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HAMILTON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

ADVANCING SOIL AND WATER SUSTAINABILITY

Let's Grow!

Hamilton County Ag News

November 2025

Message from the Ag Specialist

The second annual ***Ohio Soil Health Week*** will kick off November 9-16, bringing attention to one of our favorite essential resources: Soil! Of course, protecting and building healthy soil also means protecting clean water. Sediment from topsoil is the largest polluter of our local streams and rivers, and nutrient runoff from farm fields can cause toxic algae blooms. Soil and water conservation go hand in hand, and the best example of a statewide program that supports this work is the H2Ohio Program initiated by Governor DeWine in 2019. H2Ohio uses a comprehensive approach guided by science and data to support best farming practices that reduce fertilizer pollution.

Celebrating and conserving soil is a high priority at the Conservation District and one that is shared by many of the food producers and growers in Hamilton County that we work with. Louis and Amanda Schultz of PLAD Farm Management in Harrison, OH, have been using conservation practices like crop rotation, cover cropping, and no-till for a long time because they believe in growing food sustainably, building healthy soil, and taking care of our watershed. This commitment was demonstrated even further when they stepped up in 2024 to participate in H2Ohio. PLAD Farm Management has the largest number of acres enrolled in the H2Ohio program in Hamilton County, and received the 2025 Cooperator of the Year Award at the recent Hamilton County Conservation District Annual Meeting. Congratulations, Lou and Amanda!

You don't have to be a crop farmer to help conserve and protect our soil and water. Keep your garden and landscape beds planted throughout the year to reduce erosion, support soil microbes, and crowd out weeds

(bare soil = unhealthy soil). Leave the leaves, lawn clippings, and stems in your landscape to return nutrients in place. Select native plants that require less maintenance. Use herbicides and pesticides sparingly. Pick up dog waste and dispose of it appropriately. Choose salt-free ice melt alternatives and follow winter safety best practices that protect soil health. Check your soil's fertility levels with a Soil Fertility Test (more info at the end of this newsletter). Soil testing ensures you only apply necessary amounts of fertilizer, protecting our soil, water, and your pocketbook.

As we move into a season of thanksgiving, I encourage you to pause and take a moment to be thankful for this important source of life, the soil. And have a happy Ohio Soil Health Week!

Nicole Gunderman
Agriculture Specialist
Hamilton County Conservation District

Louis and Amanda Schultz of PLAD Farm Management received the 2025 Cooperator of the Year Award for their commitment to soil health and participation in the H2Ohio Program. Pictured here with Ag Specialist, Nicole Gunderman, at the Hamilton County Conservation District Annual Meeting and 80th Anniversary Party in October, 2025.

Upcoming District Events

EQIP Grant
Info Session and Q&A

Thursday, November 20
6:00-7:30 pm
HCCD Training Center
2710 E. Kemper Rd, Sharonville
Join staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to learn about EQIP grants. EQIP stands for Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Funds can support invasive species removal, pollinator planting, cover cropping, raised beds, high or low tunnels, and micro-irrigation, among other agricultural conservation practices. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis with deadline likely in January. Get to know the NRCS staff who serve Hamilton County and get all your questions answered!

Pizza and drinks provided!
Free to attend, registration is requested.

EQIP Info Session Registration

NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Celebrate Ohio Soil Health Week! November 9-15

Ohio Soil Health Week provides a time and space to celebrate, honor, and protect Ohio's soils. This weeklong celebration includes outreach, education opportunities, and events to raise awareness around Ohio's most valuable natural resource: our soil.

Celebrating soil means we are supporting Ohio's farmers, our water, and our future. Click the link below to find resources, webinars, and in-person events around the state.

