



The Washington State Department of Agriculture
Office of the Director

Washington State Department of Agriculture Partner Report for the Washington Association of Conservation Districts

The information below provides a few agency highlights and a summary of conservation activities that the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and Conservation Districts (CDs) have worked together on in 2022:

International Marketing. COVID-19 repercussions have continued to impact Washington food and agriculture exporters in 2022 due to ongoing shipping challenges resulting from container shortages, port congestion and high shipping rates. With travel restrictions still in-place for most countries through the first half of the year, and uncertainty around when restrictions would be lifted, 2022 was a challenge for the WSDA International Marketing Program. The program conducted a total of 31 trade activities during the year, with a mix of virtual and in-person activities. In August, the program brought its foreign trade representatives to Washington for a week to conduct company consultations and site visits across the state. This annual visit had last occurred in 2019. Over 40 Washington businesses and industry organizations participated. Director Sandison continued his roles as Chair of the Marketing and International Trade Committee for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) and Vice-Chair of the NASDA-affiliated Agriculture Trade Education Council (ATEC).

The WSDA Dairy Nutrient Management Program (DNMP). Another year flew by and not with a little change. Despite challenges with staffing and recovering from pandemic slowdowns, our work continues to support Washington as it aligns with our mission: to protect water quality and support a healthy dairy business climate.

The WSDA Dairy Nutrient Management Program (DNMP) partners with Conservation Districts (CD), inspecting 279 dairies in 29 counties. Between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022, DNMP conducted 305 routine, follow up, investigation, closeout, and other inspections. Local CDs often join for the farm visit portion of the inspection; this partnership helps CDs provide a pathway for excellent, non-regulatory technical assistance to producers, also helping to identify financial assistance for dairies through local, state, and federal cost share and grant programs. DNMP also supports the work of CD's who assist dairy producers with the development of nutrient management plans as required by chapter 90.64 RCW, the Dairy Nutrient Management Act.

Nutrient management plans (NMP) are a critical tool in protecting both surface and ground waters. As of June 30, 2022, 98% of Washington dairies either had or were in the process of obtaining an approved and certified nutrient management plan.

Through DNMP's federal National Estuary Program (NEP) grant, DNMP supports clean water and compliance with state laws by assisting dairy producers in identifying and correcting potential discharges. This work includes a DNMP field work component as well as funds passed to Conservation Districts with commercial shellfish growing areas. In spring of 2021 we provided \$10,000 sub-awards to Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom CDs to help them establish and maintain in-house Coliscan® [E. coli] sampling and analysis stations where they can offer Coliscan® as a non-regulatory, technical assistance tool in support of Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) partners. Additionally, DNMP has awarded funding for planner support, engineering, and BMP cost-share as a sub-award through our NEP grant. These funds are awarded by EPA and the Department of Health and we are thankful for their support.

The database that DNMP maintains to house producer information also allows CD access to inspection reports and Technical Assistance Referrals (TAR). CD planners are encouraged to reach out to DNMP to request access which gives them the ability to view and comment on TAR progress, as well as note barriers and successes with completing referred projects. The resulting data helps build a case for much needed dairy planning resources at individual CDs. Between July 1, 2021 and June 30 2022, DNMP issued 78 TARs to 52 facilities, with multiple facilities receiving referrals for more than one issue. Similar to the previous years, nutrient collection and storage issues remain a high priority. This is in part due to aging and failing infrastructure at dairy facilities. The second largest category of referred issues was for need of nutrient management plan updates.

Like many organizations, DNMP is experiencing change. We've lost several staff within the last year to growth and transition and have hired several new and passionate nutrient management professionals. Currently, the program has a team of six and will likely be hiring more within the next year.

DNMP relies on the partnership and support provided by CD planners. We believe that the dairy community is best supported when DNMP inspectors, producers, and CD technical assistance providers have a common understanding of water quality concerns and share in the work to fix problems. It is when all three parties' come together to problem-solve jointly that the chances for effective and permanent fixes are greatest.

Visit our website for more information: <https://agr.wa.gov/departments/land-and-water/livestock-nutrients>

WSDA Natural Resource Assessment Section (NRAS) implemented a Columbia River Basin Restoration grant from EPA to enhance our partnerships in Eastern Washington for pesticide program work, water quality and salmon protection. Project activities took place in the Palouse and Yakima River watersheds and included monitoring surface water for agricultural pesticides, waste pesticide collection, and targeted outreach in partnership with the Palouse Conservation District. In addition, NRAS received a new Columbia River grant from EPA in September for \$350,000 to continue the pesticide program work in eastern Washington and plan a pilot pesticide stewardship program in the same Palouse watersheds partnering with Palouse CD and local growers. NRAS has hired a new Pesticide Usage and Stewardship scientist to lead this process.

NRAS contracted with Whatcom CD to conduct crop mapping in 2022. This mapping work is primarily performed using windshield surveys to update the WSDA crop geodatabase. This state specific agricultural land use data is provided annually to our federal partner USDA NASS for the national

cropland data layer used for federal risk assessment. WSDA crop data provides baseline and updated agricultural land use change for county VSP programs.

Soil Health. WSDA has continued its work with Washington State University on the State of the Soils Assessment. To date, the project team has trained over 100 agricultural professionals from conservation districts, industry, and universities, to take approximately 700 soil samples in nearly 50 cropping systems. In 2022, WSDA worked with 15 conservation districts, adding Clark, Foster Creek, Jefferson, Lewis, Mason, Pend Oreille, Pierce, Pine Creek, Spokane, Stevens, Thurston, and Whatcom to our list of CD collaborators alongside Asotin, Benton, Central & Eastern Klickitat, Columbia, Douglas, Franklin, Grant, Lincoln, North & South Yakima, Okanogan, Palouse, Walla Walla, and Whitman. Data from the State of the Soils Assessment are being used to understand broad trends in soil health and carbon sequestration due to differences in climate, soil type, and soil and crop management. Participating producers are each given an individualized soil health report ([sample report here](#)). For results available to the public, check back for an upcoming series of soil health scoring curves and mapping tools, to be released in 2023. In the meantime, visit the WSDA [Soil Health Youtube Channel](#) to watch our soil sampling training videos or visit the [WSDA Soil Health webpage](#).

Additional soil health work at WSDA includes the development of the [Washington Climate Smart Estimator \(WaSCE\)](#). This Washington-specific version of COMET Planner will be used in the SCC's Sustainable Farms and Fields program, to estimate greenhouse gas emissions and soil carbon sequestration from the implementation of conservation practices. WSDA has also been preparing for [upcoming changes and opportunities](#) as the result of new state and federal climate policies. As part of the USDA Climate Smart Commodities grant, WSDA received funding to bring [STAR](#) to Washington. This certification program is expected to launch in 2024, and will help growers (including early adopters!) brag about their conservation practices and increase economic valuation of soil health practices. In 2022 WSDA also actively continued providing training and monitoring support for soil health under the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP).

To learn more about WaSHI, sign up for our new quarterly [newsletter](#) or contact WaSHI@agr.wa.gov. To meet WaSHI live, attend the upcoming [Tilth/WORC conference](#), the PNDSA Cropping Systems conference, and save the date for our annual virtual conference [SoilCon](#) on February 14th and 15th 2023.

At the Department of Agriculture, we greatly value the hard work and expertise the dedicated staff the Conservation Districts provides to those working in agriculture as they seek ways to improve the environment.

Sincerely,

Perry Beale
WSDA / NRAS / Office of the Director
SCC Commissioner
21 N 1st Ave, Suite 224
Yakima WA 98902

Cc Lisa Leffert, Megan Finkenbinder