



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2110 W. Park Court, Suite C
Champaign, IL 61821

217-352-3536 ext 3 □ www.ccswcd.com

June 9, 2020

Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District Summary of Operations

The support from the Champaign County Board is used to protect water quality, maintain drainage, protect natural resources, develop wildlife habitat and provide educational opportunities for the residents of Champaign County. As in the past, these funds will be leveraged to gain additional grant funds to further support the overall conservation effort in the county. These grants bring significant funding that is spent in Champaign County, but often do not include funding to support overhead costs.

At this time, funding from the State of Illinois, through the Department of Agriculture, remains variable. In FY16, the District received \$0.00 from the State of Illinois. In FY20, money for operations arrived in the final month of the fiscal year. County Board support and funding are essential to continue the coordination of all conservation programs administered by the Champaign County SWCD.

The District partners with state and federal agencies to bring conservation projects to the county. Many of these programs involve incentive payments or cost share funding and/or annual rental rates for land that is taken out of production and used for conservation purposes. Other opportunities the District embraces to help support county conservation efforts are highlighted below.

Working with the County:

- Assisting the County by serving on various committees.
- Providing assistance to the County Land Resource Management Plan Technical Committee.
- Providing assistance to the Municipal Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) group with Champaign, Urbana, Savoy, the University of Illinois and the County. This includes assisting with the planning and execution of the Boneyard Cleanup and the MS4 Green Infrastructure conference that was held in July 2019.
- Providing watershed planning and coordination for 5 watersheds with emphasis on the Salt Fork Watershed (40% of the county). This planning, implementation and data in the Salt Fork and Embarrass Watersheds has been the backbone for several U of I grants for improving water quality. An integral part is maintaining the USGS Gaging Stations, in which there are three streamgages and one nitrate gage. The cost is over \$58,000 per year. The City of Champaign, the City of Urbana, the U-C Sanitary District, USGS, and the CCSWCD are regular financial contributors in order to keep these vital gaging stations in operation.

- Providing Natural Resource Reports to the County Planning and Zoning office concerning new rural subdivisions and zoning changes. We also help Champaign, Urbana and some villages with the same service.
- Assisting with CREP and Agriculture Easements. These create conservation easements for properties along streams that provide water quality enhancements and help protect prime farmland.
- Providing technical assistance to install and maintain filter strips along streams and ditches. We now have 73% of the streambanks in the county protected so water from adjacent areas is filtered through trees or grass before entering the stream or ditch. Many of these buffers are enrolled in 10-year contracts that are available for re-enrollment. We are working with producers and their conservation plans and contracts to ensure our streambanks stay protected.
- Assisting drainage districts with technical information and cost share programs to keep soils productive and minimize flooding.
- Providing pond meetings for citizens and homeowner's associations to help them manage their ponds.
- Offering a reliable and consistent source of fish for pond stockings.
- Helping introduce new agricultural techniques to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality (i.e. cover crops, strip-till and nutrient management plans).
- Educating farm owners and operators on Cover Crops and Conservation Cropping Systems through multiple meetings and field days. Grant monies from the IEPA 319 Nutrient and Sidedress Bar Grant have aided these efforts. Cover Crop Champion grants in both 2019 and 2020 are utilized for educational meetings, including an upcoming Lady Landowner/Operator event.
- Providing cost share for farmers to reduce erosion and improve water quality through the Conservation Practices Program. Cover crops, strip-till and water well decommissioning are a few of the available practices. This is an ongoing program that has provided over \$58,000 in incentive payments and helped seal 85 abandoned water wells.
- Working to reduce nutrient runoff into streams and ditches as outlined in the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS). To aid in these efforts, the Soil and Water Stewardship Committee, comprised of SWCD board members and local experts and business professionals developed a tool to assist farm operators and land owners in evaluating their nutrient and soil loss management practices on individual fields. The purpose of S.T.A.R. (Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources) is to motivate those making cropping decisions to use the "best management practices" that will ultimately meet the goals of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The S.T.A.R. evaluation system is becoming a statewide model and has been adopted by 70 counties in Illinois and 2 counties in Indiana, while Iowa and Missouri have started to implement the initiative state-wide. For the 2019 crop year, S.T.A.R. had 214 participants and 1,175 fields were evaluated.
- Assisting the Illinois Department of Agriculture with their Conservation Cropping Initiative. Part of this includes hosting at least three yearly Conservation Cropping Seminars that migrate across the state and featured speakers and panel discussions at the Farm Progress Show.
- Providing educational information through the Envirothon competition, Rainfall Simulator Unit for schools, and presentation opportunities. Our youth education efforts reached over 500 students last year.

