

Berrien Conservation District

"Managing Your Natural Resources"



Berrien Conservation District
3334 Edgewood Road, Berrien Springs, MI 49103
Phone: 269-471-9111 Fax: 1-855-693-2482
E-mail: nancy.carpenter@macd.org

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2020 Annual Report

Virtual Annual Meeting Date: 02/18/2021



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The following is a list of District Staff/Board Accomplishments/Statistics.
This does not include statistics from NRCS staff.

Trees and shrubs sold or donated	19,357
Tree sales Customers	330
Native Plants sold	2669
Native Plant Customers	61
Education: Number of adults <i>Note: most events cancelled due to Covid-19</i>	400
Newsletters/Electronic notices of events via Email	12
No. of permit applications reviewed: <i>DEQ, Farmland Preservation</i>	110
Equipment rental days billed for (# days equip. was out)	17
No. hours people volunteered for district	180
Critical Dune Program; No. of VRA's written	2
Dollars collected through VRA applications	\$500
Workshops, booths, informational displays & educational events presented at or materials presented, or, other events assisted with: Most events were not held due to Covid-19.	

<i>Grower Produce Safety Training</i>	<i>SW Horticulture Days</i>
<i>Invasive Species Virtual Presentation</i>	<i>Lantern Fly Workshop</i>
<i>Tree and Shrub Reforestation Sale</i>	<i>Native Plant Workshop & Sale</i>
<i>Making It In Michigan Trade Show</i>	<i>Ag Action Day</i>
<i>Berrien Conservation District Annual Meeting</i>	<i>Miffs Small Farms Conference</i>
<i>Booth at Great Lakes Fruit & Veg EXPO</i>	<i>Well Water Screening</i>
<i>Reister's Grower Services Annual Meeting</i>	<i>Farming for the Future</i>

Grants providing funding in FY2020:

MDARD for MAEAP
 MDARD for Produce Safety
 MDNR for HAP.

Charge for services providing funding in FY2020:

Contract with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission - grant work
 Contract with the Berrien County Drain Commission -Soil & Sedimentation
 Performing Vegetation Assurances in the Critical Dunes
 MAEAP & Produce Safety Grant Administration

Fundraisers providing funding in FY2020:

Reforestation
 Native Plants

Appropriations providing funding in FY2020:

Berrien County

We would like to offer a very special thank you to:

The Berrien County Board of Commissioners for the Appropriation for general operating expenses approved as continued financial support to the Conservation District and the Commissioners interest in preserving Berrien County's Natural Resources, and support for our local farming community.

The Berrien Conservation District sincerely thanks all of those who have ever partnered with us on an event or program, supported us through donations, letters, comments, suggestions, and volunteered with their time and energy to help us accomplish our mission of protecting and improving Berrien County's natural resources through education, management, and technical assistance.



Agenda

Virtual Annual Meeting	Start Time 7 p.m.
Introductions	Brandy Wise-Tenter, Chair
District Update	Nancy Carpenter, Manager
Other Updates, Reports, Programs	
MAEAP	Suzanne Forraht, MAEAP Technician
Produce Safety	Patrick Gordon, Produce Safety Technician
CISMA	Eleanor Serocki, CISMA Coordinator
NRCS	Sherman Reed, District Conservationist
Awards	
Conservation Farm of the Year Award	presented by Mike Stickle, NRCS Soil Technician
Environmental Stewardship/MAEAP Award	presented by Suzanne Forraht, MAEAP Technician
Special Guest Speaker - “The St. Joseph River, Changes Through the Years” Matt Meersman, President of the Friends of the St. Joseph River and Director of the St. Joseph River Basin	
Election Counting & Results	

Thank You!

Tired of guessing? Here are the meanings of some acronyms .

