lands include private or tribal cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forest lands and other land in agricultural use. Participation in the program is voluntary.

Over 450 Wisconsin farmers and forest landowners enrolled in CSP in 2014. This is the fifth year this program has been open throughout Wisconsin. A great response from Wisconsin landowners comes as no surprise as Wisconsin has a strong conservation ethic and a long history of conservation.

Financial Assistance FY 14 = \$3,275,870  
New Contracts FY14 = 473 contracts  
Number of New Acres FY14 = 162,029

Total crop and pasture land acres enrolled in Wisconsin to date is 883,000 plus 108,000 acres of woodland (non-industrial private forestland) in 2700 contracts.

## CSP Success Story *Keeping Watch Over the Valley*



*“Thanks to Carlton Petersen and Todd Cockroft, NRCS staff in Richland Center, because they are the ones that got the wheels turning on this project,” says Calvin.  
“These projects would have not happened without the help of NRCS.”*  
**Calvin Sebranek**

*View of the Sebranek farm in Southwestern Wisconsin*

Calvin and Joyce Sebranek operate a 400 acre cash grain and beef farm in Richland County, in the Driftless Area of southwest Wisconsin. The farm has been in the family since 1942, with Calvin and Joyce taking over in 1985. With their three children, they now farm with a corn-soybean-hay rotation, and custom raise 80 Holstein heifers and 300 Holstein steers annually.

Conservation and environmental protection has always been a priority on the farm. In 1975, Calvin's dad constructed the first grade stabilization dam on the farm. Calvin initiated other practices, including no-till on cropland, with contour and conservation buffer strips. Through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Calvin completed a comprehensive nutrient management plan including the development of a 285acre nutrient management plan.

One long-term problem on the farm was the increasing loss of cropland due to the encroachment of eroding streambanks. Fancy Creek runs through

the most highly productive cropland on the farm. In recent years, several major storms and flash flooding have washed out streambanks, damaging cropland and the stream itself. Through the assistance of EQIP, approximately 5,400 feet of streambank protection and habitat improvement has been completed since 2008.

The streambank project was a huge success. A neighbor joined in on the project after seeing what Calvin was doing. Over a half mile of streambank is now protected in the valley, and trout are being spotted in this stretch of stream. Through CSP, Sebranek is credited with existing conservation work that protects soil and water quality, plus new conservation enhancements on the farm, such as harvesting hay in a manner that protects wildlife.

The farm is a family business. Calvin and Joyce have long believed in their duty to leave the land better for future generations and to inscribe a strong sense of sustainable farming and environmental protection for family and community.