- Managing and continuing development of the St. Joseph Wetland Restoration and Education site and the Barnhart Prairie site, both located in the county. In March 2019, amenity grants from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation were awarded for both the prairie and wetland. A new gate will be installed at the prairie while the wetland will get viewing binoculars. Partnerships with the Village of St. Joseph, Champaign County Forest Preserve and the Township continue as the education center has a gravel base and will get a paver sidewalk and benches this year. The wetland will also be connected to the rails to trails bike path, and through a partnership with Magnolia Land Partners and the USDA-NRCS, restoration work on the acres south of Highway 150 has begun. This area will be restored to a forested wetland; the trees were planted in the 2018 winter and crews are working to control invasive species this year.
- A partnership with Illinois Corn Growers continues in conjunction to the Precision Conservation Management (PCM) Program. The Illinois Corn Growers Association and 30 other conservation partners, have been selected to receive \$5.3 million to develop the new program to address the goals in the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. PCM will assist producers with farm business planning related to conservation practices as well as provide assistance with NRCS program enrollment and provide anonymous representation of farmers' conservation efforts to demonstrate good stewardship and continuous improvement in water quality and soil health practices.
- The Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP) and the district have secured two grants to assist landowners with the removal of invasive species. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant is helping the HIPP partners organize and develop a strong and secure cooperative weed management area. The NRCS-RCPP grant will bring \$380,000 to area landowners and operators to write and implement Forest Management Plans.

Current CCSWCD Board Members:

Joe Rothermel, Broadlands – Chairman
 Steve Stierwalt, Sadorus – Vice Chairman
 Eric Suits, Penfield – Treasurer
 Eleanor Blackmon, Ogden
 Lennie Heiser, Dewey

Current Staff:

Erin Bush, Resource Conservationist
 Renee Weitekamp, Administrative Coordinator (part-time)
 Hannah McDonald, Conservation Coordinator
 Bruce Henrikson, S.T.A.R. Program Coordinator (part-time)
 Clay Bess, Precision Conservation Specialist

The Champaign County Soil and Water District board and employees sincerely appreciate the loyal support of the County Board. We understand these are challenging fiscal times for all our organizations and the community. We are grateful the county has a continued commitment to watershed efforts and pursuing positive conservation of natural resources. Your financial support will assist the CCSWCD in our partnership with the county to facilitate current and future and conservation efforts within Champaign County.

Sincerely,

Joe Rothermel

Joe Rothermel
 Chairman CCSWCD Board



June 8, 2020

Darlene Kloepel
Champaign County
1776 E Washington St.
Urbana, IL 61802

Dear Ms. Kloepel,

This letter is to affirm American Farmland Trust's (AFT) support of the Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) in their efforts to maintain continued cooperation with Champaign County.

The CCSWCD has a demonstrated record working in soil and water conservation, soil health, water quality, cover cropping, nutrient loss mitigation and economics of conservation through different programs, workshops, events, and partnerships in Champaign County. This aligns with AFT's mission of saving the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land.

AFT works with the CCSWCD in several ways, including the Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources Today (S.T.A.R.) Initiative and outreach to nonoperating landowners to assist with conservation practice implementation, among other efforts. Without the partnership with CCSWCD, farmers and community members in Champaign County would not have the technical assistance or resources, including funds, to adopt needed conservation that protects our watersheds' water, soil, and habitat.

We would look forward to working with the CCSWCD now and in the future to integrate our expertise to stimulate the adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches in collaboration with agricultural producers.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kris Reynolds

Kris Reynolds
Midwest Director
American Farmland Trust

June 8, 2020

Darlene Kloeppe
Champaign County
1776 E Washington St.
Urbana, IL 61802

Dear Ms. Kloeppe,

This letter is to affirm Rademacher Farm's support of the Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD) in their efforts to maintain continued cooperation with Champaign County.

