NEW YORK STATE | Department of Agriculture and Markets

Soil and Water Conservation Committee and Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Land and Water Resources Conservation Programs

MAY 28, 2025

Outline

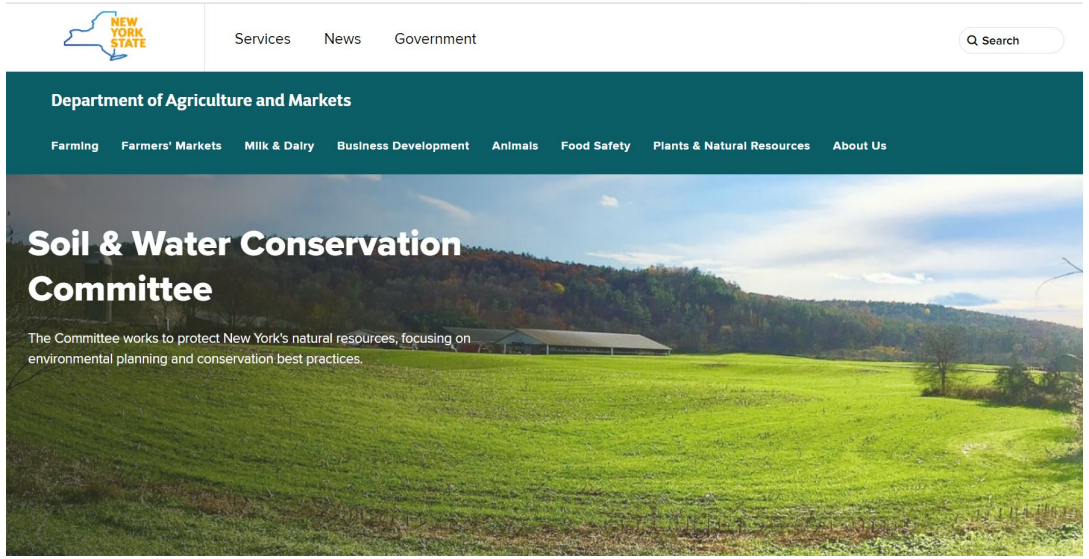
Presentation Outline

- NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee
- County Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM)
- AEM and Associated NYS Programs
- Questions

New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC)

NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee

- NYS SWCC operates as an agency of the State located within the Department of Agriculture & Markets. The Committee functions under its own statutory charge with fulltime staff members being employees of the Department's Division of Land & Water Resources



NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee

5 Voting Members

- Representative At Large for Farm Interests
- Farm Bureau
- New York State Grange
- New York Association of Conservation Districts
- Representative At Large for Urban, Suburban, and Rural Non-Farm Interests

9 Advisory Members

- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University
- SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- New York State Conservation District Employee's Association
- New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- New York State Department of Health
- New York State Department of State
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)

County Soil and Water Conservation Districts

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts are natural resource entities who implement conservation programs at the county level
- Work to address natural resource conservation needs and have the flexibility to respond as needs arise

Soil and Water Conservation Districts: 2024 Annual Report

- In 2024, Soil and Water Conservation Districts accomplished:
  - 163 acres of riparian buffers
  - 500 acres of prescribed rotational grazing systems established
  - 445 acres wetland restoration
  - 753 flood mitigation projects
  - 62 forest management plans developed for over 17,000 acres
  - 484,800 tree and shrub seedlings sold for conservation
  - 217 stream and shoreline stabilization projects to stabilized nearly 69,000 feet of bank

- **Link to the report:** About the Soil & Water Conservation Committee | Agriculture and Markets

Programs that support Conservation Work

- AEM Base Program
- Agricultural Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program (AgNPS)
- Climate Resilient Farming (CRF)
- Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) Programs
- State Aid to Districts

Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM)

Agricultural Environmental Management

- **Core Concepts**
  - **Open to all farmers**
  - **Voluntary, incentive-based**
  - **Locally-led & delivered**
    - Farmers
    - Soil & Water Conservation Districts
    - Cornell Cooperative Extension
    - Natural Resources Conservation Service
    - Farm Service Agency
    - Farmer Organizations
    - Other Government Partners
    - NGOs
    - Agri-Business
  - **Prioritized based on natural resource needs, local AEM Strategic Plans, and farmer goals**
  - **Five-tiered approach**
  - **Customized with farm-specific plans**
    - **Science-based (NRCS Stds) and feasible**
    - **Wide range of practice systems**
  - **Trust and relationship building**
    - **Farmers make decisions for their farms and the environment**
  - **Leads to practice adoption**
  - **Promotes teamwork and coordination**
  - **Adaptive to future priorities**

AEM and Associated NYS Programs

AEM Base Program

Funding for Districts to provide…..

