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HAMILTON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

ADVANCING SOIL AND WATER SUSTAINABILITY

Let's Grow!

Hamilton County Ag News

September 2026

Message from the Ag Specialist

Agriculture, Conservation, and Community: this is the intersection where the Hamilton County Conservation District works.

Agriculture, in this instance, is defined broadly to include crop farmers, meat, vegetable, fruit, and flower producers, urban growers, community gardeners, and County residents growing food in their own backyards.

Conservation best practices can be employed in each of these agricultural settings to both achieve production goals and protect our natural resources. I just completed the enrollment of almost 1000 acres of Hamilton County corn and soybean crops in the 2027-28 extension of the **H2Ohio Program**. H2Ohio is a voluntary statewide program that promotes practices such as cover cropping and data-driven fertilizer applications which reduce nutrient runoff from farm fields and protect water quality. Hamilton County farmers care about the health of their soil and their impact on watersheds. The H2Ohio program helps them put these values into practice. Find out more about H2Ohio **HERE**.

But you don't have to be a big crop farm to make a difference. On Saturday, September 5th we'll be touring the yards and gardens of four Hamilton County residents who are growing food using conservation best practices at a home scale. On the **Eco-Ag Yard & Garden Tour**, participants can learn first-hand about a variety of different approaches to ecological backyard gardening and food production. The goal of this tour is to showcase and inspire so you can take ideas back to your own yard and garden. Register for the tour **HERE**.

Community is an important part of both agriculture and conservation. The strength and resilience of our local food system relies on the strong

community connections that are made between growers, processors, distributors, and consumers. As the Agriculture Specialist, I strive to connect people with information, resources, and each other. This Agriculture Newsletter is one way I can do just that! Read on for more opportunities, programs, and events from the Hamilton County Conservation District, along with those from our partner organizations.

Nicole Gunderman
Agriculture Specialist
Hamilton County Conservation District

Making connections between agriculture, conservation, and community at a workshop on Native Warm Season Grass Pasture & Hay co-hosted by Hamilton County Conservation District, Cardinal Land Conservancy, and Pheasants Forever

Upcoming District Events

Eco-Agriculture Yard & Garden Tour

Saturday, September 5, 2026
9:00-3:00pm
$20 Includes Box Lunch

Want to grow healthy food and be a good steward of your land? Eco-Agriculture is a collection of sustainable farming and gardening methods that works with nature to protect soil, conserve water, increase biodiversity, and reduce chemical use. This program will visit four Hamilton County homes to tour their ecologically-minded yards. Learn directly from the gardeners and be inspired to implement some eco-ag practices of your own! We will travel in our own vehicles on a set itinerary following provided map and driving directions. Tour includes a box lunch (vegetarian and gluten-free options available).

Eco-Ag Tour

EQIP Info Session With Pizza!

Monday, September 28, 2026
6:00-7:30pm
HCCD Training Center
2710 E. Kemper Rd.

Join staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to learn all about EQIP grants. EQIP stands for Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and can provide cost-share funding for conservation practices including high tunnels, raised beds, micro-irrigation, brush removal, cover crops, pollinator planting, and more. The 2027 deadline has not yet been announced, but this program will provide updates and answer your questions in advance of the next grant cycle. Free to attend but registration is requested.

Pizza and drinks provided!

EQIP Info Session

Soil Fertility Testing: The Why and the How

Thursday, October 15, 2026
6:00-7:30pm
HCCD Training Center
2710 E. Kemper Rd.

Healthy soil is important to your gardening goals and for our ecosystem. Testing soil fertility tells us what nutrients are available and is one of the ways we can measure its health. In this program, you will learn how to conduct a Soil Fertility Test, receive guidance on interpreting the results, and review other practices you can adopt to support and build healthy soil.
Free to attend, but registration is requested.

