



County Conservationists: Our First Line of Defense Against Water Pollution

County Conservationists serve as our first line of defense against water pollution. The staff of County Soil and Water Conservation Departments help

implement critical programs that prevent manure, fertilizer, sediment, and other chemicals from entering our waterways. Some of the important services County Conservationists provide to keep our water safe and free of contaminants include:

- Providing essential water testing and monitoring services.
- Helping farmers design and construct manure storage facilities.
- Helping establish conservation cropping practices.
- Aiding in nutrient management planning.
- Assisting landowners in finding cost-share funds for conservation work.



Fertilizer, manure, and other pollutants cause massive algae blooms, making our lakes stinky and unsafe for fishing and swimming.

Ask your legislator: Will you support restoring funding for County Conservation staff?



How the Program Works

Soil and Water Conservation Departments are so central to Wisconsin's natural resource management that the departments' funding is written into Wisconsin Statute. Under that statute, each county is entitled to an average of three County Conservationists with a goal that the state will fund:

- 100% of the first position
- 70% of the second position
- 50% of each subsequent position

The state's share of this commitment has never been realized. Instead, it has decreased in recent budgets. At the same time, County Conservation staff have been given new responsibilities, leaving them increasingly underfunded.

What's at Stake

Governor Walker's proposed budget would reduce staff funding to county Soil and Water Conservation Departments by \$800,000 per year (\$1.6 million total). This would have lasting impacts on our first line of defense, putting at risk our lakes, rivers, and drinking water, by:

- Reducing the number of County Conservation staff providing soil and water conservation services to counties – and farmers – across the state.
- Limiting counties' ability to support local conservation efforts.
- Reducing the state's ability to monitor soil and water pollution.



County Conservationists in Action



*Facility upgrades on Randy Nierling's farm.
Photo credit: Monroe County*

Bob Micheel is the County Conservationist for the Monroe County Land Conservation Department (LCD) in the heart of the driftless region. Monroe County is also home to Randy Nierling's rabbit-breeding farm.

When Randy was in the early stages of building and expanding his operation, he reached out to the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for an operating loan. Because of manure concerns, the FSA asked that the LCD get involved.

Manure from Randy's 5,000 rabbits – which is about the same amount of waste as 25 dairy cows – was exiting the barn in a slow-moving mass, burning the grass and releasing pungent odors on its way.

Bob and NRCS engineer Amanda Crowe found that the manure was moving toward a ditch adjacent to the road. In a heavy rainfall, it could quickly reach Lemonweir Creek, which feeds into Lake Tomah.

They worked with Randy and, thanks to their assistance, Randy was able to upgrade his facility, build enough manure storage capacity for 10,000 rabbits, and secure his operating loan. The new storage also reduced odors and prevented waste from oozing into Lemonweir Creek. The farm, creek, and community all benefitted from the skill and problem solving of Wisconsin conservation professionals.