



Washington County Conservation District Newsletter

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2019 Farmer of the Year



The Washington County Conservation District

would like to recognize the Ashby Farm as the recipient of the 2019 Conservation Farmer of the Year award.

The Washington County Conservation District awards committee reviewed multiple farms this fall for the 2019 Conservation Farmer of the Year award. This award is presented in recognition for outstanding commitment to conservation in Washington County.

The Ashby Farm located in Amwell Township is owned by Dave and Chrystal Ashby, who also have two children, Ethan and Tara.

Currently, the entire farm consists of 125 acres, of which 32 acres is cropland and 79 acres is dedicated pasture. The farm is a grass-based operation which they operate as beef cow – calf operation on a rotational grazing system. The current grazing system consists of 26 paddocks with multiple temporary cross fences.

The Ashby's have worked closely with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and their programs since 2007. Through the help of NRCS, California University of Pennsylvania, Partners of Fish and Wildlife, as well as doing projects on their own, the Ashby's have been able to install and implement many practices to help with their conservation efforts.

They have installed 10,000 ft of fence, 5 stream crossings and 6 spring developments. The farmstead has a covered heavy use feeding pad and manure storage which was installed in 2015. Other best management practices that were implemented include wildlife habitat, animal trail and walkway, and pressurized watering system.

The Washington County Conservation District would like to congratulate Dave, Chrystal and Family as the recipient of the 2019 Conservation Farmer of the Year award.



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PA Clean Water Farm Award

The Iams farm is a beef operation with 155 acres of cropland and 220 acres of pasture. The farm is located in Amity, PA. The farm is a grass-based operation. They use contour strips, intensive rotational grazing, and covered manure storage structures. All of these practices protect water quality.

Based on the Iams farm dedication to protecting water quality, the Washington County Conservation District nominated the farm for the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) Clean Water Farm Award. The honor is awarded annually to farmers who manage their daily farm operations in an environmentally conscious manner that helps to protect Pennsylvania's water quality. The Iams Farm was presented the award at the annual PACD conference in July.



MANAGER'S CORNER

First, I would like to welcome Audrey Sykes to the Washington County Conservation District as a new Erosion and Sedimentation Technician. She is a great addition to the district and is hard working and learning every day. See her biography in this newsletter.

Next, WCCD has implemented many new information technology (IT) practices since the last newsletter. The staff has had to learn how to use a new data management system in PracticeKeeper, we created a better shared understanding by switching to Microsoft Office 365 for our office, and now are using a new user friendly timekeeping software. They continue to learn and adjust to the changes created within WCCD and are embracing and excelling in using these new IT practices.

Finally, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) re-issued the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit with updated procedures that many of the staff have to react and adjust to for review of new submissions. It is a learning process, but they are adapting and overcoming to assist the community. Tom and Jen have been hard at work in submitting multiple grant requests to also assist the community. They did a great job in preparing these requests and now we wait for approval. Emily continues to drive around the county conducting road assessments to better the reporting of roads for possible future funding.

Welcome To Our TEAM

My name is Audrey Sykes.

I was born and raised in Louisiana. In 2013, my family and I moved to West Virginia where I went on to study Environmental Stewardship and Education and am nearing the completion of a Master of Science in Biology at West Liberty University. I am a member of WLU's Crayfish Conservation Laboratory, which is one of the only labs dedicated to crayfish

conservation in the country. This seemingly uncharismatic animal group are considered keystone species, and the Appalachian Mountains are home to 75% of the crayfish species found globally! My graduate research projects included sampling lakes for native and invasive crayfish throughout western Pennsylvania and documenting crayfish faunal shifts in Pennsylvania's portion of the Potomac River Basin for the first time since 1905.

As of January, I will have lived in five states in the past seven years! To highlight a few, I served as a Science Instructor in Houston, Texas, a Naturalist for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and as a Park Ranger for Allegheny County in Pennsylvania. Though I have been very fortunate to travel through work and continuing my education, I am grateful to have the opportunity to plant roots here in Pennsylvania. This past November, I began working for Washington County Conservation District as an Erosion and Sedimentation Control Technician. In this position, I will have the opportunity to provide insight regarding the best management practices associated with permitted earth moving activities to preserve the integrity of freshwater ecosystems in Washington County.