*Severely eroding streambanks needing protection.*



*Wooden "lunkers" are placed in the stream to provide fish habitat.*



*Rocks are placed on top of the lunkers to hold them in place.*



*Final grading and placement of riprap on the streambank.*



## Beautifully restored streambank on Fancy Creek

# Easement Programs

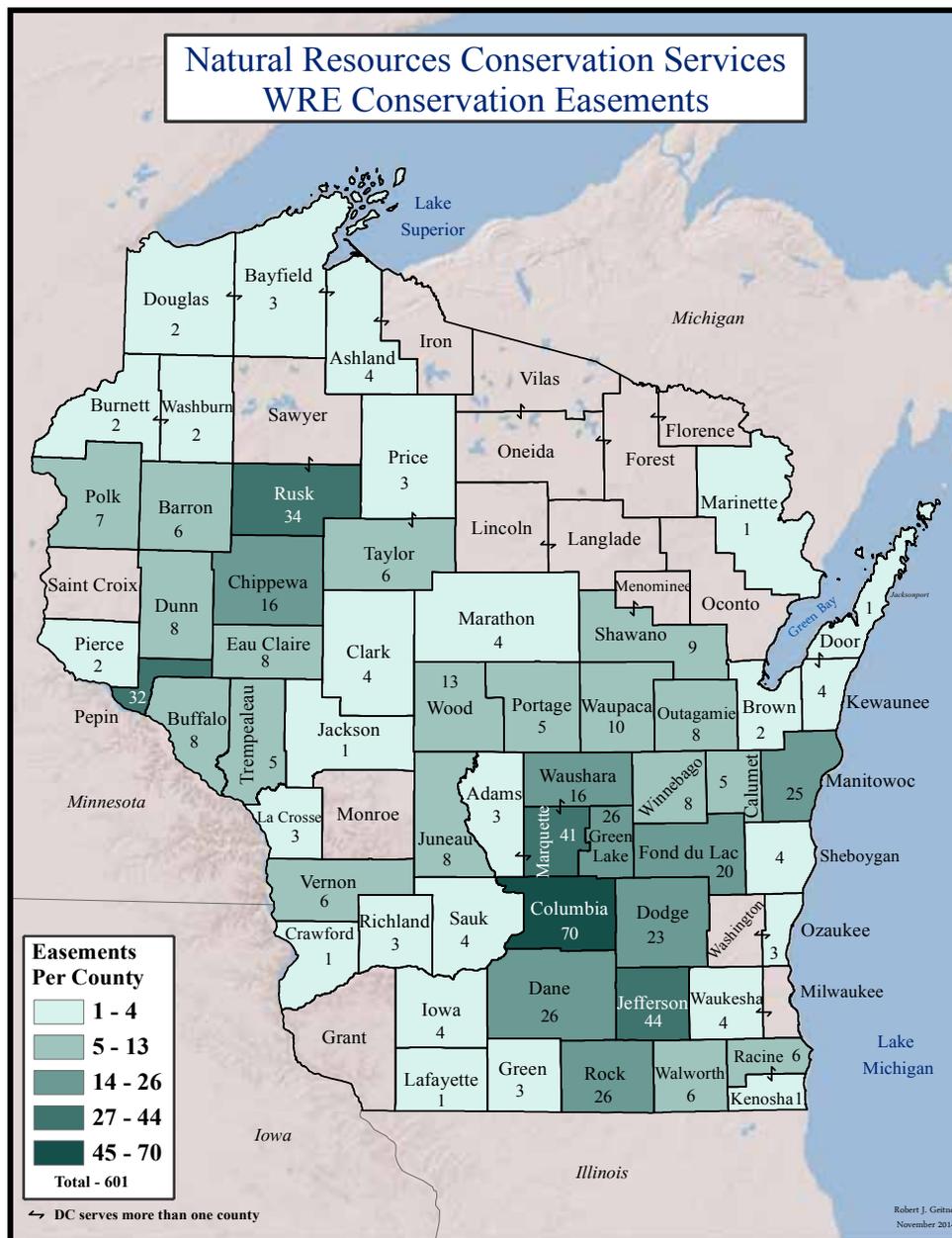
## Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) component, NRCS helps state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and Indian Tribes protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

In FY14, Wisconsin obligated 2.86 million\* in ACEP contracts covering 1300 acres in 17 easements.

\* Includes acquisitions, restoration and maintenance funds.