Ohio Soil Health Week Happenings

Partner Programs & Events

If you would like us to include your upcoming events in this bi-monthly newsletter, please email pertinent information and a link to: nicole.gunderman@hamilton-co.org

Education Programs:

Nov 4: A Model for Farmland Transition Webinar, Central State
Nov 6: Compost Tour, Civic Garden Center
Nov 8: Farmer Veteran Coalition Annual Meeting, Central State
Nov 12: Garden Tool Care Basics, Civic Garden Center
Nov 15: Driving Basics for One Horse, Turner Farm
Dec 4: Compost Tour, Civic Garden Center
Dec 5: Urban Food Systems Convening, OSU Extension

Partner Spotlight:

Greenacres Foundation Garden Apprentice Program
Applications Open: December
Apprenticeship Begins: Early April
Greenacres offers a two-year Garden Apprentice position to two individuals, offering a chance to immerse themselves in all the elements of growing vegetables and flowers in a low-till, regenerative farming system. This is a full-time (40h) paid apprenticeship. Learn more and apply **HERE**.

Interested in hiring a Garden Apprentice Graduate? Our local food system needs highly trained workers to produce healthy and sustainable food for our community. Greenacres Apprentice Graduates bring 2 years of hands-on experience and classroom learning to help any market garden or production farm succeed. Find a hiring inquiry form at the bottom of the web page **HERE**.

Grant Opportunities

Green Cincinnati Plan - Seeds of Change Urban Agriculture Grants
Deadline: November 24, 2025 by 11:59pm
Up to $1,000
Local food production and distribution plays an important role in addressing health, social, economic, and environmental issues. The Seeds of Change Urban Ag Grant Program supports local agriculture efforts such as community gardens, foraging sites, and market garden businesses, as well as local food hubs, to increase local food production, distribution and access to fresh, healthy foods. To qualify for funding, the location of the growing or distribution sites must be within the City of Cincinnati. Applicants can be nonprofit or for-profit corporations, however grants are not made to individuals.
Find out more and apply **HERE**.

NCR-SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant Program
Deadline: December 4, 2025 at 4pm
Farmers and ranchers have critical insight when it comes to improving their systems. Whether they need to limit off-farm inputs, reduce erosion, create more time for family or community activities, learn marketing skills, or find other ways to enhance their livelihoods, farmers and ranchers can turn to the North Central Region SARE (NCR-SARE) Program for grant opportunities and information. This competitive grants program is for farmers and ranchers who want to explore sustainable solutions to problems through on-farm research, demonstration, and education projects.
Find out more **HERE**.

Educational Resources

Navigating Legal & Financial Pathways to Land Access
Nov 5, 12, 19, 26
Webinar hosted by Agraria Center
Join us for (4) ***free***, informative 30-miniute **Zoom** sessions exploring practical steps to secure, lease, or purchase farmland. We'll cover key legal considerations, financing options, and strategies to build a strong foundation for long-term land access. Perfect for beginning and growing farmers looking to better understand contracts, ownership models, and available funding resources.
Find more information and register **HERE**.

Indiana Black Loam Conference
Nov 14 & 15, 2025
Indianapolis, IN
The Black Loam Conference brings together Farmers, Agencies, Cooperatives and Community organizations in acknowledgement of the work and resilience of the farmers and agencies with "Boots on the ground." The event will provide information on:

- Business strategies and market readiness
- Financial resources and financial readiness
- Navigating Agency Changes
- Succession, from the soil to the future
- Farmer panels and discussions

Find more information and register **HERE**.

Farmer & Farmland Owner Income Tax Webinar
November 14, 10am-12pm
This live webinar will cover key tax issues affecting farmers and farmland owners, including an update on Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV), tax provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, tax planning in low-income years, residual fertility/excess fertility deduction, and much more! The OSU Extension tax team will walk through key updates, answer questions, and share practical insight to help you prepare for questions that may arise. More info and register **HERE**.

OSU Soil Health Webinar Series 2026
Webinars 8:00 to 9:00 AM on:

- January 15, February 12, March 19, April 9, 2026

Empower your farm with science-backed, practical strategies! Each webinar delivers expert-led insights—from real-world cover crop management and soil testing to boosting yield, resilience, and profitability in Ohio's fields. Aimed squarely at farmers, these sessions feature Extension educators, researchers, and producers sharing proven approaches you can start using immediately. Past recordings are conveniently accessible anytime. Get the latest research and on-farm experience designed to help your soil and bottom line thrive. Find out

more and register **HERE**.