Washington County Farmland Preservation Program

Location:: Washington County Conservation District Office
50 Old Hickory Ridge Road, Washington, PA 15301

The Washington County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (WCALPB) is pleased to announce that from 1994 to present, **6,531 acres on 41 farms are preserved!** These farms represent working lands across the county which produce field crops, milk, vegetables, Christmas trees, nursery stock, and a variety of livestock. On behalf of Washington County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we thank the farm families who have made this forever commitment.

Anyone with a pending application to the Washington County Farmland Preservation program or anyone considering applying to the Washington County Farmland Preservation program, please plan to attend the **Farmland Preservation Informational Workshop**.

Date/Time: Thursday, March 12, 2020 – 5:30 PM
30-45 minute Presentation plus Q & A Session

Light Refreshments Provided

What Information Will Be Covered In The Workshop?
Overview of the Washington County Farmland Preservation Program

- Application Process & Deadlines
- Eligibility Requirements (including Agricultural Security Areas)
- Farmland Ranking System
- Program Restrictions

For More Information or to RSVP, contact:

Caroline Sinchar, Washington County Planning Commission
100 W. Beau Street, Suite 701, Washington, PA 15301
Telephone: (724) 228-6811
Email: sincharc@co.washington.pa.us

Please RSVP BY MARCH 10 for the Farmland Preservation Informational Workshop via phone or email so we are prepared with adequate materials & refreshments

2020/2021 Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Projects Announced

The Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road (DGLVR) Program has funded 10 new projects for the 2020 funding cycle in the amount of \$687,493.53.

Projects include:

East Crossroads Road – Hopewell Township (3 project sites) – \$283,906.58 Total

McCready Road – Jefferson Township (3 project sites) – \$291,471.67 Total

McElree Road – North Franklin Township – \$10,795.58

Possum Hollow Road – Hopewell Township – 44,400.00

Ridge Church Road – Amwell Township – \$44,158.70

Walker Hill Road – Blaine Township – \$12,761.00

Get funding for your local roads!

It's time to start thinking about potential projects for the Spring of 2021! The upcoming DGLVR grant round will be open for applications starting June 1, 2020 and will be open until August 31, 2020. If you know of a potential project within your municipality, contact the DGLVR Technician, Emily Wise, at ewise@pawccd.org, or call 724-705-7098.

A municipal employee must have attended an Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) training within the last five (5) years to be eligible to apply for a grant. The eligibility list and upcoming trainings can be found at dirtandgravel.psu.edu/education-and-training.



Photo: 2019 landslide repair on Cherry Road, Hopewell Township.

Anyone Remember - The rainstorm that happened on September 10, 2018?

The residents on Birch Road northwest of Daisytown sure do. The nearly 5 inches of rain received from the remnants of Tropical Storm Gordon caused catastrophic flooding on Little Pike Run, which flows underneath of Birch Road. The existing crosspipe under the road became partially plugged with debris, essentially creating a dam, causing the normally 18-inch stream to swell to over 60 feet wide upstream of the culvert. Eventually, the stream overtopped the three existing culvert pipes and the road was completely washed out, cutting off access to the homes of all Birch Road residents.



West Pike Run Township applied for a Low Volume Road grant in May 2019 to replace the culvert and it was approved two weeks later. With a \$91,536.00 Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road grant and supplementary funds from the Redevelopment Authority of Washington County, the Township was able to replace the three destroyed pipes with one larger aluminum culvert. With this replacement, Little Pike Run should have no problem staying within its banks!



FROM THE WASHINGTON COUNTY WATERSHED ALLIANCE—Winter 2020

Washington County Watershed Alliance

50 Old Hickory Ridge Road, Suite 1, Washington, PA 15301

Website: Visit us at www.wcwalliance.org or our Facebook page for more information on our activities.

Meetings: The meetings are the first Tuesday of the month at the Washington Co. Conservation District office (50 Old Hickory Ridge Rd., Washington, PA 15301). Meetings are open to the public and begin at 7:00 pm. Join us to learn more about our organization.

Amazon Smile: You can now help the WCWA with every purchase you make on Amazon. If you use Amazon, you can login through Smile.amazon.com to send 0.5% of each of your purchases to the Watershed Alliance.