The CCSWCD has a demonstrated record working in soil and water conservation, soil health, water quality, cover cropping, nutrient loss mitigation and economics of conservation through different programs, workshops, events, and partnerships in Champaign County. This aligns with Rademacher Farm's mission of farming in a more environmentally conscious manner, and helping others do the same.

CCSWCD has been instrumental to Rademacher Farm's adoption of sustainable practices by their outreach/educational programs and aid with securing financial assistance. In fact, it was a CCSWCD meeting that first inspired us to start making drastic changes to our operation, ultimately leading to us eliminating tillage, and reducing fertilizer and chemical use. Without the partnership with CCSWCD, farmers and community members in Champaign County would not have the technical assistance or resources, including funds, to adopt needed conservation that protects our watersheds' water, soil, and habitat.

We would look forward to working with the CCSWCD now and in the future to integrate our expertise to stimulate the adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches in collaboration with agricultural producers.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at (217) 530-5572 or fnrademacher@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Frank Rademacher
Rademacher Farms

Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District

Chairman
Joe Rothermel
Broadlands, IL

Vice-Chairman
AISWCD President
Steve Stierwalt
Sadorus, IL

Sec/Treas
Eric Suits
Penfield, IL

Board Member
Eleanor Blackmon
Ogden, IL

Board Member
Lennie Heiser
Dewey, IL



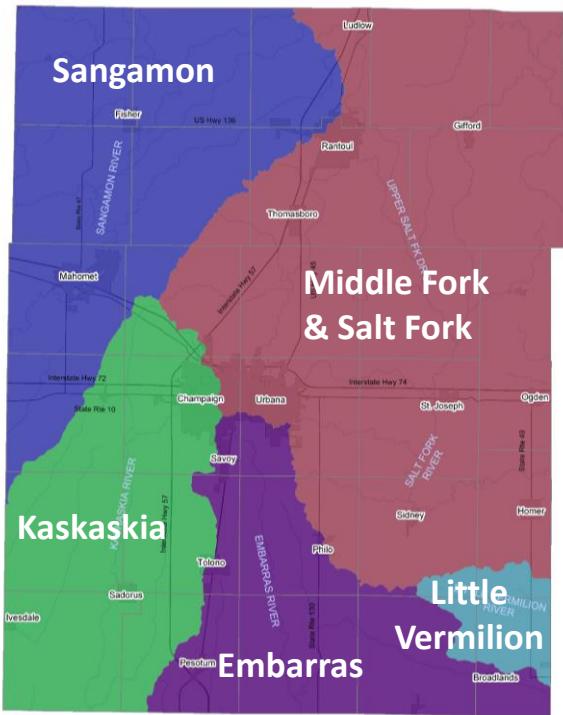
Provide leadership and coordinate programs to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources

Local and Non-regulatory unit of government established April 12, 1943

Led by a 5 member volunteer board of directors elected by landowners and occupiers of Champaign County



FY20 Priorities



Soil Erosion

- Keep Soil and Nutrients in Place



Water Quality

- Headwaters—Planning & Implementation
- Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy
- Efforts to Keep Drinking Water Clean



Sangamon: Working on IEPA319 grant for \$278,000; NWQI process started

Salt Fork: Active Watershed Group; gaging station operation continues

Embaras: Regenerative Grazing Project; watershed update

Kaskaskia: Seeking funds for watershed plan



The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (Illinois NLRS or the strategy), released in July 2015, was followed by the first biennial report released in August 2017. Since that time, strategy partners in the Policy Working Group and several other working groups—guided by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Illinois Department of Agriculture, and University of Illinois—have continued to provide considerable support and focus to advance nutrient loss reduction. This Illinois NLRS Biennial Report 2017–18 provides a summary of these efforts.