Soil Fertility Testing

Get the Dirt! A Soil Health Science Fair

Saturday, November 14
10:00 am - 2:00pm
Gorman Heritage Farm

Dig into soil science with hands-on exhibits, demonstrations, activities, and local experts at this family-friendly celebration! Join Gorman Heritage Farm and Hamilton County Conservation District for an interactive science fair exploring the living world beneath our feet. Discover just how much is happening underground through hands-on exhibits, demonstrations, and activities. Learn how to test your soil at home, dig into composting, meet some of the creatures living underground, explore soil health around the farm, and even make art with soil. Along the way, local experts will help us uncover what makes healthy soil so important—and what we can do to care for it.

This family-friendly, drop-in event invites curious learners of all ages to get their hands dirty and discover why we're so excited about soil! More details are coming soon. We can't wait to dig in!

Soil Health Science Fair

Soil Probe!

Soil Fertility Testing is an important conservation action. Knowing the nutrients and organic matter available in your soil can help you determine what type of soil amendment is needed to achieve your growing goals. Over applying fertilizer is harmful to our watersheds and your wallet. The Hamilton County Conservation District partners with Penn State Extension to analyze soil samples. Once you receive your results we are happy to answer questions and help determine next steps. For more information about the Soil Fertility Testing Program, check out this page on our website **HERE**.

The first step in soil testing is collecting soil core samples, and we've got a tool for that! You can use a hand trowel to collect your soil cores, but a soil probe is designed to cut through root thatch and pull up just the right amount that's needed.

Contact Nicole Gunderman to schedule your **free soil probe rental** by emailing **nicole.gunderman@hamiltoncountyohio.gov**

Partner Programs

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@hamiltoncountyohio.gov**

Education Programs:

Sep 2: Dehydrating & Freeze-Drying the Harvest, OSU Women in Ag
Sep 5: Seed Saving, Winton Woods Farm
Sep 9: Northside Farmers Market Tour, Food Policy Council

Sep 9: Vermicomposting Workshop, Gorman Heritage Farm
Sep 12: Native Plant Festival, Civic Garden Center
Sep 12: Honey Extraction Workshop, Fibonacci Brewing
Sep 12: Growing Food Stability, Westwood Common Good
Sep 13: Fall Beekeeping Class, Hive & Comb
Sep 17: Westwood Farmers Market Tour, Food Policy Council
Sep 22-24: Farm Science Review, London, OH
Sep 26: Garden Season Extension, Civic Garden Center
Sep 27: Fall Beekeeping Class, Hive & Comb
Oct 7: Livestock Mortality Composting, OSU Women in Ag Webinar
Oct 25: Sheep to Sweater, Winton Woods Farm

Cultivating Fertility: Farm-Made Biological Inputs

October 11, 1:30-5:030pm
Camp Washington Perennial Farm
Cincinnati, OH

This hands-on workshop is for farmers interested in making affordable inputs for their farms and gardens. The session explores how biological inputs can support soil and plant health, including preparation methods, ingredient selection, storage, dilution, application, and realistic expectations for their use. Participants will learn how to make fermented plant juice, lactic acid bacteria serum, water-soluble calcium, and traditional bocashi. A meal will be provided, and participants will take home biological inputs they make during the workshop.
Learn more and register **HERE**.

Inside the Market Garden Tour

September 12, 1:00-3:00pm
Green Table Gardens
Xenia, OH

Part of the Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association (OEFFA) Farm Tour Series. Certified organic since 2022, Green Table Gardens is a no-till market farm built on compost, living soil, and a commitment to growing the most nutritious produce possible for the people Stephen knows by name. Now, he's inviting you in for a tour of the farm and a look at the full story of how it got here. Stephen is opening the financial records of Green Table Gardens and sharing five years of growth charts, revenue reports, and real operational data so you can see exactly what it looks like to grow a small organic farm into an efficient, thriving business.
Learn more and register **HERE**.

Permaculture Design Certification Course

November 2026 - October 2027
Cincinnati Permaculture Institute

Cincinnati Permaculture Institute's Year Long Permaculture Design Certification (PDC) is an immersion in ethical mindsets and ecological skill-sets to create positive change, modeled off of Bill Mollison's permaculture design curriculum. Students learn not just the hard skills of permaculture, such as soil science and natural building, but more importantly the underlying design thinking process that makes a permaculture system so unique, prolific, and resilient. Find out more and register **HERE**.

