



A Legacy of Service

Early farmland cultivation did not include practices to ensure the long-term health of the soil and water. As a result, nutrients were depleted, deep-rooted plants were removed and the soil's ability to retain moisture was lost.

When a horrendous drought hit south-central United States in the 1930s, up to 70% of topsoil, in some places, simply blew away. The resulting massive airborne dust clouds or "black blizzards" characterized the historic Dust Bowl.

To rebuild the soil foundation and improve the sustainability of precious resources, Franklin D. Roosevelt developed legislation establishing conservation districts and concluded...

"The nation that destroys its soil, destroys itself!"

Early SWCD efforts focused on soil health and included crop rotation, contour plowing and terracing practices. Today 97 SWCD's across Illinois work more holistically and specialize in many areas of conservation.

Ronald Reagan's 1989 statement on soil and water conservation declared...

"the management of soil and water resources on nonfederal lands are the principles of responsible stewardship and cooperative action to solve resource problems."

To continue this legacy of service by the states SWCD system, public investments are essential to address the growing wage-stagnation for front-line conservation professionals while also ensuring that equitable insurance options are available for employees and families.

Addressing wage stagnation is critical to stemming the state's reoccurring front-line employee turnover and shortage crisis. It is also important for putting required conservation on the ground essential to addressing the states nutrient loss reduction strategy.

Please safeguard this essential long-term investment in resilience, to ensure that Illinois'

Soil and Water Conservation Districts remain vibrant to elevate the Legacy of Service!

Elevate the Legacy of Illinois' Commitment to Conservation

Dedicating \$10.5 million

into the SWCD Operational Fund will ensure that Illinois' natural and working lands remain our greatest ally in the fight against climate change.

Since 1948, SWCD work has left a legacy of service across Illinois' natural landscapes and working lands, benefiting soil health, water quality, wildlife habitats, and food security—all while **building a sustainable environment fit to pass down to future generations.**

Agriculture is a major industry in Illinois, contributing over \$51.1 billion annually to the state's economy. Crops account for 40% of that total, and Illinois is the 5th largest exporter of agricultural products in the United States. \$10.5 million in the FY 25 state budget, **to help safeguard this vital industry is a small portion to invest** to ensure that Illinois' agricultural production industry remains vibrant and environmentally sustainable.

It is said that agriculture contributes 10% of US heat-trapping emissions and therefore, conservation on farms must be a part of our state's climate solution. Many farmers and landowners are ready to implement these practices on their land, but they need **the legacy of service from their local SWCD staff to facilitate the shift.**

Neighboring states invest in their Soil and Water Conservation Districts at a much higher level.

- Wisconsin (\$10,962,300 or \$152,254/district)
- Ohio (\$17,005,614 or \$193,245/district)
- Missouri (\$16,509,770 or \$144,822/district)
- Minnesota (\$15,000,000 or \$170,454/district)

Compared to the Illinois 5-year investments...

- FY 20 & 21: \$4,949,937 (\$40,721/district)
- FY 22 & 23: \$7,950,000 (\$81,958.78/district)
- FY 24: \$69,958.76/district thus far, waiting for second installment figures)
- FY 25: proposed \$4,500,000 (\$36,082/district after insurance deduction)

Each of these states rank behind Illinois in terms of cash receipts from the agricultural industry (Wisconsin 10th, Ohio 11th, Missouri 12th, and Minnesota 6th), yet **they exceed Illinois in their fiscal commitments** to elevating their states soil and water conservation districts.

Education & Outreach

Through education and outreach, SWCD staff teach people of all ages about their local natural resources and conservation. District programs like classroom presentations, workshops, and field days, help people develop skills to creatively solve conservation needs on their land and in their community.

Soil & Agriculture

SWCD staff deliver tools and programs to strengthen farmland preservation, soil health, and agricultural economies.

Forest Health & Wildfires

SWCD staff provide technical and financial assistance to landowners to plan and implement forest conservation projects. Restoration projects and conservation easements facilitate the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

Wildlife Habitat

For more than 75 years, SWCD staff have worked with landowners and communities to restore habitats, improve water quality, and protect vital wildlife resources.

Invasive Species Removal

SWCD staff help landowners make responsible weed management decisions and provide tips, tools and support for removal projects.

Water Use & Quality

SWCD staff provide landowners with the tools they need to protect water from sediment runoff and nutrient loss while also working to prevent and mitigate the effects of drought, advance the restoration of dams and reservoirs, and improve the management of stormwater.

Urban Environment

SWCD staff provide technical and educational assistance to urban residents and communities. A variety of projects help protect and improve the urban environment.

- Rain gardens and rainwater harvesting
- Tree planting and management
- Invasive species management
- Impervious surface removal
- Stormwater management
- Permeable pavement installation
- Small acreage farming and rooftop gardens
- Soil interpretation-protection
- Urban erosion and sediment control

**“A nation that destroys its soil,
destroys itself.”**

~ President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1936

**Are we fated to repeat history
when we don't learn from it?**



**Elevating the state
investments into
Illinois' Soil and Water
Conservation Districts
can reduce the return to
days of the dust bowl.**

**Please increase.
HB 5673/SB 3832
Section 115 from
\$4.5 million to \$10.5 Million**



Surviving the Dust Bowl: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xqlfsm>

“One of the best, and certainly the most promising, of the devices for dealing democratically and effectively with maladjustment in land use, as well as for carrying forward positive programs of desirable conservation, and for maintaining the work, is the soil conservation district.”

~ Hugh Hammond Bennett
The Father of Soil Conservation