

CCCD NEWSLETTER

CASS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

NOV. 2017

Annual Meeting

We've had a wonderful year and would like to share highlights and future plans for continued progress! Please consider attending our Cass County Conservation District Annual Meeting/Election on **Tuesday, December 5** at the Vandalia Community Center, located at 18035 State Street (M-60), Vandalia, MI 49095. The event will open at 5:30 pm with election (voting stops at 7pm), displays and appetizers, followed by feature presentation:

"History of Michigan's Conservation Partnership"

We are fortunate to have Mr. Steve Law as our guest speaker for the evening. Mr. Law has extensive experience working with Conservation Districts across Michigan to build and promote the local soil and water conservation program. His work experience with the Soil Conservation Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service over 32 years included helping producers to adopt no-till and minimum tillage methods, the implementation of the highly successful Conservation Reserve Program and National Buffer Strip Initiative and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Steve has a passion for spreading the word about the importance of local Conservation Districts which serve as the "Delivery System" for Federal, State and local conservation programs and dollars. Join us for an enthusiastic and insightful exploration of the history of Conservation Districts and their outstanding accomplishments in protecting and preserving our Nations Natural Resources for our wise use and enjoyment.

The Annual Meeting will also feature an awards ceremony and updates from our programs. We will try to connect the positive historical actions in our community to future development plans with the Cass County Economic Development Corporation, Cass County Parks & Recreation, MEANDRS, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, SW x SW CISMA, MACD, MDARD, NRCS, and other partners.

The presentation will be followed by dinner catered from Wood Fire of Dowagiac. Special thanks for generous sponsorships from North Star Landscaping, Farm Bureau, Dussel's Farm Market, & others who have donated in support of our programming efforts.

***Special Bonus for Conservation District Annual Meeting Attendees: Open House at the Bonine House before the Annual Meeting on Dec. 5 between 4-5:30 pm.** Normal hours for Christmas at the Bonine House (CBH) is Saturday and Sunday, Dec 2, 3, 9, 10 from 1-7:00 pm daily. Admission is free, donations are most appreciated. The Bonine House is at the corner of M-60 and Penn Rd.



LIMITED SPACE PLEASE SEND THIS SLIP TO OUR OFFICE OR CALL TO RSVP BY NOVEMBER 27

Cass County Conservation District December 5, 2017 Annual Meeting RSVP

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Attending: _____ Special Dietary Request: _____



MAIL: 1127 EAST STATE STREET
CASSOPOLIS, MI 49031

PHONE: (269) 445-8641 x5

Note: **MEET THE CANDIDATES:** On Tuesday, December 5 Cass County Conservation District will hold an election at the Annual Meeting to fill three open Director Positions. Any Cass County resident of legal age is eligible to vote. We encourage you to participate in the election. Absentee ballots are available in our office for those who cannot attend Dec. 5 - please bring identification. We asked the candidates to share information about themselves and their goals for the District. Here are their answers.

Karen Nelson: I have lived in Jefferson township for 28 years. I own and operate Nelson's Herbs and Farm Market, full time, with my son Jason. With 20 acres, we are a MAEAP Certified Farm in both Forest, Wetland & Habitat and Greenhouse Systems. I feel it is important to protect and educate the public. Everyone has the right to expect clean water, soil, and air and I feel these things are protected by educating the public. This is what we strive to do at our farm and I hope to extend that to the Soil Conservation District Board. Thank you.

Kevin Hershberger: I have lived in Cassopolis my entire life. I was raised on the south side of town where my parents still reside, and have lived on our farm situated to the north of town between Cass and Dowagiac for the last 22 years. I am a full time farmer. I began my own farm operation in 1987 and worked at other jobs. I worked at the Cass County Road Commission for 19 years and ran the asphalt plant until 2013, when I left there to farm full time. My main conservation interest as a farmer is preserving the soil and farm land. I use no-till practices in my operation. I also have a great interest in preserving our county parks for use by future generations. The district has come a long way in the last several years and my main goal has been to bring operations back to a place that allows us to have a full time administrator. We are currently meeting that goal and actually going beyond to add more personnel to the office. We have some really great people both on the board and in the office who are leading the district in the right direction to accomplish our goals.