Annual Meeting: The WCWA will hold it's 2020 Annual Meeting on Tuesday March 3rd from 5-7:30 pm at the Conservation District Office. Attendance is \$10 and will include dinner, speakers, and raffles. Tickets can be purchased on the WCWA website or by contacting us at info@wcwalliance.org At the meeting there will be a presentation from Keep PA Beautiful on clean-up efforts and Diane Peterson of Our Children Our Earth will talk about reducing your single-use plastic consumption and have items for purchase available.

2020 WCWA Annual Meeting

Tuesday, March 3rd — From 5:00-7:00pm

Friends, come as you are for a friendly environmental evening! Enjoy a light dinner, great conversation, and a night full of environmental inspiration!

Members-Vote for At-Large Board positions for 2020!

Hear a presentation by Keep PA Beautiful and information on how to participate in clean ups. Also learn from Dianne Peterson on how to reduce single-use plastics in your life and purchase reusable items!

Please RSVP by February 24th*:

Online: www.wcwalliance.org

Email: info@wcwalliance.org

*RSVP is required. The dinner will cost \$10.00 per person. Payment can be made online at the website or by contacting us to mail in payment.

Chartiers Creek Watershed Association

www.upperchartierscreek.org; email: chartierscreekwa@pawccd.org; [facebook.com/upperchartierscreek](https://www.facebook.com/upperchartierscreek)

Meetings - The ChCWA meets at 7:00 pm on the second Wednesday of each month at the WCCD Office— 50 Old Hickory Ridge Rd. Suite 1, Washington, PA.

Backyard Birds Presentation: Tom Contreras Associate Professor and Chair of Biology at Washington and Jefferson College gave a presentation on winter mixed-species bird flocks and the citizen science Christmas bird count project at the December meeting. Attendees learned what birds to expect in Western PA during winter months and how to participate in the Christmas Bird Count from the comfort of their own home.



WCWA Fundraiser Tree Sale

Through March 6th

Please see our website for details on the trees available! All trees will be available to pick up at Ag Days, April 17 & 18 at the Fairgrounds. Get your orders in soon as quantities are limited.

www.wcwalliance.org

Buffalo Creek Watershed Association

www.buffalocreekwatershed.org; email: buffalocreekwa@gmail.com

Meetings: BCWA meetings are the second Thursday of each month, 7:00 pm at the Buffalo Twp. Municipal Bldg.

Research Project: The group has joined with West Liberty University, the WCWA, and the Center for Coalfield Justice to continue to assess five sites within the watershed. Sampling for macroinvertebrates was completed in 2019 and chemical samples will be taken every two weeks until March 2021. A new round of macroinvertebrate sampling will be done in the spring of 2020. Results are presented quarterly at the BCWA meetings.



December Meeting and Presentations:

At the December meeting BCWA hosted a public outreach program featuring Presentations by: Andrew Donovan of *Meadowcroft* on the history of the Rock Shelf; Larry Helgerman, local Audubon representative, explaining the significance of the *Audubon's Citizen Science Christmas Bird Survey*; and, Morgan Livingston, Farm Manager of the *Greater Washington County Food Bank* addressing how that organization's goals, focus, and activities are aimed at eradicating hunger in the Southwestern PA region and beyond. Dinner was enjoyed by all attendees and some wonderful items were raffled off at the end of the evening.

Ten Mile Creek Watershed Association

www.tenmilecreekwatershed.org

Facebook: The TMCWA has created a Facebook page, find us and keep up to date with volunteer items and meeting dates.

Upcoming Meetings: The TMCWA meets on the first Monday of April, July, and October, at 9:00am at the Log Cabin Fence Company meeting room. The next meeting will be held on Monday April 6th.

Natural Gas Joint Event—Ten Mile and Upper Wheeling

Watersheds: On Monday October 7th, 2019 the Upper Wheeling and Ten Mile Creek Watershed Associations hosted a joint event at the Barn at Ike's Place. The event featured a speaker from EQT. The event was well attended.



Upper Wheeling Creek Watershed Association

www.upperwheelingcreek.org

Upcoming Meetings: The Upper Wheeling Creek Watershed Association meets quarterly on the first Wednesday of April, July, and October at 10:00 AM at the East Finley Township Building, 1394 East Finley Drive (Rt, 231). The next meeting will be held on Wednesday April 15th.