1. conservation technical assistance through AEM's 5-Tiers

   and

2. cost-share funding with farmers to implement BMP Systems in Tier 4 ($200K max/District; two-year cycles)

AEM Tier	Purpose	People
Tier 1 – Inventory (Questionnaire)	Basic info and interests from the farmer	Farmers and District Planners
Tier 2 – Environmental Assessment ("Tier 2 Worksheets")	Walk the farm and discuss stewardship, management concerns, and opportunities for improvements	Farmers and District Planners
Tier 3 – Conservation Planning	Develop conservation plans	Farmers, District Planners, Specialists
Tier 4 – Practice Implementation	Implement conservation practices based on the plans	Farmers, District Planners, Specialists, Engineers, Contractors, Permitters
Tier 5 – Evaluation and Updates	Evaluate/update plans, practices, and programs	Farmers and District Planners

PROGRESS THROUGH AEM PROGRAMS

May 2005 – December 2024 Snapshot

AEM Tiers across all SWCDs	AEM Tier Work Completed
Tier 1 Inventory	13,095
Tier 2 Assessments	8,100
Tier 3 Plans	5,426
Tier 4 BMP Systems (across AEM Base, AgNPS, CRF, and CAFO cost-share programs)	Over 15,500 practices on 3,600 farms
Tier 5 Plan/BMP/Assessment Updates	8,381

- Programs are offered annually
  - AgNPS since 1994
  - CRF since 2015
- Competitive:
  - 75-150 applications submitted per round
  - ~50% of applications are funded
- Cost share-based:
  - farmers cover on average 40% of project costs
  - projects are also reimbursement-based

Ag Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program

About:

- AgNPS program was created in 1993
- First Round of AgNPS was awarded in 1994
  - $340,000
- Approximately, $254 million has been awarded for AgNPS projects
- Approx. $25 million available for projects in Round 30

Program Goals:

- Water quality protection
- Reduce and/or prevent the non-point source contribution from agricultural activities in watersheds across the State
- Utilize AEM Framework and Soil and Water Conservation Districts to implement the program

Ag Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement and Control Program

- Prioritize projects that will help to meet goals or objectives in a NYS approved clean water plan
  - Nine Element Watershed Plan
  - Total Maximum Daily Load

- Prioritize projects that will help to meet goals or objectives of other watershed based management plans
  - Harmful Algal Bloom Action Plans
  - Drinking Water Source Protection Plan

- Offer higher scores for projects that implement high priority practices (i.e., Riparian Forest Buffers) and provide a benefit to other resources (i.e. air quality, etc.)

Climate Resilient Farming (CRF) Grant Program

- **Launched in 2015 (Rounds 1-8)**
  - **~$69** million awarded
  - **570** farms
  - **~574,000** metric tons of CO2e/yr estimated emissions reduction
    - Includes 29 cover/flare projects to date
- **Four tracks (as of Round 8):**
  1. Livestock Management: Alternative Manure Management & Precision Feed Management
  2. Adaptation & Resiliency
  3. Healthy Soils NY
  4. Agricultural Forest Management
- **Goals: GHG Mitigation, C Sequestration, and Adaptation + Farm Viability**

CRF Track 1

Alternative Manure Management & Precision Feed Management (for GHG emission reduction and water quality benefits)

Manure Storage Cover and Flare

Solid separation equipment

Manure management through composting

Bedding alternatives to sand for cover and flare preparation

Innovative manure treatment technologies

Pasture Based Management

Compost Bedded Pack Systems

Short-Term Manure Collection and Transfer Systems

Precision Feed Management

CRF Track 2

Adaptation & Resiliency (emphasis on water management for flood and drought)

