

FY 2014 Annual Narrative Report

Weakley County Soil Conservation District



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Weakley County Soil Conservation District

CONSERVATION COST SHARE & RENTAL PROGRAMS (CRP), STATE BEST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (BMP), & ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP) COST SHARE

Conservation Plans for Cropland written for the year as measured in acres totaled 3,825 acres. This acreage included Conservation Compliance Planning, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The sign-up and re-enrollment into CRP has dropped off due to the rising income from corn and soybeans. There were 58 contracts, 10 of them were Filter Strip Contracts approved in this sign-up. The contract total rental rate for this sign-up was \$198,221. The acres that were re-enrolled will have maintenance cost share one or two years of the contract. There were newly enrolled acres that will receive cost-share for establishment of grasses, forbs, shrubs and or trees. The Conservation Reserve Program is a ten year contract. The amount of rental payments for all acres in the Conservation Reserve Program is \$886,572 which is on 8968.2 acres. Weakley County has 335 Conservation Reserve Program Contracts. There were 31 applications in FY14 EQIP. There were 16 Certified and/or Planned EQIP Contracts obligated for FY14 with cost-share amounting to \$242,519.00.

The State Agriculture Resources Conservation Fund (ARCF) provides cost-share assistance to Tennessee landowners to install Best Management Practices (BMPs) that reduce agricultural water pollution. This assistance is facilitated primarily through Soil Conservation Districts although Resource Conservation and Development Councils, universities, and other agricultural associations may participate. A wide range of BMPs are available for cost-share. Weakley County Soil Conservation District accepts applications on a first come first served basis. Applications are accepted year round. Landowners may be eligible to receive up to 75% of the cost of a BMP installation. We had two applications and one canceled. One was a cropland conversion to pasture with a cost share of \$1,638.29 and the other was a grade control structure with a cost share of \$6227.82 which was canceled by the owner. It was too late in the year for a new application to be applied. We hope to have more participation next year.

The new Soil Health Management Systems introduced by the Natural Resources Conservation Service features how to unlock a farms' potential. The district secretary and supervisors, NRCS conservationist and local farmers attended a conference hosted by the Madison County Soil Conservation District in Jackson in July 2013 had experts and long-time farmers showing the ways to "unlock the secrets of the soil". The Milan No-till Field Day had exhibits demonstrating the concept in 2014. The Weakley County Soil Conservation District hosted a Soil Health Breakfast in December 2014 with a program that was attended

by local farmers. Soil Health Systems can optimize inputs, protect against drought by increased infiltration of the soil and increase production. A practicing farmer in West Tennessee explained to local farmers how he was doing it in a short program after the hosted breakfast.

COUNTY STATISTICS

In 1985 the Dresden Field Office performed an in-depth census of the county. The measurement of the county acres being in those numbers. There are 389,109 acres in Weakley County of those acres 116,000 acres are highly erodible land and 76,265 are not highly erodible, with approximately 211,009 acres of cropland.

The remaining acreage includes towns, roads, railroads, forests, grassland and idle land. Farming is the major industry in the county.

According to 2012 Census of Agriculture (www.agcensus.usda.gov) for Weakley County there were 255,550 acres of land in farms in 2007 and 254,133 acres in 2012. There were 1,214 farms in 2007 and 861 in 2012. Government payments in 2007 averaged \$5,068 per farm and \$6,495 per farm in 2012. The average age of the principal operator: 58.5 years old. There was 66 percent of farm income from crop sales and 34 percent of farm income from livestock sales.

DISTRICT SECRETARY AND SUPERVISOR ACTIVITIES

The district secretary assists with many aspects of the programs available to farmers and landowners. She coordinates the Conservation Reserve Program paper work between Farm Services Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the district and the landowners. She helps with the EQIP and CRP folder work and takes applications for the State Funded Best Management Practices. She is the receptionist, clerk, bookkeeper and program assistant.

The district secretary helps farmers in the Conservation Reserve Program connect with seed companies specializing in native warm season grass seeds and connects them with districts that rent the special planter that they require.

The district holds a spring tree sale. Offerings are ornamental and fruiting trees, and ornamental and fruiting shrubs which are delivered to the office parking lot to be sold for planting. The district supervisors help in the tree sales. This past spring sale in March was frozen out due to an ice and snow storm.

The district secretary attends workshops and meetings offered for training. The annual convention of the Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts is also attended by supervisors and the secretary. These meetings keep the secretary and supervisors up-to-date on program benefits and conservation activities and other areas of concern to the farmer.

The supervisors have regular monthly meetings to conduct district business and discuss conservation concerns. These meetings are open to the public and are held on the third Thursday of the month. The board of supervisors consists of five members. Those members are Gerald Parham, chairman; Dr. Bob Hathcock, vice-chairman; Keith Kemp(alone), Secretary; Tony Winstead, Treasurer; and Kevin Canaday, member.

PL-566 WATERSHEDS

There were four watersheds districts established in the 1950's and 60's in Weakley County. Watershed work plans due to Public Law 566 were developed and boards established. The county now has three active watershed district boards and one watershed district without a board. Cypress Creek Watershed, Middle Fork Obion River Watershed and Mud Creek Watershed have active boards. Thompson Creek Watershed no longer has a board. The Middle Fork Board is headquartered in Henry County (Paris Field Office) because the majority of structures are in Henry County. Special property taxes are no longer appropriated by the watersheds and are no longer collected therefore maintenance funds are dwindling.

All the watershed dams in the county are aging. Two dams in Thompson Creek Watershed have reached or surpassed the end of their 50 year evaluated life. The owners of the property sites on which the dams are have been notified and are responsible for their upkeep. Even though this has occurred, the dams will continue to provide many benefits as described in the original watershed work plan. The owners were sent an official notice that the Federal interest is completed when a project measure has accrued all benefits in which the Federal government has an interest. Thompson Creek Watershed has not had a board of supervisors or any operating money in over 20 years.

All watershed dams are inspected on a regular basis and have been certified safe by the State Inspectors of Safe Dams. The dams are also inspected by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The activities and accomplishments of the district are made possible with the continued fine cooperation and assistance of the many individuals, groups, organizations and agencies that support our conservation program. We extend special appreciation to the Weakley County Commission and the State of Tennessee for the financial assistance provided to the district. We value this support.

We also appreciate the Natural Resources Conservation Service for providing employees to give technical assistance to our district and an office at 196 Hunt Street; Dresden, TN 38225 for the district.



196 Hunt Street

Dresden, TN 38225

Respectfully submitted,

Gerald Parham, Chairman

Weakley County Soil Conservation District

MISSION STATEMENT: It is the mission of the District to improve the quality of life for all people of Weakley County through a comprehensive program of natural resources management that utilizes all available resources including technical and financial sources to maintain and improve the soil, water and other natural resources. The district will strive to provide quality technical assistance to both land users and owners to complete its mission.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: The conservation of the district's natural resources is essential for the wellbeing of the environment where people live, work and provide for their families. The prosperity of Weakley County relies on agriculture. It is the goal of the district that a strong natural resources conservation program is sustained that meets or exceeds the needs of the district while maintaining and improving the natural base.

It is the policy of the Weakley County Soil Conservation District that program delivery and benefits will be provided without regard to race, sex, age, handicap, color, religion or national origin.



March 2014 tree sale on the east side of the office parking



Bob Hathcock on the left Gerald Parham on right



Tony Winstead



Keith Kemp



Kevin Canaday