Grants & Other Resources

NIFA Scholarships for 1890 Land Grant Institutions

Amount: $67,200,000

Deadline: September 10, 2026

Eligibility: 1890 Land Grant Institutions

The USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture is offering scholarships to support recruiting, engaging, retaining, mentoring, and training of undergraduate and graduate students at the 1890 Land-grant Institutions.1890 land-grant institutions are historically Black universities designated under the Second Morrill Act of 1890. These 19 public and private colleges focus on agriculture, science, and technology. They receive federal funding to support research, teaching, and community extension programs. This scholarship program is intended to encourage outstanding students at 1890 Land-grants to pursue and complete baccalaureate and graduate (i.e., master's and doctoral) degrees in the food and agricultural sciences that would lead to a highly skilled food and agricultural systems workforce. Learn more **HERE**.

Spotted Lanternfly Community Control Grant

Amount: $15,000

Deadline: September 8, 2026

Eligibility: State and local government agencies, parks systems, nonprofit organizations

The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) is committed to strengthening our state's number one industry – food and agriculture. This grant program is intended to mitigate the impact of the invasive spotted lanternfly (SLF) and its invasive host – tree of heaven. To support local efforts, a limited number of grants are available to organizations working to control SLF populations. Priority will be given to agencies working in the most infested areas. We encourage your organization to take part in this initiative, or to share with your members and/or partners that may be eligible and interested, as we work together to suppress populations of SLF in Ohio. Learn more and apply **HERE**.

DIY Compost Resource from City of Cincinnati

Developed by the City of Cincinnati Office of Environment & Sustainability through USDA Compost and Food Waste Reduction grants, the DIY Johnson-Su Bioreactor Guide shares lessons learned from building and equipping community leaders to manage more than 60 bioreactors at community gardens, orchards, schools, and urban agriculture sites across Cincinnati. The guide includes step-by-step instructions, material lists, maintenance tips, and best practices for creating low-cost, low-maintenance composting systems that help divert food waste from landfills and create nutrient-rich compost. Now that the grants have ended, please lean on this new, comprehensive tool to ensure composting continues to be effective in Cincinnati!
Find the Guide **HERE**.

Education Corner

With recent reports of increased foodborne illness more people are choosing to buy local produce from farmers they know and trust. Vegetable vendors at farmers markets, especially those growing lettuce, and small beef producers are anecdotally reporting increased interest and sales. Situations like the cyclosporiasis outbreak are very unfortunate. But they can shine light on the vulnerability of our food system when we rely on products grown far away and shipped long distances. Supporting our local growers

can reduce our risk of food born illness while supporting family and small businesses right here in our communities.

Ways to find locally grown foods:

- **The CORV Local Food Guide** provides a list of area farmers markets and other local food resources
- Find a state-wide list from the **Ohio Produce Growers & Marketers Association**
- Find food and agricultural products made and grown in Ohio at **Ohio Proud**
- Ask for local products at your grocery or specialty market. When retailers know what their customers want they can seek out connections and suppliers

Always follow good food safety guidelines at home, no matter where you source your ingredients:

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after preparing fresh fruits, vegetables
- Thoroughly rinse produce under running water
- Refrigerate cut, peeled, or cooked vegetables promptly.

OSU College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences have released a consumer guide explaining cyclosporiasis, proper produce handling and best practices for reducing the risk of foodborne illness: Learn more **HERE**.

Rather than waiting for an outbreak to occur, try shifting just 10-20% of your food budget to locally-grown foods throughout the year if you are able. Our support helps to strengthen our local food system so it is resilient and ready when we need it the most.

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.

All District programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, religion, national origin, genetic information, ancestry, age, marital/parental status, political affiliation, military service, disability, or other non-job-related criteria.

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