NRCS Wetlands Reserve Easements to date



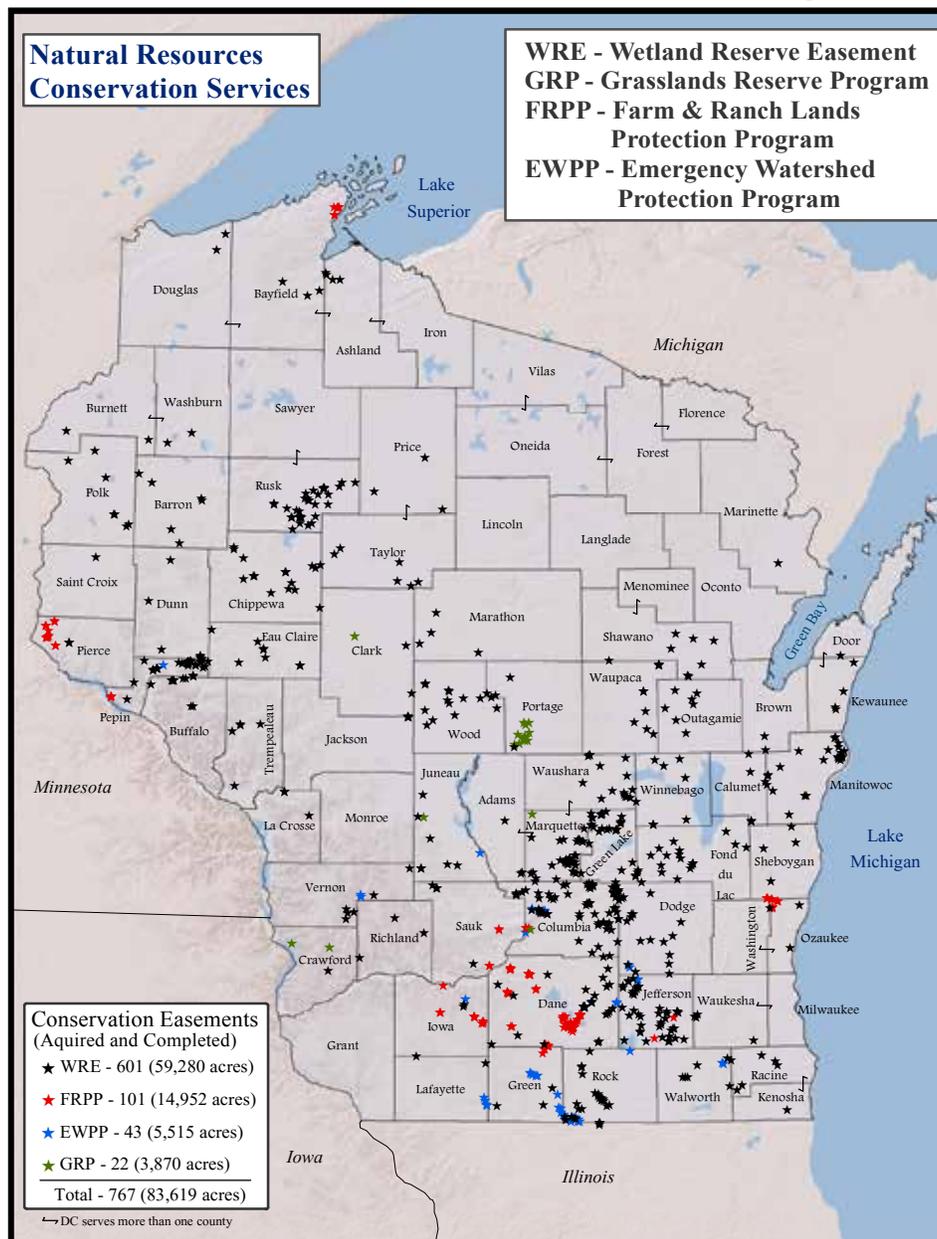
ACEP is a consolidation of three former programs – the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP).

ACEP has two components:

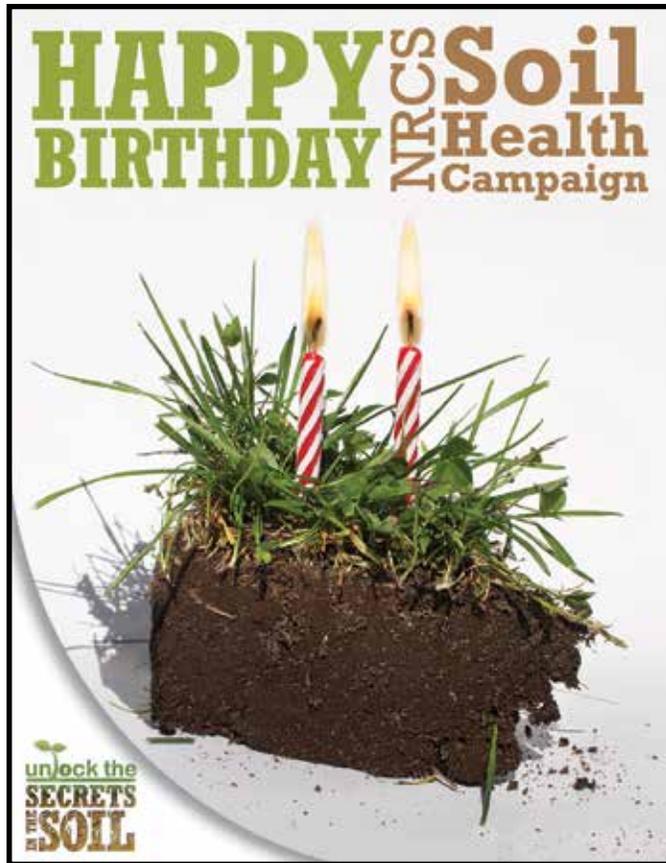
1. Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) component that combines FRPP and GRP.
2. The Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) which continues the functions of Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Not part of ACEP, the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) purchases easements in response to natural disasters and is intended to relieve imminent danger from those occurrences.