- BLKPP** Black and Paw Paw
- BMP** Best Management Practices
- CISMA** Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
- HAP** Hunting Access Program
- FSMA** Food Safety Modernization Act
- MAEAP** Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program
- MDARD** Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
- EGLE** Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
- MDNR** Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- NRCS** Natural Resources Conservation Service
- PSA** Produce Safety Alliance
- PPRWS** Paw Paw River Watershed

Personnel

Conservation District Board of Directors

Brandy Wise-Tenter, Chair	Terry Holloway, Director
Ryan Postema, Treasurer	Bette Pierman, Director
Alan Martin, Director	

Conservation District Staff

Nancy Carpenter, Manager
Suzanne Forraht, MAEAP Technician
James Magner, Soil Erosion Inspector
Patrick Gordon, Produce Safety Technician
Eleanor Serocki, (Shared) SW x SW Corner CISMA Invasive Species Coordinator-housed at Van Buren CD

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Staff

Sherman Reed, District Conservationist
Mike Stickle, Soil Conservation Technician





Berrien County Conservation District Budget	End of FY20	Proposed FY 2021 Budget
REVENUE (By source type) <i>Do not list individual grants. Do not list Activity numbers. All Revenue must be in one of the following categories:</i>		
State Funds	\$ 135,983.73	\$ 154,500.00
Federal Funds	\$ 1,647.32	\$ 3,000.00
Contributions from Local Units	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
Charges for Services	\$ 53,818.34	\$ 50,367.00
Interest and Rentals	\$ 2,466.13	\$ 1,650.00
Reforestation, Native Plant Sales, Retail Materials	\$ 39,336.86	\$ 39,000.00
Other Revenue	\$ 784.00	\$ 3,900.00
Donations	\$ 1,402.37	\$ 3,000.00
Total Revenue	\$ 250,438.75	\$ 270,417.00
Expenditures (By Activity) <i>Use required activity numbers below and discretionary activity numbers for other activities. Include only those activities which apply to your District.</i>	End of FY20	Proposed FY 2021 Budget
281 Operations	\$ 58,024.25	\$ 61,000.00
281 BLKPP (contract with SWMPC)	\$ 1,179.71	\$ 5,100.00
281 Critical Dune	\$ 94.08	\$ 36.00
282 & 284 MAEAP	\$ 79,000.84	\$ 76,000.00
294 Reforestation, Native Plants, and Retail Materials	\$ 25,011.31	\$ 25,000.00
296 Hunting Access Program	\$ 1,305.47	\$ 2,160.00
540 Soil Erosion	\$ 22,367.76	\$ 22,400.00
542 Produce Safety	\$ 56,111.39	\$ 78,500.00
Total Expenditures	\$ 243,094.71	\$ 270,196.00
Budget Balance	\$ 7,344.04	\$ 221.00
Beginning Fund Balance (Required)	\$ 51,686.21	\$ 55,226.49
Ending Fund Balance (Required)	\$ 59,030.25	\$ 55,447.49

The Produce Safety Technician offers numerous services, available to Allegan, Berrien, Kalamazoo, and Van Buren Counties. The technician works as a part of the Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety team. This team is comprised of technicians and representatives of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and MSU Extension. Any growers in surrounding counties without a Produce Safety Technician can gain access to services by reaching out to their respective Conservation District, or through the Technician website. Technicians are able to provide many tools to help local growers assess risks involved with the growing, handling, harvesting, storing, and transportation of fresh produce covered by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR). All services offered are free, voluntary, and confidential. The overall goals: assist areas growers to reach or maintain compliance with sometimes-tricky regulations, and educate on best practices in the prevention of contamination of microbial pathogens that impact human health via fresh produce. Produce Safety Risk Assessment (PSRA) is the primary tool used to determine if a growing operation may need improvement. By going through an on-farm PSRA with a produce safety technician, both the grower and technician are able to determine areas of improvement in order to be in compliance with FSMA's PSR. Once completed, the technician and grower are able to work together to compile a Produce Safety Improvement Action Plan. Upon completion of the Action Plan, the farm is eligible for the Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety certification. This certification may be used as additional branding, as a way to show buyers and the public, the high standards of the farms produce safety operations. It is a simple way to show the farm is in compliance with FSMA's PSR, and practices safe produce handling.

