

**SWCD Conservation Pilot Program  
2026 Application Form**

**Project Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**Soil and Water Conservation District** \_\_\_\_\_

**ODA Pre-Application Review Date** \_\_\_\_\_ **ODA Watershed Manager**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Applicant Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Summary:**

The SWCD Conservation Pilot Program is designed to fund locally led, water-quality-focused conservation projects and to expand the experience and abilities of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to deliver conservation programs. This fulfills a need to develop and evaluate agricultural water quality improvement approaches on different farming practices across Ohio’s varied landscapes with a focus on pasture and hayland.

Projects should address nonpoint source pollution with an emphasis on agricultural best management practices (BMPs) that improve water quality by reducing, abating, assimilating, and/or eliminating sources of phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment. A total of **\$2 million** in funding is available with a maximum award of **\$250,000** per proposal. Proposals must be submitted by **May 1, 2026**.

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**Overview:**

- **Eligible Applicants:** The 64 statewide Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) –the 24 Western Lake Erie Basin SWCDs are not eligible for this program
  - **Eligible Practices:** Water quality improvement measures not currently or previously funded by H2Ohio, with a focus on hayland/pasture practices (e.g., livestock exclusion, stream crossing, alternative watering, manure management, etc.)
  - **Funding Availability:** **\$2 million** (approximately 8-12 awards)
  - **Maximum Award:** **\$250,000** per proposal
  - **Matching Funds:** Not required but strongly encouraged
  - **Project Duration:** Up to 5 years from the date of the fully executed agreement
  - **Application Period:** February 9, 2026 – May 1, 2026
  - **Extensions:** No-cost extensions will **not** be offered
  - **Administrative Cost Limit:** No administrative costs are allowed with this award. SWCD administrative costs will be supported through a separate H2Ohio technical assistance award, up to 20% of the total project cost.
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**1. Applicant Information**

**Soil and Water Conservation District** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Manager** \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Administrative/Grant Manager** *(if different from project manager)*

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Project Overview**

**Project Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Funding Request** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location** *(include relevant hydrological unit codes, HUC-12 and others)*

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**Project Goals and Planning Foundation**

*Describe the goals of the project, along with context for the project, noting specific water quality pollutants of relevance and how this project addresses them. Reference relevant watershed planning, e.g. NPS-IS, ODA Regional Watershed Plans, and other state and/or federal documents.*

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**Project Duration** *(include proposed start date)*

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**SWCD Capacity and Outreach**

*Describe how the project will build and expand SWCD capacity and outreach for delivering conservation programming.*

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**3. Project Description:**

**A. Objectives**

*Describe project purpose and expected, measurable, water quality outcomes.*

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**B. Rationale**

*Describe the need for the proposed projects/practices and their scientific basis for addressing nonpoint source issues. Describe clearly why this project is needed to correct water quality issues and provide evidence of producer willingness to participate. Include any relevant statistics, references, and/or stakeholder input.*

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**C. Implementation Plan**

*Describe in detail the conservation practices and how implementation will occur. Reference Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) standard or equivalent. Include a timeline that outlines all key milestones and activities, methods of recruitment and selection, design, permitting, education, outreach, and outcomes evaluation. **Note: Project timeline should be attached separately as Excel or other file type.***

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**D. Results and Deliverables**

*Explain anticipated outcomes including quantitative reductions in phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment, increased BMP adoption, development of partnerships, and expansion of SWCD program capacity to deliver programming.*

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**4. Budget**

***Attach a detailed budget using the provided form.*** Include administrative/indirect costs (not exceeding 20% of total project cost) and additional funding sources or match contributions (if applicable). Budget details should include the expected breakdown of contractual expenses.

*A budget narrative directly correlating to the table is also required to justify the budget items listed. Funds should be directed only toward those activities and materials needed to successfully generate the project deliverables.*

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**5. Partnerships**

*Explain stakeholder engagement and involvement in the project, including how partnerships will improve outcomes and longer-term SWCD program delivery. Provide a description of partner roles and contributions, including letters of commitment from key partners as applicable.*

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**6. Experience and Qualifications**

*Summary of applicant’s relevant experience, showcasing past projects or initiatives which demonstrate capacity to manage similar projects. Identify SWCD staff assigned to the project and their relevant experience and qualifications.*

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**Proposal Evaluation Criteria:**

Category	Points	Evaluation Focus
Relevance and Impact	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project goals and objectives</li> <li>• Potential to reduce, abate, assimilate, or eliminate agricultural nonpoint source pollution (N, P, sediment)</li> <li>• Utilization of 9-element or equivalent planning to scientifically address nonpoint source issues</li> </ul>
Technical Approach	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feasibility and innovation of the proposed conservation practices and restoration methods</li> <li>• Clear and achievable objectives</li> <li>• Adequate activities and deliverables</li> </ul>
Budget and Cost Effectiveness	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thorough and detailed budget outline</li> <li>• Allocation of resources, including adherence to the 20% administrative/indirect cost limit</li> </ul>
Partnerships and Collaboration	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and strength of commitment from project partners</li> <li>• Contribution of matching funds or in-kind support (if applicable)</li> </ul>
Applicant Qualifications	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated capacity and experience</li> <li>• Record of successful project implementation</li> </ul>
Results and Deliverables	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantifiable benefits such as nutrient reduction, increased BMP adoption, and SWCD capacity building.</li> </ul>
Evaluation and Monitoring	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thorough execution plan</li> <li>• Metrics to assess and track success</li> </ul>
Pre-Application Review	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check-in with ODA-DSWC staff prior to application submission</li> </ul>

**Application Submission:** Submit application electronically to [Levi.Arnold@agri.ohio.gov](mailto:Levi.Arnold@agri.ohio.gov). Applications must be received by **May 1, 2026**.

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