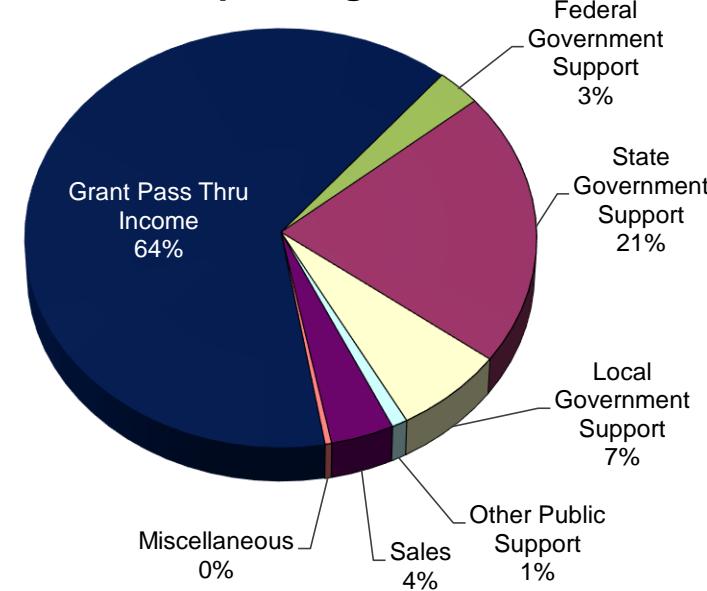
Snapshot of FY 2019

Over 60% of our income is Pass Through Monies – Money coming into the Champaign County economy for farmers, businesses & jobs

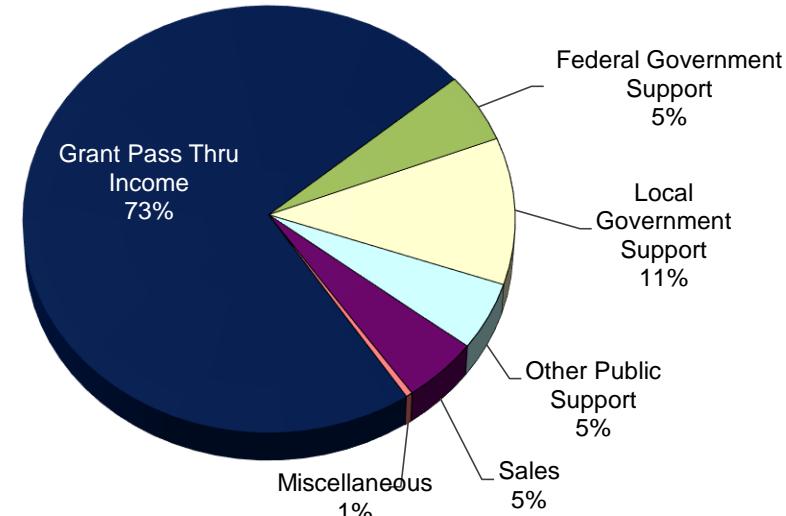
- Partners for Conservation \$23,000. Over \$580,000 since inception (ongoing project)
- IL Corn Growers Precision Conservation Management \$60,000 (ongoing project)
- Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership funding through the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation \$26,000 of the \$75,000 grant
- IEPA 319 Nutrient grant \$100,000 of the \$490,000 grant
- National Wildlife Federation Cover Crop Champion \$8,000 of a \$10,000 grant

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District Income from Grants & Operating Funds



