

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

Friday, April 17, 2015

What a pleasant surprise the last few weeks have been from warm weather to a fairly calm atmosphere here in Springfield. However, we are still dealing with some very important issues, like SWCDs funding for FY15. We have many allies that are working to release the remainder of FY15 SWCD allocation but the climate is getting more difficult every day, especially with the proposed cuts Governor Rauner rolled out on Good Friday. While most of us completely agree Illinois needs to take control of its spending, the SWCDs have already endured a 70% cut since 2002. SWCDs are a vital organization to this great state. Let's be sure your local legislators know just how important your SWCDs role is in to the local community, county and the entire state of Illinois.

SWCD LONG RANGE PLANS

Don't forget about SWCD Long Range Plans! AISWCD can't stress enough how important these plans are to future funding ventures. The Long Range Plan acts as a Business plan which once completed will likely open doors to more funding opportunities. While IDOA is not providing a template for districts to use, you are welcome to Google "Business Plans" to see the structure and layout. There are several districts who have already completed their plans and would be more than happy to answer questions or let you borrow their plan as a template. Just remember, while we are all SWCDs, each is uniquely different in that districts have a wide range of partners and projects within their county. If AISWCD can help in anyway please let us know or contact your IDOA Area Rep. for more information.

AISWCD INTERNSHIP

The AISWCD internship job description is now posted to the website. The interviews were to take place during the week of April 20th however it has been postponed to the week of May 18th. This is an unpaid internship but, if approved by the college or university in which the student is attending, can earn credit for school. Please share the job announcement as you see fit.

http://www.aiswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/AISWCD-Internship_Job-Description_2015.pdf

NUTRIENT LOSS REDUCTION STRATEGY (NLRS) TASKFORCE

At the last NLRS meeting with IL Farm Bureau, Lauren Lurkins asked permission to have a meeting with myself and a few other commodity group partners. That meeting was set and the "Nutrient Geniuses" meeting took place on Monday, April 13th in Bloomington. Attendees included:

- Lauren Lurkins, IL Farm Bureau
- Jennifer Tiery, Council on BMPs
- Caroline Wade, Corn Growers Assn.
- Laura Gentry, Corn Growers Assn.
- Kara Downin, ISWCDEA Rep.
- Gina Bean, AISWCD
- Kelly Thompson, AISWCD

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

The following are a few items that were discussed:

NLRS Roadshow meetings – they would like SWCD employees and partners to be involved in presenting, identifying particular issues in the region where the meeting is being held and encourage SWCD Directors to attend.

SWCD Certifications – they recommend AISWCD apply for an NREC grant (due this fall) to help pay for SWCD employee training. This grant would allow technical employees to gain the certifications they need in order for districts to gain a competitive edge. Certifications could include but not limited to: CPESC, CCA, 4R training, Sustainability, Cover Crop, Certified Planner, Job Approval, etc. The training could be in the form of webinars, in-person meetings, etc.

C-BMP Funds – The Council is awarding mini-grants to the watersheds they have identified as “priority” to fund small implementation projects. The target watersheds are: Lake Springfield, Lake Decatur, Evergreen Lake, Bloomington, Vermilion River (IL Basin), Salt Fork Vermilion River (Wabash Basin), Lake Vermilion and Lake Mauvaise Terre. These mini-grants are in the amount of no more than \$5000 and are available now.

Additional Grants – It was suggested to develop a grant program at the local level to assist districts with implementation. More to be discussed on this idea.

CDSI – CLIENT GATEWAY – CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS

AISWCD has completed the NRCS/AISWCD Contribution Agreement. NRCS will now have the agreement signed and approved by the federal office before the agreement can begin. The expected start date for this agreement is June 1, 2015. Please note this date is approximate and can change. AISWCD is drafting the contract/agreement language at this time. We anticipate a general sign-up to take place in the early to middle part of May however the agreement start-date will not begin until a final agreement is signed by both AISWCD and NRCS. More information about sign-up is listed below.

CDSI-Client Gateway

The Administrative portion of this grant will include tasks and duties such as:

- Managing Program Applications
- Obligating New Contracts
- Provide support to active NRCS Financial Assistance Programs
- Perform activities to support certification and payment of conservation practices

These duties will be similar to duties already being performed in your office currently. The delivery system will be different in that most of the work will be done electronically. Training for this program will take place the first week of June. There will also be an earlier training towards the end of April. Please contact your NRCS field staff for details on this training.

