

Cost Share Opportunities

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, more commonly known as the Farm Bill, contains unprecedented support for environmental stewardship and the conservation of working lands. These programs include:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: The Farm Bill added 4.6 billion dollars to this conservation cost share program. Landowners can receive from 75%-90% cost share on conservation practices including waste storage structures, livestock fencing, and a variety of other practices.

Conservation Reserve Program: The Farm Bill increased the acreage caps, allowing more enrollment in this program. Landowners may receive funding to install grass waterways and plant fields for a conservation use, receiving annual payments.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program: The legislation reauthorized this popular program that reimburses landowners up to 75% for creating wildlife habitat including creating wetlands, prairie plantings, and other improvements. This program is available to all landowners.

Wetland Reserve Program: The legislation increased the acreage caps on this program from 975,000 to 2.275 million acres. Landowners are able to receive compensation for conservation easements placed on streams. Funds are also available for easements and construction costs on wetland restoration sites. The program was recently changed in Ohio to allow for up to \$2,000 per acre reimbursement for these conservation easements. Farm and non-farm landowners are eligible for this program.

Farmland Protection Program: The Farm Bill reauthorized this effort to place agricultural easements on working lands. In Ohio, this effort works on tandem with the state farmland preservation program.

Cost share opportunities mentioned are available to all land and farm owners in Geauga County including nurseries, horse stables, dairy farms, grain farms, and hay farms. Landowners who are interested in installing a conservation practice are encouraged to contact the Geauga SWCD at 440-834-1122 or the NRCS at 1-888-217-3947.



Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District

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Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District

Conservation Basics of Land Management

A Best Management Practices Guide for Landowners

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Soil Erosion

Erosion is the wearing away of the soil by water, wind, ice, and other forces. Soil erosion is currently the greatest threat to the Nation's soil productivity and the largest source of pollutants in our waterways.

There are 74 different soil types found in Geauga County. Most soils can only sustain 2-3 tons per acre of soil loss every year to keep long term production. Many things play a role in soil loss, but none more important than the amount of cover on the soil surface.

Most soil loss occurs on fields with clean tillage and poor residue cover, like silage ground. Many practices help reduce erosion levels and can save nutrients over winter.

Cover Crops

Oats, Wheat, Rye, Barley, and other cover crops are an excellent practice to limit soil loss on silage ground and save nitrogen on fields. For example, soil loss will be reduced from 7 to 4 tons per acre, per year on silage ground where a cover crop is planted.

Contour Farming

Planting on the contour and using strip crops will reduce soil loss by half or more.



Crop Rotation

A rotation that includes several years of hay will help balance the soil lost in the row crop years.

Conservation Tillage

Leaving crop residue on the fields at planting will cut soil loss in half or more.

Grass Waterways

All fields have drainage patterns that concentrate water. Some drainageways have enough water flow to wash out yearly and form gullies. Shaping and seeding these areas to fescue/wheat, or other grass cover will stabilize the drainageway.



Managing Nutrients

Controlling soil erosion helps control nutrients. Every time soil is lost, phosphorus, nitrogen and other nutrients are lost as well.

Keeping nutrients at adequate levels without over applying will also keep the applied nutrients on the field. Excess nutrients are easily carried off the field to the nearest waterway by stormwater runoff.



Soil Testing

One of the best things a landowner can do is test the soil on his or her fields. This includes crop fields as well as pastures. When nutrients like phosphorus have high test levels, additions of more phosphorus is wasting money and can have harmful impacts on the quality of our waters.

Once soil test results are obtained and levels are known, corrective applications of some nutrients can be added and others levels brought down by crop removal over several years.

Testing levels of soil and manure will also help manage nutrients from manure. In general, one dairy cow will provide enough phosphorus for 2 acres of silage. Specific recommendations are based on soil test levels and crop rotations.

Soil tests and nutrient management will also improve pastures. Pastures are probably the least managed working lands in the county. With proper fertility and grazing management, the carrying capacity and production of pastures can be dramatically improved.

Soil test bags are available through local fertilizer dealers, Penn State University, and the Ohio State University Extension Office. To obtain manure or soil test kits call 814-863-0841, or the Extension Office at 440-834-4656.



Protecting Water Resources

"Is the water leaving my farm as clean as the water that enters it?" If your answer is "NO", then maybe you should consider utilizing some of the following conservation practices.

Buffers and Setbacks

Grass buffer strips along drainageways are an excellent practice to capture both sediment and nutrients leaving a field. Buffers range from 20 feet on flat ground to greater widths on steep lands. Buffers can be used as a turn area and harvested for hay. Buffers are a very cost-effective practice used to keep clean water.

Setbacks for manure spreading are also very important. Manure application should be limited to 33 feet from drainageways and up to 100 feet in winter. Manure applications in winter should only be completed on hay ground or fields with good residue, (never silage ground), to prevent runoff.

Excluding Livestock

All livestock, including horses, given free roam in a creek bed will largely destroy that portion of the creek. These animals can destroy streambanks and pollute a stream someone else may depend on.

Electric and high tensile fencing along with other options are often used to restrict animal access to several areas where a stone crossing is constructed. Cows and other animals are able to water without causing significant pollution. Off-stream watering devices are also used.

Treatment of Milkhouse, Parlor Waste and Silage Water

These wastes can cause very significant impacts to streams and creeks. These wastes need to be captured and either field applied or treated on the farm.

Manure Storage Structures

Waste storage structures may fit well into farm operations to limit spreading to when fields are fit for spreading, reducing compaction.