Income from Grants & Operating Funds
FY20 through 5/31/20





Involvement

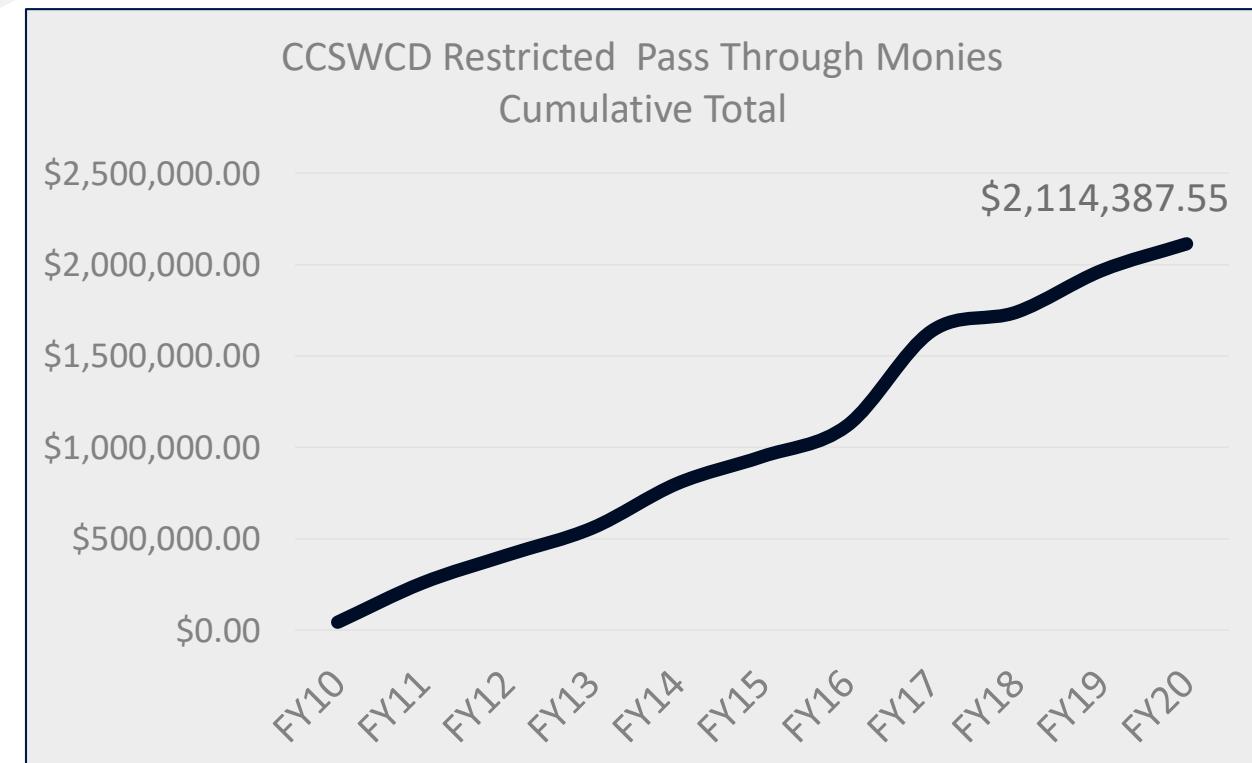
- Champaign County Stormwater Partnership (MS4)
- Boneyard Creek Community Day
- CC Regional Planning Commission
- Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP)
- S.T.A.R. & progressive web app
- Natural Resource Reports
- Youth & Adult Education
 - Family Cover Crop BBQ
 - Envirothon
 - Rainfall Simulator
 - Barnhart & St. Joseph Wetland Restoration & Education



Return on Investment

- Farmer Incentives for Cover Crops and Strip-till
- Streambank Protection
- Sealing abandoned water wells
- Assist USDA with Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that contributes over \$2,500,000 annually to area farmers for conservation practices
- Assist USDA NRCS with Conservation Programs that contribute over \$200,000 to area farmers.

For \$35,500/year since FY10, the district has provided a minimum return of \$2,114,000, plus provided jobs and good & services to residents.





New & Upcoming

- IEPA 319 Big Ditch \$278,000 (cost share plus one job for 2 years)
- Lumpkin Family Foundation Grant for Regenerative Grazing \$15,000
- The Nature Conservancy \$26,000 for S.T.A.R. progressive web app and coordinator position
- NWF Cover Crop Champion \$8,000 for education events
- Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership RCPP over \$380,000 for landowners and operators
- Lady Landowner and Operator Event
- IL Clean Energy Community Foundation Amenities and Education at St. Joseph Wetland and Barnhart Prairie
- S.T.A.R. local participation and overall expansion
- This current total of \$640,000+ is future pass through dollars into the county. Most likely to increase with submitted and future grant applications

- We provide services and have resources that no one else in the county has.
- By leveraging county funds, we actively pursue grants that help fuel the Champaign County economy.
- State funding is unreliable. We were 11 months into our fiscal year before receiving Illinois operations money. Having reliable annual support from the County helps sustain our district employees so we can continue to provide the above.
- The County Board has been an indispensable partner in watershed & conservation efforts!

Thank You
Champaign County SWCD

www.ccswcd.com