### NRCS Conservation Easements to date - All Programs



## Soils



NRCS knows that soil is the foundation of sustainable agriculture. Our educational campaign called “Unlock the Secrets in the Soil” is providing farmers with important information about caring for their soil resource. Healthy soils are important for several reasons. These soils are more productive and farmers optimize production, improving their bottom line. Environmentally, keeping the soil healthy keeps nutrients on the farm - not in the local waterways. It also holds water for living plants and reduces the chance of flooding by allowing the water to infiltrate into the soil.

The four key messages for healthy soil are:

1. Keep the soil covered as much as possible.
2. Disturb the soil as little as possible.
3. Keep plants growing throughout the year to feed the soil.
4. Diversify as much as possible using crop rotation and cover crops.



## NRCS is Celebrating Two Years of a Successful Soil Health Campaign

Since the kick-off of the national campaign in October 2012, the soil health effort has blossomed across the country with dozens of local, state and national stakeholder groups teaming up to help mobilize this growing movement.

Local workshops, field days and demonstrations on the basics and benefits of soil health and cover crops were conducted throughout the year, in nearly every state by a wide range of producer groups and stakeholder groups, as well as the NRCS.

Thanks to the on-going work of our dedicated conservation community, and to the ingenuity, innovation, and skill of our nation’s farmers, there is renewed energy and excitement in harvesting the many on- and off-farm benefits of improving the health of our nation’s soil.

In a recent message to employees and stakeholder groups, NRCS Chief Jason Weller wrote: *“NRCS’s soil health campaign was not created to make a splash, it was created to make a difference. And thanks to all of you, we are making a profound difference across the landscapes of this great nation — today and for generations to come.”* Jason Weller, Chief, NRCS

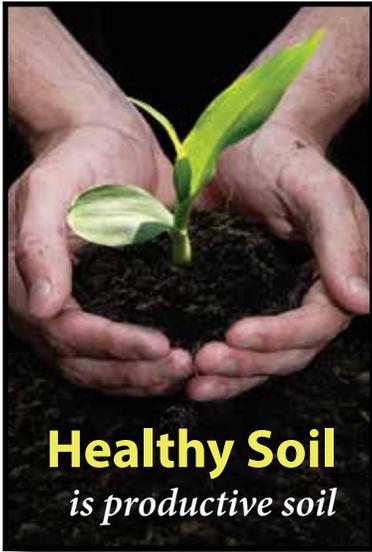
NRCS Soil Health Information can be found at:  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health/)

# Cover Crops

A special signup for cover crops was offered in 2014 to encourage landowners to plant cover crops. It brought a terrific response from across the state with 468 eligible applications received. In this special signup all high priority applications were funded totaling \$1.6 million in financial assistance covering 25,000 acres.

“We had an absolutely overwhelming response to the special pilot cover crop signup,” said Jimmy Bramblett, State Conservationist in Wisconsin. “Farmers are rapidly moving to try cover crops to start re-building the health of the soil. We are excited to see so many farmers interested in pursuing the health and sustainability of our farm land.”

In total in FY14, \$2.9 million for all EQIP applications that included cover crops on 55,000 acres.



## Success Story ~ Soil Health and Cover Crop Field Day

A field day held at the Van Wychen Farm in Brown County in October explored cover crop species, planting rates and management considerations. Conservation professionals from NRCS, Brown County Land and Water Conservation Dept. and UW-Extension demonstrated the conservation benefits and soil health improvements that can be gained from keeping soil protected and under cover.

George Van Wychen has been farming since 1977, and planting cover crops for 15 years. His farm is now part of a farm network to demonstrate leading-edge conservation practices to reduce phosphorus runoff in their watershed.

“I have a passion for healthy soil. I don’t want to see brown creeks and runoff from tilled fields in the spring,” says George. “I am proud of my farm and want to show what we’ve done with cover crops, erosion control, and building healthy soils here.