CRP Contribution Agreements

The CRP Contribution Agreement sign-up will be similar to what districts have received in the past with NRCS. The Admin portion still remains in this agreement. The same rules still apply to this agreement as they have in the past. NRCS DC will still need to sign-off to verify the workload is accurate and the SWCD staff have the technical expertise to complete the work. NRCS staff are not allowed to complete any portion of this agreement. NRCS staff are to only verify the work has been completed by the SWCD employee. If the SWCD employee does not have the technical expertise to complete any of the tasks

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

listed in the Plan of Work they will need to either contract with a neighboring district to complete the technical work or sign-up for the Admin portion only.

General Questions

Conference Call – AISWCD will host a conference call once the contribution agreements have been reviewed by SWCDs. The call will likely take place during the middle of May.

Training – NRCS will host two trainings for the CDSI work, one at the end of April and another during the first part of June. Please contact your local NRCS staff to participate in the April training. AISWCD will share the June training details as they become available.

Payment – The district will be paid per contract/duty on the CRP Contribution Agreement. If your district signs-up for the Admin Agreement they will be paid monthly for a total of \$4640.00 per year.

AISWCD Dues – In order for a district to sign-up they must have paid their dues in full as of January 1, 2015. Please contact Gina with questions regarding dues payments.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Budget - Update

The FY15 operations allocation is beginning to look even bleaker as we move forward. Every district, except McHenry-Lake, should have received \$8,419.00 for operations. Districts still need approximately \$18,800.00 before the end of FY15 in July. This money has been suspended due to the Governor's budget cuts. AISWCD and partners are working diligently to get this money released but we need your districts help. Please continue to call your legislators. Let them know the financial state of SWCDs. I developed a press release for your district to share with local media regarding this issue.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS!

Discuss with them ***how will funding cuts will and are affecting their legislative district and the state as a whole***. Keep reminding them throughout the legislative session on how important Soil and Water Conservation is to Illinois. Legislators need to hear from their constituents. One last time, **I can't stress how important it is to call your legislator to let them know how a cut in funding will not only affect SWCDs but their legislative district as well.** Please continue to carry this message throughout the year as it is imperative that we are all carrying a clear and concise message.

Legislative Visit(s) – Thank you to the districts who attended the meeting with Representative Bradley and Phelps on Wednesday, April 8 in Marion. We had a great turn out of Directors and staff, so thank you! Both Representatives knew their SWCDs well. Please keep up the good work by informing your legislators.

AISWCD ANNUAL MEETING

The new schedule and registration forms will be posted to the AISWCD website next week so be looking for an email via IL.ALL with that information.

NEW THIS YEAR ...

An **Exhibit Hall** will feature partners and products. We have several exhibitors already signed up and confirmed. If you know of someone who might be a good fit please contact us ASAP as space is limited and filling up quickly.

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

A **Sunday Tour** will be offered for those who like to travel to Springfield a day early. You don't want to miss out on this tour...on the agenda is a visit to a local restaurant with a roof-top garden, a local brewery complete with beverage samples and much more! The full agenda will be posted next week on the website. Be sure to sign-up early as space is limited!

The **Hospitality Rooms** will once again be offered during the conference.

Live Auction is slightly different from the past few years. We are seeking 10-12 auction items (value \$250+) for the live auction. We are also taking other donations (i.e. wine, hand-made items, housewares, wall art, etc.) for the silent auction (value <\$250). The silent auction will take place in conjunction with the Live Auction this year. If your LUC would like to pool their money to purchase an item to place in the Live Auction (i.e. seed corn, Terry Redland print, firearms, etc.) it is greatly appreciated. Some items might be paired and placed as a "basket-type" item. We need a list of all items no later than June 1st so we can advertise on the website and in the auction booklet. **Please note:** the auction is a money-maker for education programs. Our partners: Auxiliary, Envirothon, ISWCDEA all hope to receive a portion of the money raised to help fund their individual education/outreach needs.

Bring your spouse and family to this year's Annual Meeting & Summer Conference. There will be plenty of activities for the whole family!

AISWCD DUES

When budgets get tight so do the checkbooks...we've all been in a similar situation. While we understand the dues amount - 3% assessment of district operational funds – seems to be a large amount, especially when districts are fighting to keep their doors open and pay employees. However, that amount we feel is invaluable because it assures districts that they will receive some amount of funding from the State of Illinois each year, as long as AISWCD is in place and functioning properly. The more dues we receive the better off we are at keeping a lobbyist on staff and offering districts programs, grants and services at a discounted rate. Without dues, AISWCD does not function, and quite frankly, will not exist.

