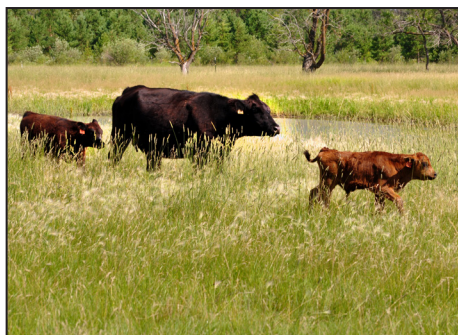


Coming soon: Noncompetitive soil health funds for Minnesota SWCDs



BWSR's Soil Health Practices Grants are partially funded by \$5 million from the Clean Water Fund. These dollars can be used by participating SWCDs to provide technical, engineering and financial assistance.

Noncompetitive grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) that support soil health practices will soon be available to 70 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) throughout the state.

Soil Health Practices Grants administered by BWSR will provide financial and technical support for soil health practices that improve water quality, soil productivity, climate resiliency and carbon sequestration. BWSR plans to open a Request for Interest (RFI) in late February to allow eligible SWCDs to opt in.

"SWCD staff play an invaluable role in increasing soil health practice implementation by lending their expertise to local producers and managing incentive programs," said LeAnn Buck, executive director of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. "This investment will better equip our districts to assist farmers with integrating soil health into their operations."

The grants are largely funded by a \$25 million [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP) award [BWSR received](#) from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS) in November 2023. Approximately \$5 million in state dollars via the Clean Water Fund are also available as part of the grants to those SWCDs for technical assistance, engineering and financial assistance.

RCPP grants leverage public-private partnerships to address conservation challenges on agricultural land. BWSR was one of 81 organizations that received a total of [\\$1.1 billion in 2023](#) for RCPP conservation projects. BWSR also received a \$21 million RCPP award for water storage projects in 2024. Ninety-two organizations throughout the U.S. [received more than \\$1.5 billion last year](#) for RCPP conservation efforts.

"Partnering with NRCS will help local governments engage more producers who are interested in integrating soil health practices into their operations," said BWSR Soil Health Coordinator Jared House. "Our goal is to make incentives readily available to interested landowners across the state."

Each SWCD is eligible to receive an initial base grant of \$180,000. SWCDs that have used at least \$120,000 of the federal funding can request additional

From left: *Soil Health Practices Grants can be used for a variety of project and practice types including cover crops, prescribed grazing and buffer strips.*

Photo Credits:
BWSR

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— LeAnn Buck, executive director,
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

grants of \$120,000. Additional grants can be requested every month until funding runs out. All grant funding must be used by Dec. 31, 2028.

Soil health practices funded by the grants must address resource concerns such as soil quality limitations, nutrient loss and source-water depletion. Examples of eligible practices include cover crops, no-till, buffer strips, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, forest stand improvement, tree and shrub establishment and shelterbelt establishment. All practices must follow NRCS standards.

The Soil Health Practices Grants are one component of a large-scale effort by BWSR to improve soil health on farmland throughout Minnesota. During the 2023 legislative session, BWSR received \$21 million from the state’s general fund and \$12 million from the Clean Water Fund to support soil health programming across the state. Soil health is a priority identified in Minnesota’s [Climate Action Framework](#).

In March 2024, [BWSR awarded more than \\$17 million](#) in noncompetitive Soil Health SWCD Capacity Grants to 40 SWCDs to increase local expertise

related to soil health. Later that summer, more than [\\$6.4 million in noncompetitive funding was distributed](#) to Minnesota SWCDs for soil health delivery.

BWSR also administers the [Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture](#) pilot program for Minnesota. This national USDA-funded program is led by Virginia Tech to support landowners’ adoption of climate-smart practices. Eight Minnesota [SWCDs are participating in the pilot](#), which offers \$100 per acre or [animal unit](#) to producers who voluntarily implement practices that sequester carbon, improve

soil health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“Over the past several years, Minnesota landowners have gained unprecedented access to funding for soil health initiatives,” House said. “BWSR aims to make these funding opportunities straightforward for SWCDs to participate in. By offering more noncompetitive funding, local offices with limited staffing don’t need to fill out lengthy applications, they just need to indicate their interest via a short survey.”

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.