We want to help get the word out to other farmers, and figure out new and better ways to farm and protect our water and environment,” says George. “We’re trying new things. There is lots of interest; we get questions from

other farmers.”

The Van Wychens will continue building the health of the soil and sharing what they’ve learned to help others see the benefits of good conservation.



*Crimson clover is a popular choice for a cover crop.*



*George Van Wychen (R) and Jason Firster, Soil Conservationist with NRCS, examine the soil profile, investigating the root depth of radishes during the field day.*

# Outreach

2014 was a successful year for NRCS outreach efforts.

In Wisconsin, some of the activities include:

- 2014 Farm Technology Days in Portage County - the largest annual farm show in the state.
- World Dairy Expo - International event attracting world wide participation
- Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service Conference - largest event in the U.S. about organic and sustainable farming
- State FFA Conference- boasts 19,000 members in Wisconsin
- Growing Power International Urban Ag Conference - building healthy and resilient community based food systems
- Earth Day Conference - in conjunction with the UW - Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies
- Pheasants Forever National Conference
- Farm Bureau Conference
- Grassworks Grazing Conference
- Wisconsin Wetlands Association Conference
- Great Lakes Conference
- Many other local events and fairs

Outreach is part of NRCS' daily business. We work to ensure that programs and services are made accessible to all customers, while placing special emphasis on those who may be under-served. Historically, under-served audiences have included minorities, tribes, women, the disabled, new farmers, veteran farmers, limited resource farmers and small-scale farmers. Outreach involves understanding under-served customers and their needs, learning how best to communicate with various groups, earning the trust and acceptance of under-served customers, and developing partnerships and working relationships.

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## ***Farm Technology Days - Stevens Point August 2014***



NRCS had a major presence, with a Soils Pit, and two informational displays in the Conservation Tent and Progress Pavilion Tent. Melissa Knipfel and Kevin Halvorson from NRCS, along with the Portage County, Land Conservation and UWEX organized the exhibitors for the Conservation Tent. This year, 23 different exhibitors had informational displays in the Conservation Tent. Phil Meyer, Area Resource Soil Scientist, took lead with the Soils Pit – featuring the soils of the host site. Betsy Doolittle, Area Resource Conservationist, was instrumental in Cover Crop demonstrations.



## ***Wisconsin High School Land Judging Competition***

The 2014 State FFA/4-H Land Judging Competition was held in Portage County during Farm Technology Days, near Amherst, Wisconsin. This year there were 13 Senior and 9 Junior teams from across the state. Todd Mau, Phil Meyer and Melissa Knipfel took lead on this project. This year's winner was the Senior Team from Pecatonica High School. They will represent Wisconsin at the National Land Judging competition in Oklahoma, May 5-7, 2015.

## ***Professional Development Workshops for Women in Conservation***

Two workshops for Workshop for Conservation Professionals: Techniques to Reach a New Audience, the Non-operator Women Farmowner, were held in Madison, March 19 and Sept 22, 2014.

The workshops focused on improving conservation outreach to non-operator female farmland owners in Wisconsin. This growing but often under-served audience is crucial to increasing the adoption of conservation practices on all types of farmland in the state. The workshops were conducted by the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN), a non-profit organization based in Iowa that has been doing research on conservation and women landowners for the past decade. Funding is provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service through a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).

The women conservationists participating in these training workshops will organize Learning Circles for women landowners in their areas. Three were held in southwest Wisconsin in April, 2014, and 3-6 will be held in other areas of the state in spring, 2015.



*Participants in the September workshop learned best practices for organizing and conducting a conservation tour.*

## Earth Team

Earth Team volunteers choose us. They believe in us, our mission and the benefits we offer the environment. They choose to work alongside us on our conservation projects. They do this for the experience, the self-satisfaction, to help the environment and for a hundred other reasons.

The Earth Team/NRCS partnership works. It is a great example of cooperative conservation that results in environmental benefits everyone can enjoy. NRCS applauds their hard work, dedication, and commitment to improving our nation's land, air and water.

In 2014, 60 Earth Team volunteers in Wisconsin invested 4,000 hours of their time to NRCS, our mission and to our customers.







NRCS helps protect the environment,  
preserve the nation's natural resources and  
improve agricultural sustainability through  
voluntary conservation of private lands.

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