Q: *Why is the dues amount a 3% assessment of district operational funds when the district isn't allowed to use operational dollars to pay dues?*

A: The 3% assessment of district operational funds is to ensure the AISWCD is doing their job – lobbying to get funding for districts which in turn empowers each SWCD in Illinois. The more money districts receive the better off AISWCD will be financially and can focus on finding additional forms of revenue for districts.

Q: *If my district pays a portion of the dues will my district be considered in good standing, have voting privileges and be allowed to participate in AISWCD led programs, grants or other activities listed in the AISWCD Bylaws?*

A: The AISWCD Bylaws state in **Section #6: Dues**. The dues of the Association shall be paid in full annually by January 1. **A district paying only a portion of the dues will not be considered "in good standing" for that year.**

AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

Q: My district just cannot afford the 3% dues amount required to be a member of AISWCD but I need AISWCD's help to continue lobbying efforts in order to receive funding from the State of Illinois. What are some options for my district?

A: At the discretion of the AISWCD President and under advisement from the Executive Committee, your district can be granted a dues variance. The dues variance is a one-time opportunity extended to districts with extenuating circumstances.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY AISWCD

AISWCD is grateful for Soil and Water Conservation Districts! We'd like to provide a list of services that we currently offer to our SWCD members.

- ❖ **Lobbying** for SWCD funds
- ❖ Registered **Lobbyist**
- ❖ **Discounted Insurance Premiums** (AISWCD holds the master policy and gets reimbursed by IDOA)
 - Directors and Officers Liability
 - Business Auto
 - Package Policy (property, inland marine and general liability)
 - Umbrella Policy
 - Workers Compensation
- ❖ **Program & Grant Opportunities** – Contribution Agreements
- ❖ State Envirothon Competition
- ❖ Illinois Urban Manual – coordination & update
- ❖ Informational material – email based (il.all subscription)
- ❖ Conservation Catchall publication
- ❖ Legislative Day Reception
- ❖ Tech Soup – technology discounts

AISWCD was set-up to lobby for funding to support districts. Without AISWCD efforts over the past few months, districts would not have received any of the 2nd operations allocation. District staff are not allowed to lobby unless they are taking time off. District Directors are allowed to lobby, however most have full-time jobs and are unable to take the time required to travel and time to visit legislators at the state house. Without our lobbyist and efforts of the Executive Committee (President & Executive Director) districts would not have received the amount they did nor would the state consider releasing the remainder of the 2nd allocation.

We greatly appreciate your membership! Please let us know how we can better serve your district by submitting comments to Kelly.thompson@aiswcd.org. I will direct any comments or question to the AISWCD Executive Board members.

As always, if you have any questions or comments at all, don't hesitate to call the office! Remember, AISWCD works for Districts...without SWCDs, the Association would not exist!

Remember to **INFORM** your Legislators!

You can never send them enough information on activities taking place in your district!