Due to constraints associated with Covid-19, the Produce Safety team has developed alternative methods to serve the produce growers of Michigan. Many of these methods use a virtual platform as an alternative to face-to-face interactions. The Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety Team has worked to develop and administer Produce Safety Alliance Online Grower Trainings throughout the year. This virtual platform has allowed for the continuation of on-farm produce safety personnel training, the first step in developing proper produce safety programs. Another work around and overall improvement to services has been the development and launch of the Produce Safety Technician website www.miofps.org. This website will have many useful tools such as: serving as a database of resources for Michigan Growers, and providing a direct link to the Produce Safety Technicians. The team has worked to create and launch instructional videos through multiple online platforms, these videos are now contained on the technician website. Despite setbacks from Covid-19 and personnel changes, the Berrien Conservation District Produce Safety Program was able to:

- Conduct 3 On-Farm Readiness Reviews
- Reach 87 farms through targeted newsletters
- Conduct 13 farm visits
- Hold or assist with 9 educational outreach events

*Invasive Species CISMA Partnership
“Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area”*

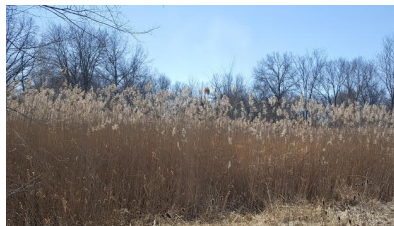


Throughout 2020, the CISMA worked to continue our work with residents, leaders, and managers in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. While some events, such as the popular Shoreline Symposium, were moved online, the CISMA adapted many services to continue. As always, the CISMA was able to visit properties to identify invasive species and treatments, hold paddles to educate the public on our rivers, and survey our dunes for Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. 2020 was a great year for the CISMA, and we're excited to continue working to protect Southwest Michigan!

The CISMA was started in 2016 as a grant funded program to help Southwest Michigan better understand and address the invasive species that threaten our environment, economy, and health. Some species, such as Garlic Mustard or Zebra Mussels, are well known (and well established) in our area, but the CISMA has identified 13 species as its “most wanted”. Species such as Japanese Knotweed have caused havoc in infrastructure, where their thick roots can break through concrete and hardtop. Additionally, the CISMA is working with partners throughout the state to help prepare farmers for Spotted Lanternfly, which could drastically impact vineyards.

This year, the CISMA has submitted over \$250,000 worth of grant proposals to bring assistance to Southwest Michigan to deal with these issues. Meanwhile, they continue to execute grants won from the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program to help increase signage and decontamination opportunities, treat species such as Kudzu and Japanese Stiltgrass, and provide on the ground assistance and education. Additionally, the CISMA is working with partners along the entire Lake Michigan coastline in the lower peninsula to survey for Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, or HWA, to help stop the spread of this insect.

If you have questions about invasive species, would like to schedule a survey, or are interested in an outreach presentation, contact Nor Serocki, CISMA Coordinator, at leanor.serocki@macd.org.



Summary of Conservation Plans, Contracts, & Practices Planned & Applied FY20



*In Partnership with the Berrien County
Conservation District*

FY 2020 Conservation Program Applications:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP 2018): **34**
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP 2018): **3**
Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE 2018): **1**
Regional Partnership Conservation Program (RCPP-EQIP 2014): **0**
Agriculture Land Easement Program (ALE 2018): **0**

FY 2020 Conservation Program funded Contract Agreements:

22- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP 2018) **6,117.80** acres at **\$343,658.10**

FY 2020 Summary of Contracted Crop Acres:

Corn/Soybean-**6,231.30** (ac.) at **\$195,694.10**
Hay-**195** (ac.) at **\$136,626.00**
Trees-**19.2** (ac.) at **\$1,607.00**
Vegetable-**102.1** (ac.) at **\$9,731.00**

FY 2020 EQIP Certified Conservation Practices for Payment:

Cover Crop-15 contracts consisting of **1,633.8** (ac.) at **\$60,101.10**
Forest Management Plan -Written 2 (no.) at **\$3,214.00**
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan-Written 1 (no.) **\$6,172.00**

FY 2020 RCPP-EQIP Certified Conservation Practices for Payment:

Cover Crop-**14.7** (ac) at **\$969.21**
Nutrient Management-**30.9** (ac.) at **\$84.05**

FY 2020 CSP Certified Annual Payments:

