



**Department of
Agriculture**



SWCD Conservation Pilot Program

Request for Proposals

Application Period

Opens: February 9, 2026

Closes: May 1, 2026

INTRODUCTION

H2Ohio is Governor Mike DeWine's statewide water quality initiative designed to address complex issues impacting Ohio's waters. Launched in 2019, H2Ohio uses a comprehensive approach guided by science and data to reduce algal blooms, stop pollution, and improve access to clean drinking water by supporting best farming practices, road salt runoff reduction, litter cleanup, dam removal, land conservation, and water infrastructure revitalization.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The **SWCD Conservation Pilot Program** is designed to fund **locally led, water-quality-focused conservation projects** and **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, or eliminating sources of **phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment**.

OVERVIEW

Eligible Applicants: 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. Matching funds and in-kind support will be considered in proposal scoring.

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.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

I. Key Considerations

Competitive proposals will demonstrate:

- A **clear local need** for water quality improvement.
- **Implementation** of pasture/hayland practices.
- **Stakeholder engagement** and partner collaboration.
- **Project feasibility**, including readiness and technical soundness.
- **Measurable outcomes**, such as nutrient and sediment load reduction.
- **Capacity-building**, showing how the project expands SWCD programming and expertise.

II. Deliverables

In consultation with Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) Division of Soil and Water Conservation (DSWC), grant recipients will provide:

- **Semi-annual progress and fiscal reports** detailing project status, accomplishments, and financial expenditures.
- **Annual presentation** to ODA personnel summarizing implementation progress.
- A **comprehensive final report** describing completed activities, quantified water quality improvements, partnerships, and final expenditures.

III. Allowable and Ineligible Costs

A. Eligible Budget Items:

- Project implementation costs directly supporting approved activities.
- Cost-share with landowners
- Technical, design, or construction assistance directly related to BMP implementation.
- Outreach, education, and training directly tied to the project.

B. Ineligible Budget Items:

- Food, beverages, or general office supplies not essential to the project.
- Purchase of equipment exceeding \$5,000 per item unless pre-approved by ODA–DSWC.
- Land acquisition, easement purchase, or compensation unrelated to approved practices.
- Routine operations or maintenance costs after project completion.

C. Additional Budget Details:

- 100% of project funding is to be used for implementation.
- Administrative costs (up to 20% of this award) will be provided through a separate technical assistance fund from ODA.

IV. Administration

A. Program Oversight:

The **ODA–DSWC** will administer the SWCD Conservation Pilot Program and serve as the primary point of contact for awardees throughout the project duration.

B. Monitoring:

ODA–DSWC may perform **on-site inspections** to ensure compliance with program objectives.

C. Maintenance:

ODA–DSWC is **not responsible for future maintenance** of field-scale structures installed through this grant.

D. Nondiscrimination Policy:

No person shall, on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, gender, national origin, age, or disability, be excluded from participation in or denied benefits under any program receiving assistance under this grant.

VI. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the following criteria:

Category	Evaluation Focus
Relevance and Impact	Alignment with watershed-based planning and potential to reduce nutrient and sediment loading.
Technical Approach	Feasibility of conservation methods; clarity and achievability of objectives.
Budget and Cost Effectiveness	Logical and detailed budget with clear justification of costs.
Partnerships and Collaboration	Strength of partnerships, commitment of stakeholders, and match or in-kind contributions.
Applicant Qualifications	Demonstrated experience and past performance in project implementation.
Results and Deliverables	Quantifiable benefits such as nutrient reduction, increased BMP adoption, and SWCD capacity building.
Evaluation and Monitoring	Clear, measurable metrics for tracking project success.
Pre-Application Review	Completion of required pre-application consultation with ODA–DSWC staff.

VII. Method of Payment

- Participating districts will receive **100% of the total award budget upon agreement execution.**
- 10% (up to \$5,000) of an accompanying administrative / technical assistance cost award will be withheld until all funds are expended and acceptable final reports are received for both awards.

VIII. Reporting

- Semi-annual fiscal and progress reports are due every six months – April 15 and October 15
- Annual presentation summarizing activities and outcomes.
- Final report detailing implementation results, financial summary, and measurable impacts.
- Deliverable completion documentation, e.g., project plans, Beehive entries, event materials, sign-in sheets, articles, photos, digital media, etc.

IX. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals must be submitted using the official SWCD Conservation Pilot Program Application Form (fillable PDF) and emailed to: Levi.Arnold@agri.ohio.gov

Subject line: SWCD Conservation Pilot Program – [Your SWCD Name]

A proposal consultation with an ODA watershed manager is required prior to submittal.

Checklist

- Complete application
- ODA consultation
- Match commitment letters (as applicable)
- SWCD board chair signature

Deadline: May 1, 2026

X. Program Timeline

RFP Release:	February 9, 2026
Pre-Application Consultation:	Required before submission
Proposal Submission Deadline:	May 1, 2026
Proposal Review Period:	May 1 – May 15, 2026
Award Notifications:	May 15, 2026
Agreement Execution Deadline:	September 11, 2026
Project Start Date:	October 1, 2026
Project Completion:	September 29, 2031
Final Reports Due	November 28, 2031

Contact Information

For questions or assistance:

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