



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DIVISION

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Updates from the Washington State Department of Agriculture's (WSDA) Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences (NRAS) Program

We're excited to report several projects completed in collaboration with conservation districts and the State Conservation Commission (SCC) during the 2023-2025 biennium:

1. Climate Smart Equipment Grants

With one-time funds from the legislature, WSDA distributed an extra \$1m to applicants of Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) who did not receive awards due to a shortage in funds. Through WSDA's Climate Smart Equipment Grant Program, 24 eligible SFF applicants were contacted and 12 producers ultimately awarded. Funded projects include reduced tillage equipment, tractor GPS units, electric manure scrapers, and drone pesticide applicators.

2. CTD and WSDA Soils Curriculum

For years, conservation district staff have been waitlisted for limited seats in the NRCS Soil Health Course. This delays how quickly a CD staff can receive their planner accreditation, and keeps soil health knowledge behind a paywall. To address this gap, WSDA soil scientists have partnered with the Center for Technical Development (CTD) to produce *Soils 101: Learning Soil Science to Build Soil Health*. This course will be available to CD staff, as well as farmers, agronomists, and interested members of the public. In a recent MOU, NRCS approved the course as an equivalent to theirs, and will issue planner credits to eligible CD staff who complete the CTD curriculum. The course is currently [available for beta-testing](#), with a planned release for early 2026.

3. Groundwater Nitrate Testing

WSDA launched a new groundwater monitoring program in 2023 to detect pesticides and nutrients in regional aquifers. Through strong partnerships with local CD staff, sample collection has begun in the Pasco and Walla Walla basins. Working together, WSDA, local health jurisdictions, and CD staff connect study participants with high nitrate concentrations to alternative drinking water programs. This project aims to improve local health and environmental outcomes while supporting VSP monitoring goals. The sampling program will expand to new regions in Fall 2026. Learn more at agr.wa.gov/groundh20monitor

4. Education and Outreach for Upcoming Pesticide Changes

In many cases, new EPA requirements will mandate the use of conservation practices to mitigate the runoff and drift of pesticide applications. Through collaboration between staff from WSDA, CDs, and NRCS, trainings and surveys were held in the Palouse region to understand grower needs. These efforts have made clear that Palouse farmers—due to geographic conditions and the use of practices such as reduced till—largely meet or exceed the new EPA requirements. Additional trainings and listening

sessions will be held as EPA releases more information about their pesticide runoff and drift mitigation menus. Visit <http://agr.wa.gov/agscience> or contact anickelson@agr.wa.gov for more information.

5. Washington Soil Health Initiative and STAR

The Washington Soil Health Initiative (WaSHI) is a statewide partnership between WSDA, SCC, and Washington State University. WaSHI has been hard at work building tools and resources to make it easier to promote soil health among the districts, including a website to [automatically print customized soil health reports](#) when you upload your soils data, and our annual conference [SoilCon](#), back in February 2026. [Subscribe to the quarterly WaSHI newsletter](#) to stay up to date.

The STAR conservation assessment tool is live! Enrollment is currently open for producers of grains and legumes, juice and wine grapes, and tree fruit, and will open soon for vegetable and root crops. If you're a farmer, visit startool.ag to enroll today! Or, contact the STAR team at WaSHI@agr.wa.gov if you're a CD interested in using STAR with your farmers or in your VSP monitoring, or if you're a processor, packer, or food company interested in using STAR to green your supply chain.