Cropland Annual Payment-**1,873.22** (ac.) at **\$12,838.00**
Pasture Annual Payment-**304.3** (ac.) at **\$42.00**
Cover Crop-**122.3** (ac.) at **\$1,021.20**
No till system to increase soil health and soil organic matter content-**122.3** (ac.) at **\$486.75**
Establish Monarch butterfly habitat-**15** (ac.) at **\$26,782.00**
Cover crop to minimize soil compaction- **254.3** (ac.) at **\$2,354.00**
Reduced tillage to reduce water erosion- **715.4** (ac.) at **\$2,981.00**
Other **44.3** (ac.) at **\$3,548.00**

Conservation Compliance Actions:

Identified Potential Wetland Violations: **17**
Identified Potential Highly Erodible Land Violations: **15**
HEL and/or Wetland Determinations Logged: **34** Tracts

Contact Sherman Reed, District Conservationist, for questions.

Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program



Berrien MAEAP Report FY 2020

Producers in Berrien county continue to be actively involved in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) by voluntarily reducing environmental risks to ground and surface water on their farms. A total of 41 risk assessments were completed on farms of all sizes in FY20. Thirteen local producers became environmentally verified through MAEAP with a total of 8 new verifications and 11 re-verifications (due every 5 years):

BC Hemp Co. - (Jeremy Dybdahl & Ryan Piedt) - Eau Claire/Sodus, *Cropping*
Nimtz Farms (Alan Nimtz) - Eau Claire, *Farmstead*
Siewert (Heidi) Schmaltz Farms - Stevensville, *Cropping*
Kienzle Farms - Watervliet, *Farmstead & Cropping*
Black & Blue Farms (Casey Benjamin) - Three Oaks, *Farmstead & Cropping*
R & B Miller Farms Inc. (Roger Miller) - Coloma, *Farmstead*
Hillside Orchards (Paul Thelen) - Berrien Spgs., *Farmstead & Cropping Re-Verif.*
John Heil Farms - St. Joseph, *Cropping Re-Verification*
Rambo Inc. (Verne Rambo) - Bridgman, *Farmstead (2) & Cropping Re-Verif.*
Tower Hill Farm (Mike & Julie Studier) - Sodus, *Farmstead & Cropping Re-Verif.*
Lehman's Orchard (Steve Lecklider) - Niles, *Cropping Re-Verification*
12 Corners Vineyards - Benton Harbor, *Cropping Re-Verification*
Dongvillo Vineyards (Bob Dongvillo) - St. Joseph, *Cropping Re-Verification*

This environmental assurance indicates that their farms are in conformance with state and federal regulations, Right-to-Farm GAAMPs, and that they are continuing to protect Michigan's natural resources for future generations.

A well water screening "drop-off" event took place at the office in June. A total of 12 well owners participated in the event. The well water is screened for Nitrates and Nitrites. All of the samples tested within normal limits.

A Forestry Field Day was in the plans for 2020 but due to Covid19 we had to re-schedule the event. We had received a grant from the Heart of Cook through the Berrien Community Foundation to assist with this event and they agreed to let us use it for the rescheduled field day later on this summer/fall in 2021. The main focus will consist of "Forest, Wetlands & Habitat." This is the newest category for MAEAP verification. It focuses on practices that promote sustainable forestry, wetlands, and non-forest habitat such as forest health, protecting air, water, and soil, and restoring habitat. Through the on-farm field day event, we will aim to answer some of the landowner's questions on forest/timber management plans, invasive species identification and control, wetland restoration and management, and fish/wildlife habitat priorities. We look forward to the opportunity to educate our local landowners on this important topic. Please watch for details that will be coming soon!

MAEAP cost-share was available to Berrien County producers in 2020 that are working to reduce environmental risks on the farm. A total of \$3,000 was available. Some of the items that were cost-shared were oil drum containment pallets, pesticide spill kits (containing personal protective equipment, absorbent material, broom/dust pan, etc.), well water testing (Nitrates, Coliform, E. coli.), soil sampling, fire extinguishers, a lockable pesticide cabinet, a 160 gallon double-walled fuel tank, and manure sampling. The participating farmers are actively working toward verifications.

Six local farmers agreed to participate in the well water monitoring program in FY20 to sample household drinking water wells for some commonly used pesticides. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requires states to develop plans to protect water from pesticide contamination. This study is part of Michigan's plan to protect our groundwater. Names are selected at random from a list of private applicators certified to buy and apply restricted use pesticides in Michigan.