Small Farm Management College
Hamilton County OSU Extension
2055 Reading Rd, Cincinnati, 45202

- In-person classes on: Jan 22, 29 and Feb 5, 12, 2026

This 10-hour small farm management college is designed to help landowners examine potential ways to increase profits from their small acreage properties. Open to all new or aspiring farmers, landowners, small farmers, and farm families looking for new ideas. Participants will be challenged to develop realistic expectations for their farm business and receive information about getting started, identifying strengths and weaknesses of their property, and developing a farm business plan. Learn more and register **HERE**.

Farm Service Agency Offices Reopen

On Thursday, Oct. 23, the USDA reopened 2,100 Farm Service Agency (FSA) county offices to provide limited services despite the ongoing federal government shutdown. Core operations offered are farm loan processing, ARC/PLC payments, disaster aid, and indemnity programs.

The current government shutdown has left thousands of federal employees furloughed and many agricultural producers waiting on program payments and assistance. Some FSA employees in critical positions have continued to work without pay and will receive back pay once the shutdown ends. Recalled county FSA employees are being paid with Commodity Credit Corporation funds.

USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins announced in October that $3 billion in funding will be coming to farmers through the Commodity Credit Corporation. Funds will support commodity programs and other key safety-net operations for producers.

The Hamilton and Butler County Farm Service Agency is now open on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8:00am to 4:30pm providing limited services based on lack of access to some online tools and programs.

Hamilton Service Center

1802 Princeton Rd
Hamilton, OH 45011
(513) 642-3715

Education Corner

Soil Fertility Testing

The Hamilton County Conservation District partners with Penn State University Extension to offer low-cost soil fertility testing to Hamilton County residents, landowners, and business owners. Laboratory soil analysis is provided by Penn State for just $10 per test. The results reveal any deficiencies or excesses of essential soil nutrients to help guide fertilizer application rates and other types of amendments.

The first step of good soil stewardship is learning your soil's composition so you can manage it more effectively.

- **Soil testing helps you achieve your growing goals** by identifying the right type and amount of fertilizer needed.
- **Soil testing helps you be a good steward** of the environment by reducing excess nutrients that can run off or leach into waterways.
- **Soil testing saves money** by preventing unnecessary fertilizer purchases and by increasing your crop yields.
- **Soil testing monitors long term changes over time** so you can better understand how your management practices affect the productivity and health of your soil.

Visit the Soil Fertility Testing page on our website to learn more about the program and to find step-by-step and easy to follow instructions on how to submit a soil sample for testing.

Soil Fertility Testing Web Page

Hamilton County Conservation District

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) like us were established in response to the environmental devastation of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, with the mission of promoting sustainable land management practices. These districts, which exist in almost every U.S. county, work to conserve and protect local soil, water, and natural resources through education, technical assistance, and community collaboration. In agriculture, SWCDs help farmers and landowners implement practices that prevent erosion, improve water quality, and enhance soil health, supporting long-term sustainability and resilience. Hamilton County presents unique challenges as a mostly urban county, but it also has a rich and vibrant agriculture community.

<u>District Staff</u>
Sara Fehring - Executive Director
Melinda Hartley - Business Service Officer
Gwen Z Roth - Education & Outreach Mngr.
Chey Alberto - Urban Conservationist
James Gleason - Urban Technician II
Haley Golsch - Urban Technician II
Aaron Habig - Urban Technician II
Teresa Slonaker - Education Coordinator
Sarah Meadows - Public Involvement
Christopher Hall - Stream Specialist
Nicole Gunderman - Agriculture Specialist
Keith Robinson - Marketing & Outreach

<u>NRCS</u>
John Williams, District Conservationist
Michaela Werling, Soil Conservationist
Jordan McMahon, Natural Resource Specialist

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Lisa Soper - Treasurer
Ken Petren - Secretary
Jane Wittke - Program Chairperson

Conservation Spotlight
(513) 946-8020
www.hcswcd.org

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