- Riparian Buffer System
- Stream Corridor and Shoreline Management System
- Erosion Control System – Structural
- Irrigation Water Management System
- Access Control System
- Prescribed Rotational Grazing System
- Integrated Pest Management
- Weather monitoring systems and tools
- Green Infrastructure Systems

CRF Track 3

Soil Health (Increase soil carbon and resiliency)

- Cover crops
- Conservation tillage
- Structural soil conservation practices
- Conservation crop rotations
- Riparian Buffers
- Agroforestry
- Expanded outreach
- Soil health testing services
- Equipment eligible expense (with related BMP implementation for improved Nutrient Management and Soil Health)

CRF Track 4 (new in Round 8)

Afforestation / Forest Management on Farms (to increase carbon sequestration and other environmental benefits)

- Tree planting (or natural forest regeneration) on underutilized Ag lands
- Forest regeneration work in existing woodlands on farms
- Along with landowner goals, primary goal is carbon sequestration

ECO-SYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) is a systems approach that strives to balance the needs of people, nature, and the economy through science-based decision making.
- “EBM recognizes that humans are part of any ecosystem and ecosystems are vital for supporting human life.”
- Program allows AGM/SWCC
  - Implement the Goals of the Great Lakes Action Agenda or other 9E Plan
  - On-The-Ground Implementation Projects
  - Targeted Watersheds, Pollutants, or BMPs
  - Prioritization of projects with direct drainage to the Ocean or Great Lakes Watersheds

ECO-SYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- Funded through the Ocean and Great Lakes Initiative within the Environmental Protection Fund
  - Fiscal Year 2025-2026 – $24.6 Million
  - AGM submits requests for projects based on needs.
- Seek funding from other State and Federal Sources
- Past EBM Programs include:
  - Erosion and Sediment Control in Genesee River Watershed and Finger Lakes
  - High-Efficiency Irrigation Water Management Practices
  - AEM on NYS Grown & Certified Farms
  - Nutrient and Sediment Reduction in the Lake Erie (LEWPA) Watershed

STATE AID TO DISTRICTS

- Supported by the NYS Environmental Protection Fund
- Provides reimbursement for SWCD operational expenses (Part A), financial assistance for the implementation of conservation projects or programs (Part B), and designated funding to support District activities and staff capacity; landowner assistance programs; municipal assistance programs; non-governmental organization activities; conduct school assistance programs; etc (Part C).
- Fiscal Year 2025-2026 – $18 Million
  - **Districts that receive full Part A reimbursement, Part B funding, and meet all requirements for Part C could receive approximately $306,000.00**

STATE AID TO DISTRICTS – PART A

- Reimbursement for SWCD operational expenses
- SWCDs are reimbursed 50% of their total eligible expenses
  - Up to $60,000 per SWCD and $300,000 for the five boroughs of New York City
- Eligible expenses include:
  - Costs associated with providing technical assistance for the establishment or implementation of the conservation practices
    - Employment of conservation field technicians or district managers
    - Purchase of supplies and equipment

STATE AID TO DISTRICTS – PART B

- Financial Assistance for implementation of conservation projects or programs
- Up to $6,000.00 ($30,000 for the five boroughs of New York City) is provided to individual SWCDs to carry out conservation projects
- In 2024:
  - 17 projects to conserve, restore, and enhance the soil and water resources of the state
  - 5 projects to assist in implementation of agricultural BMPs
  - 3 projects to prevent and reduce agricultural and non-agricultural nonpoint source water pollution
  - 8 projects to assist in the control of flood and mitigate flood damage
  - 3 projects to protect and restore streams and wetlands
  - 8 projects to protect and manage rural and urban forests

STATE AID TO DISTRICTS – PART C

- Designated funding to support District activities and staff capacity; landowner assistance programs; municipal assistance programs; non-governmental organization activities; conduct school assistance programs
- In 2024, Districts that met all requirements received over $230,000.00
  - Build staff capacity - 13 SWCDs were able to hire additional staff!
  - Implement 71 programs to work with private landowners and farmers to implement conservation practices
  - Implement 56 programs consisting of activities that support state, county, town, city, or village municipal departments
  - Work with schools to conduct 18 programs providing natural resource conservation education to students in grades K-12

Thank you
Questions?

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