Dan Stutsman: I have lived in Cass County all my life. Been on the same 120 acre farm since 1954. I live in Edwardsburg, Ontwa Township I serve as a Trustee on the Ontwa Township Board as well as Ambulance Board and Sewer Board. I also serve on Michigan Farm Bureau Promotion and Education Board and on the AG Advocacy Committee for MSU - Southwestern MI College. It is important to be involved in conservation and land preservation that is the reason I stay so active within the county. It is important to me to preserve our farm land as well as wetlands and forest areas. I would like to see our district grow and become more active in tree sales and projects within our county. I will strive to get our CISMA grant back as I feel we made great strides this year with our program and want to see it continue in coming years. I also have all 3 farm MAEAP Certifications for my farming operation which includes approx 600 acres.



Invasive Species and Cass County

Since the start of 2017 Kimberly Barton, the Cass County Conservation District's Invasive Species Outreach Educator, helped identify over seventy new sites of invasive species. These species have included plants like Japanese Knotweed, Chinese Yam, invasive Phragmites (shown here), and other plants that can harm our native ecosystem. It is important to monitor these species because they can cause damage to properties, crowd out native species, and cause issues with native animals. Native species often won't eat invasive species even when they are the only food source around. This can cause a decline in habitat and negatively impact native wildlife. If you are interested in learning more about invasive species please contact Kimberly Barton at kimberly.barton@macd.org or (269) 445-8641 ext. 5. Cass County Conservation District is a partner agency with the SW x SW Corner CISMA. The SW x SW Corner Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area is a partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, individuals, and various

interested groups that manage (or have a stake in managing) invasive species in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties. Partners include the Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Conservation Districts, Chikaming Open Lands, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, The Stewardship Network and many others.

GIVING TUESDAY IS NOVEMBER 28 - A NATIONAL DAY OF SPENDING WITH A PURPOSE.

WE HOPE YOU ARE INSPIRED TO GIVE TO EFFORTS THAT PROMOTE CONSERVATION.

What is MAEAP and how did we do? A Look Back on Fiscal Year 2017 in Cass County

Going back several years, the Cass County Conservation District's Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and Cass County farmers have had an excellent working relationship. Since its formal creation, farms of all types have participated and achieved verification in all of MAEAP's offered systems. The year of 2017 was no different, with several new farms participating in the program, expanding the growing community of MAEAP participation in Cass County.

But what is MAEAP and how does it make a positive impact on your farm and our community? MAEAP is a voluntary program for producers of all types and sizes; small farmsteads to large CAFO's. The program is designed to reduce farmers' legal and environmental risks through education, technical assistance via risk assessment and practice implementation, and by a final look over by a representative from the Michigan Department of Agriculture. Why participate? MAEAP benefits your farms and our county by:

- Protecting natural resources using environmentally sound practices.
- Having emergency plans ready to deal with the unexpected.
- Using proven scientific standards to protect our air, water and soil.
- Maximizing natural fertilizer use and reducing use of fertilizers made from fossil fuels.
- Earning you RUP (restricted use pesticide) credits.
- Providing Farm Bureau Insurance members with insurance breaks as a reward for minimizing risk.
- Ensuring safe storage of fuel, fertilizer and chemicals.
- Balancing efficient production and sound environmental practices.



MAEAP verification can be achieved in four systems: Farmstead, where environmental risks such as fuel and fertilizer storage are minimized; Cropping, where nutrient management practices are looked over and improved upon, mainly based off soil health; Livestock, which is based off manure storage and handling; and Forest Wetland and Habitat, where sound forest management practices are examined and implemented.

The benefits are extensive and the positive impact on the community is huge. Farmers in Cass County this past year have done a tremendous job and are helping set a standard of sound farming practices for the state of Michigan. As of 9/25/2017, the MAEAP program had achieved 4,249 verifications since its establishment in 1997. Cass County has done great, particularly this past year with 15 farms achieving verification equaling 27 verifications total for the year, putting the county amongst the top in the state. Highlighting stand out farms would not be fair, since all verified farms have done a remarkable job in practicing conservation minded farming.