Stream Monitoring: The UWCWA will be continuing its stream monitoring program, even after the WCWA ends its participation. These loggers monitor for conductivity, temperature, and water level every 15 minutes continuously. This project will run in the Upper Wheeling Creek watershed into 2020 due to generous donations from local companies.

Erosion and Sedimentation Control Program

Matt Golden and Audrey Sykes

E&S Technicians

Sediment is one of the largest sources of nonpoint pollution by volume in Washington County, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and in our country. Though erosion can be facilitated by a number of natural processes, development can also contribute to sediment pollution. Sediment can be made up of the fine particles of soil, clay, sand, or silt that can be carried to aquatic systems. Sedimentation can fill the interstitial spaces beneath rocks in streams that fish and macroinvertebrates (e.g. crayfish, Water Penny, Dragonfly larvae, etc.) depend on for refuge. Over time sedimentation can lead to rock embeddedness, which decreases the amount of suitable habitat for stream dwelling creatures and has the potential to cause ripple effects both in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Our goal is to ensure that the best erosion and sediment runoff prevention methods are used on locations being developed for the preservation of freshwater ecosystems in Washington County.

The Erosion and Sedimentation Control Program, otherwise known as the Chapter 102 Program, permits earth moving activities and oversees the implementation of best management practices on site. Through our partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Protection (DEP), we evaluate and issue General and Individual NPDES permits for construction plans that will disturb one acre of land or more over the life of the project. In 2019, E&S staff completed 163 plan reviews, which proposed a total of 1,903 acres during construction. Our Erosion and Sedimentation Control Technicians performed 336 site inspections spanning 295 construction locations across the county. Additionally, we responded to 32 resident complaints regarding potential sources of nonpoint pollution related to construction activities. For information regarding permit acquisition, stream health concerns, or for information about upcoming outreach events, feel free to reach out to the Washington County Conservation District at 724-705-7098, or email Matt Golden (mgolden@pawccd.org), Lyndsey Burton (lburton@pawccd.org), or Audrey Sykes (asykes@pawccd.org).





**Farm Service
Agency**



50 Old Hickory Ridge Rd, Suite 2, Washington, PA 15301 Phone: 724-222-3060 Ext. 2

USDA Safety Net Program Enrollment for 2019 and 2020

Agricultural producers now can enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs – two U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) safety net programs – for the 2019 and 2020 crop year.

ARC provides income support payments on historical base acres when actual crop revenue declines below a specified guaranteed level. PLC provides income support payments on historical base acres when the effective price for a covered commodity falls below its reference price. The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and updated both programs.

Signup for the 2019 crop year closes *March 15, 2020*, while signup for the 2020 crop year closes *June 30, 2020*. Producers who have not yet enrolled for 2019 can enroll for both 2019 and 2020 during the same visit to an FSA county office.

ARC and PLC have options for the farm operator who is actively farming the land as well as the owner of the land. Farm owners also have a one-time opportunity to update PLC payment yields beginning with crop year 2020. If the farm owner and producer visit the FSA county office together, FSA can also update yield information during that visit.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

MAL and LDP Policy

The 2018 Farm Bill extends loan authority through 2023 for Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs).

MALs and LDPs provide financing and marketing assistance for wheat, feed grains, soybeans, and other oilseeds, pulse crops, rice, peanuts, cotton, wool and honey. MALs provide producers interim financing after harvest to help them meet cash flow needs without having to sell their commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows. A producer who is eligible to obtain a loan, but agrees to forgo the loan, may obtain an LDP if such a payment is available. Marketing loan provisions and LDPs are not available for sugar and extra-long staple cotton.

FSA is now accepting requests for 2019 MALs and LDPs for all eligible commodities after harvest. Requests for loans and LDPs shall be made on or before the final availability date for the respective commodities.

Commodity certificates are available to loan holders who have outstanding nonrecourse loans for wheat, upland cotton, rice, feed grains, pulse crops (dry peas, lentils, large and small chickpeas), peanuts, wool, soybeans and designated minor oilseeds. These certificates can be purchased at the posted county price (or adjusted world price or national posted price) for the quantity of commodity under loan, and must be immediately exchanged for the collateral, satisfying the loan. MALs redeemed with commodity certificates are not subject to Adjusted Gross Income provisions.

