



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 2023:

International Marketing. The WSDA International Marketing Program conducted 30 trade activities throughout 2023, with a mix of outbound trade missions, inbound trade missions and international trade shows. The program also coordinated filming of the Washington Grown television show in Vietnam and Mexico as part of a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant they received for the upcoming season which will focus on Washington food and agriculture exports. The episodes will air January through March of 2024. In August, Director Sandison and other agency staff were heavily involved in Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) programming in Seattle, which brought hundreds of international policy makers and their staff, as well as USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack and USDA Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, Alexis Taylor. In September, the International Marketing Program brought its foreign trade representatives to Washington for a week to conduct company consultations and site visits across the state. Over 40 Washington businesses and industry organizations participated. After serving as Chair of the Marketing and International Trade Committee for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) for many years, Director Sandison has moved onto the board's Executive Committee which puts Washington in line to host the NASDA Annual Meeting in 2027. Director Sandison also became President of the Western U.S. Agricultural Trade Association (WUSATA), the organization through which the WSDA International Marketing Program conducts federally funded trade activities. Director Sandison also participated in a NASDA trade policy mission to Vietnam in January and a trade mission to Mexico in October that also included the Lt. Governor, the Washington Director of Commerce and the Association of Washington Business.

Dairy Nutrient Management Program (DNMP). DNMP successfully submitted a decision package for permanent funding from the WA legislature for implementation work in the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area (LYGMWA). This work addresses nitrate contamination from agricultural sources located within the project boundary. This included funding to hire a GWMA Specialist within DNMP, an Agronomist within NRAS, and pass-through funding for South Yakima Conservation District.

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>

Natural Resource and Agricultural Sciences (NRAS) has changed its name from Natural Resource Assessment Section, maintaining the same acronym but reflecting the work it does more accurately. NRAS continued a partnership with Palouse CD to develop a pilot pesticide stewardship program in the Palouse watershed. This included PCD conducting surface water sampling and helping to develop the strategic work plan and outreach for the project. This work is being funded by an EPA Columbia River grant received last year and has evolved with the recent release of EPA strategies and Bulletins Live! Two pesticide use mitigations for ESA.

NRAS received permanent funding from the legislature to develop a new groundwater monitoring program to test rural and underserved household wells for pesticides and nitrates. WSDA will be partnering with two conservation districts in 2024 to determine the best strategies and locations for sampling.

The Washington legislature has funded a new program at WSDA intended to generate economic valuation for on-farm soil health management. [Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources \(STAR\)](#) was created by Illinois farmers in 2017 and has since spread across the country. This free and voluntary program allows participants to answer simple, production-specific questions about their rotation, tillage, nutrient applications, and conservation practices. STAR is intended to provide farmers: 1) A clear pathway to conservation adoption and free, unbiased technical support; 2) Public recognition for environmental stewardship; 3) Access to branding materials that can generate a market signal with consumers and supply chain partners; and 4) A consistent scale for evaluating progress across regions and systems. A new Economic Development Coordinator at WSDA has been hired to run STAR, which is expected to launch for grower enrollment in summer 2024.

NRAS continued work on the [State of the Soils Assessment](#). To date, the project team has trained over 100 agricultural professionals from 28 conservation districts, industry, and universities, to take approximately 900 soil samples in nearly 60 cropping systems. To date, over 300 participating producers have been given a customized soil health report ([sample report here](#)). Recent funding from the legislature also supported the hiring of a postdoctoral fellow at Washington State University. This new hire will help WSDA use the soils data to understand broad trends in soil health and carbon sequestration due to differences in climate, soil type, and soil and crop management.

WSDA is conducting an agency climate resilience plan, so that agriculture in Washington can remain viable and adapt to a changing climate. We will be conducting in-person and virtual listening sessions and surveys, to better help our stakeholders take advantage of the enormous federal and local climate resilience opportunities. Stay tuned for more information!

The Washington Soil Health initiative has launched a new website! Visit www.wasoilhealth.org to learn more about our resources and events.

WSDA continued to support the WSCC Sustainable Farms and Fields and Voluntary Stewardship Programs providing data science, grant support, soil sampling expertise, and monitoring advice. WSDA's Technical Panel representative helps guide counties through the VSP process.

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
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