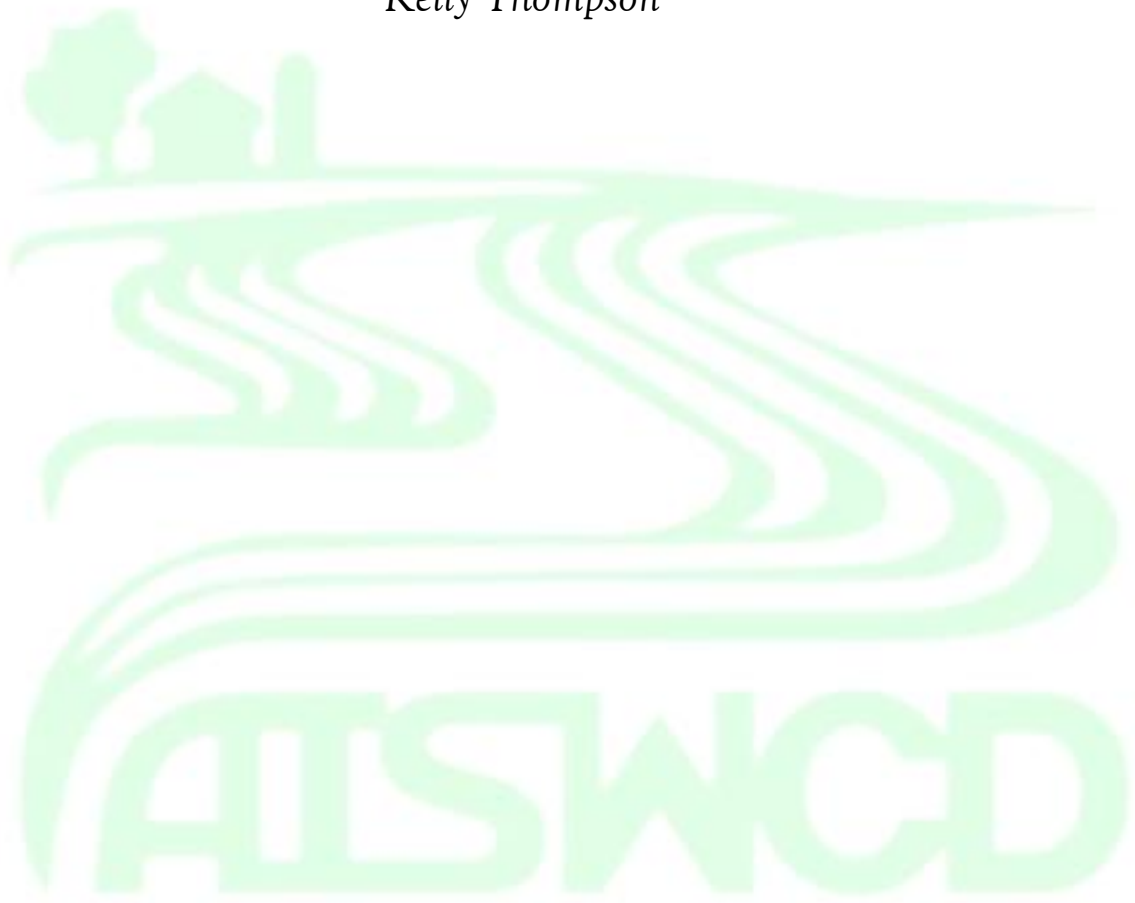
AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

Planting season has begun...drive safe and look out for farm equipment!



Kelly Thompson



AISWCD

Executive Director's Bi-Monthly Report

CDSI-Client Gateway & CRP Contribution Agreements GRANT Question & Answer Sheet - UPDATED

Q: *Does my district have to be in "good standing" with AISWCD in order to participate in this new program?*

A: Per AISWCD Bylaws, Section #5: Membership states, A district in good standing shall have privileges of being represented by the Association and directors able to hold office, vote in Association matters, and participate in Association programs. Yes, your district must be in good standing in order to participate in this program.

Q: *How can AISWCD withhold Federal Program dollars from my district?*

A: AISWCD is not withholding any Federal Program dollars from your district. No document states Soil and Water Conservation Districts have to be the contracting partner to complete the CDSI and CRP admin and technical work. NRCS has extended this opportunity to AISWCD to subcontract with districts because they are the logical partner and have been an asset to NRCS operations. Overall, if NRCS would have hired a third party to administer this program, it is likely the third party could hire whoever they desired to complete task with no guarantee the districts would have a role in any part of the process.

Q: *If my district only has one employee, am I still eligible to partake in both opportunities?*

A: Any and all districts can participate in the CDSI-Admin grant. In order to participate in the CRP Contribution Agreement your district must have the technical expertise to fulfill all of the duties listed in the CRP Plan of Work.

Q: *If my district has one administrative employee and a neighboring district has a technical employee, can my district complete the CDSI-Admin grant for the neighboring county and they complete the CRP Contribution Agreement technical grant for my district?*

A: Absolutely your district can coordinate and contract with a neighboring district to complete the full scope of work.

Q: *When will AISWCD ask districts to review and sign a contract?*

A: AISWCD is drafting the AISWCD/SWCD agreements now. The request for work will be sent to all districts in early May via IL.ALL email.

Q: *Will training be provided for district staff to complete the administrative duties?*

A: Yes, the first training will be hosted by NRCS at the end of April. Contact NRCS staff for more information. The next opportunity will be the first week of June. More details to come.

Q: *Will AISWCD hold a conference call before districts are required to sign the agreement and plan of work?*

A: Yes, AISWCD plans to host a conference call with all potential district partners sometime during the early to middle part of May. An email will be sent out via IL.ALL with more details.