To be considered eligible for an LDP, producers must have form [CCC-633EZ, Page 1](#) on file at their local FSA Office before losing beneficial interest in the crop. Pages 2, 3 or 4 of the form must be submitted when payment is requested.

Marketing loan gains (MLGs) and loan deficiency payments (LDPs) are no longer subject to payment limitations, actively engaged in farming and cash-rent tenant rules.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provisions state that a producer whose total applicable three-year average AGI exceeds \$900,000 is not eligible to receive an MLG or LDP. Producers must have a valid CCC-941 on file to earn a market gain of LDP. The AGI does not apply to MALs redeemed with commodity certificate exchange.

Banking on Soil Health

By Dee Ann Littlefield, USDA

Aug 20, 2019

Farmers implementing conservation practices that improve soil health aren't just hoping for better crop yields, they're banking on them. The Natural Resources Conservation Service and American Farmland Trust recently released case studies highlighting the economic benefits of implementing soil health management practices.

The four case studies focus on:

- Two corn-soybean farmers in Illinois and Ohio;
- An almond producer in California; and
- A diversified crop farmer growing sweet corn, alfalfa, and corn for silage or grain in New York.

The four farmers implemented soil health practices like no-till or strip-till, nutrient management, cover crops, compost, and mulching.



Case Study Highlights

- The average yield increase for all crops grown was 12%
- The average return on investment was 176%, with a range from 35% to 343%.
- The practices led to increased infiltration, thereby reducing water runoff and soil erosion to ultimately improve water quality outcomes.

“Quantifying these economic benefits of soil health management systems across the nation’s diverse soils, climates, and production systems has been one of the critical gaps in rapidly increasing their adoption,” said NRCS Soil Health Division Director Bianca Moebius-Clune.

“Although many farmers are strong conservationists, a deciding factor is how the cost compares to the return. Each case study offers a clear example. This gives producers interested in making changes on their operation an idea of the potential return on their investment, and how those economic benefits can be justified.”



Conservation Innovation Grant

The four case studies were developed as part of AFT’s 2018 NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant project entitled “Accelerating Soil Health Adoption by Quantifying Economic and Environmental Outcomes & Overcoming Barriers on Rented Lands.” The study employed several tools developed by USDA and NRCS to conduct the analysis.

AFT hired Florence Swartz, a retired NRCS economist from New York, to conduct the economic partial budget analysis. AFT also partnered with the developers of USDA’s Nutrient Tracking Tool to determine water quality benefits of the adopted soil health practices and NRCS’ COMET-Farm tool to determine their greenhouse gas emissions reductions. These tools are both available to the public.

“We felt there was a gap in information available to producers – most farmers are aware of the environmental benefits of soil health practices, but the on-farm costs and benefits of implementing them have not been widely available,” said Michelle Perez, water initiative director and lead researcher of this project for AFT.

“We wanted to help fill that gap. USDA and NRCS has invested in the people and the tools that provide these quantitative assessments. AFT is using this infrastructure to show the economic and environmental benefits across a variety of farming operations.”

Establishing profitability and good return on investment is key to helping farmers evaluate risk in trying something new. Farmers who have been considering adding soil health practices to their operation can use these case studies to approach their property landlords to discuss sharing the risks and rewards of the soil health investments. If purchasing a new field, farmers may also consider sharing the case studies with their bankers to secure additional financing for farm expansion.

Kid's Corner

How to Compost

Composting your food scraps and used paper is one way to reduce waste and help the environment!

1. What is composting?

Composting is where organic material is left to decay under natural conditions, turning the waste into usable soil.

2. How do I get started?

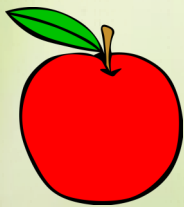
Getting started is easy! First, you can choose what kind of bin you would like to use. You can buy one at the store, shop online, or even make your own out of recycled wooden pallets or a black trash bin.

3. What can I put into my compost bin?

There are many things you can put into your compost bin. It is good practice to put equal amounts of green and brown materials in your bin. Green materials are things such as vegetable scraps, fresh green grass clippings, coffee grounds and fruits. Some brown materials include newspaper and dry leaves. Some things you should avoid throwing in your compost bin include, bread, meat and dairy products. Make sure to keep your compost material moist and stir it regularly to keep the material aerated!

Now its your turn!

Draw lines connecting the items that you can throw in your compost bin!



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