The following is a summary of farms that achieved verification or re-verification (R) in the 2017 Fiscal Year:

Farmstead System - Dan Stutsman, A-Mazing Acres, Bennett Farms, Maple Row Sugarhouse, Jim Green, P. Stevens, White Tail Acres, Bucklen/Redfield Farms (R), Bucklen/Redfield Farms, & Bishop Farms (R).

Cropping System - Dan Stutsman, Robert Locke, A-Mazing Acres, Bennett Farms, Jim Green, White Tail Acres, Dussel Farms, & Calvin Creek Farms.

Livestock System - Dan Stutsman, Robert Locke, A-Mazing Acres, Bennett Farms, White Tail Acres, Dussel Farms, & Calvin Creek Farms.

Forest, Wetlands & Habitat System - Dr. Lawless Park, & Nelson's Herbs.



The MAEAP program was established in 1997 by a combination of farmers, commodity groups, state and federal agencies, and conservation and environmental groups to provide a venue for farmers to learn more and improve their management methods with the goal of protecting and enhancing natural resources. For more information regarding the MAEAP program, visit MAEAP.org, or if you would like to participate in the program or have any questions whatsoever, contact Erez Brandvain, your Cass County MAEAP guy, at:

Office: 269-228-7084 Cell: 248-752-0865 Email: Erez.Brandvain@macd.org.

We are already in the process of working with several farms for verification in the coming year, and we hope to have the chance to work with you next! Exploring MAEAP now has even more rewards...

- Ask me about the new Cost Share opportunity available.

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

offers new opportunities for the NRCS, conservation partners and agricultural producers to work together to harness innovation, expand the conservation mission and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

The St. Joseph River Watershed Conservation Partnership is a bi-state project to improve and protect the streams, rivers, lakes and groundwater in the St. Joseph River Watershed. The project aims to reduce sediment and nutrient loading, optimize groundwater use and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. Project partners have selected Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation practices that farmers can receive cost-share to implement. These practices improve soil health and water quality and prevent fish and wildlife degradation. \$6.8 million in Farm Bill funds were dedicated to this project to provide technical assistance to landowners and to implement Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) practices and wetland restorations through the Wetland Reserve Easement program (WRE).



Eligible Applicants:

Agricultural producers who are in the St. Joseph River Watershed are eligible to apply. All of Cass County is in the St. Joseph River Watershed. Interested or Have Questions? Please call the NRCS Conservationist - Frank Velazquez at 269-228-7082 or stop in the District to meet with MAEAP Tech Erez Brandvain. We will get you started with meeting program eligibility through the Farm Service Agency, assist with the development of a farm conservation plan through NRCS, and apply for desired practices through EQIP or WRE.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

SESC - Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Control Program Enforcement Lessons from Year #1

The District was entrusted with enforcing Michigan Law Part 91 for Cass County in December of last year. There was much to learn about soils, slopes, and silt fence. The fiscal year ended with 137 permits issued, 83 permits closed, 5 extensions granted & 1 waiver. Korie Blyveis is the SESC enforcement administrator and Bruce Campbell assists with inspections and the administrative transition of the program from the County Drain Office. Our new employee Rachael Horn has been assisting with paperwork and upon completion of training will become an inspector. Although many contractors and homeowners working within 500 feet of a lake or stream take the necessary precautions to protect the water body from harmful sediment, many overlook the importance. Our County experienced excessive rains as well as a 500 year rain event which all contributed to erosion control failures such as those pictured below. Thankfully many were prepared or quickly remedied and maintained their erosion controls. Last spring we underwent a DEQ audit which helped fine tune our paperwork and resulted in requiring more detailed control plans at the forefront. They are also requesting more frequent inspections - which was difficult since we were simply unprepared for the great demand of time & needs required by this program. We have been revising our paper work and adding more educational pieces to help folks learn the importance of utilizing temporary and permanent erosion controls including the consideration of native landscaping for improved stormwater drainage control. We are dedicating more staff hours, taking many pictures, and will continue working with the DEQ to improve our program. We expect 2018 to be a busy year. We look forward to seeing more properly installed/entrenched silt fence, and drainage solutions including rain garden installations and native landscaping.



A silt fence not entrenched will not protect the lake.



Please take the time before it rains to properly install erosion control measures, have a well thought out control plan & stabilize your site as quickly as possible.