



# Van Buren Conservation District

## January 2025 Program Update

Submitted by *Emily Hickmott, Executive Director*

Happy New Year!

Despite the cold start to the year, things are heating up at the District! We have been releasing recycling dates for 2025, our county-wide survey, our tree seedling sale, CISMA Annual Meeting (Feb. 28), and a seasonal job posting in the last few weeks. Be sure to send us any questions from this report and keep up to date on our website and social media accounts to know what's happening next. [www.VanBurenCD.org](http://www.VanBurenCD.org)

**Conservation Needs Assessment Survey:** We, at the Van Buren Conservation District (VBCD), are looking to hear from you! Take our quick survey to guide conservation in Van Buren County. Whether you live, work, or play in Van Buren County, we need your input. Your thoughts help the VBCD better serve you, our community, and our natural resources.

The VBCD brings programs, services, education, and events to our community. To address our local needs, we need your local voice. Your input helps us focus conservation funding and programming for Van Buren County. This quick survey takes about 10 minutes. All responses are anonymous. For assistance with the survey, contact us at [info@VanBurenCD.org](mailto:info@VanBurenCD.org) or call 269-633-9054. Complete the survey to be entered into a drawing for special prizes! Take the survey by May 31, 2025! <https://vanburencd.org/input/>

**Tree Seedling Sale:** The annual VBCD Tree Sale is open through March 31, 2025! Don't miss out on this preorder period - we do sell out of species before it closes! We are excited to once again provide you with quality, affordable seedlings. Your purchase reforests our community and supports local conservation! Our new and classic tree and shrub species provide a wide variety of options to meet your needs. The bonus is they are all great for our environment and wildlife!

- Flowering and ornamental species
- Nut and fruit-producing species
- Species to block wind
- Shade tree species
- High value lumber species
- Species for erosion control
- More!

Be sure to check out our accessories. Show your support of local conservation efforts and action! Whether you're new to Tree Sale or want a reminder, read more about our sale here: <https://vanburencd.org/shop/> Have questions? Contact Outreach Coordinator Jacob Diljak at [Outreach@VanBurenCD.org](mailto:Outreach@VanBurenCD.org) or call 269-633-9052.

### **Program Updates:**

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - The Ag and Water Quality team is excited to kick off a new grant project: "Stacking BMPs to Mitigate Ag



## Van Buren Conservation District January 2025 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

Runoff in the Paw Paw River.” BMPs are Best Management Practices. This 2-year project is funded through the Clean Water Act and is administered by Michigan’s Department of Energy, Great Lakes and Environment (EGLE). The grant will bring in nearly \$600,000 to Van Buren County and will fund cost-share for farmers, educational events, and on-farm research.

- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - The CISMA Team finished out the year wrapping up field work for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant. Our surveys of invasive species along Van Buren County roads are ongoing. We are also developing a partnership with GEI, an environmental contractor, to conduct invasive species surveys for a large municipal project at Ox Creek in Benton Harbor. Planning for the CISMA Annual Meeting has begun in preparation for the end of February 2025.
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - The technician has been working on reaching out to Cass County farmers to complete Re-Assessments after the holidays. He also participated in Soil Health Fundamentals Training with the Newly created Regen-Ag Program and Understanding Ag to learn how to complete the new Regen-Ag soil assessments that are now part of the MAEAP (CTAP) Grant. The tech volunteered to help train 3 new technicians from the area and organized a Walk Through of Windswept Farms in Monterey. That is 4-system verified where the new techs could learn how the Van Buren technician pre-plans for a visit, how he sets up 3-ring binders to give to the farm at the visit, and how to look at specific things on the farm as well as ideas on how to troubleshoot alternative practices so that a farmer can choose which Best Management Practices would work best for their operation, and how they farm.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman, Gabriel Francisco*) - As with every December, this seems to be the slower month for things happening on the NRCS side, as the EQIP is still in the application period and waiting for direction from the new farm bill. Next month, things start rolling out again, and Lucas, Kami, and Gabe already have a large group of folks waiting to get going. Looking like another full year of EQIP’s coming down the pipeline for Van Buren County.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - The VBCD has amazing things coming out in 2025! Conservation needs your input - take the Conservation Needs Assessment survey to guide conservation! This short survey is for all who live, work, or play in Van Buren County: [VanBurenCD.org/input](https://VanBurenCD.org/input). Our Tree Sale is open! Shop affordable seedlings and help raise funds for local conservation - shop now at [VanBurenCD.org/shop](https://VanBurenCD.org/shop)
- **Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) -December is the season for celebrating. The Resource Recovery team was able to celebrate the success of the program by summarizing the results of the post collection survey. Overall, results were very good and residents seem very happy with the services we offer. Jacob and Kalli attended an accessibility event with Michigan Sustainable Business Forum and learned about considerations for all abilities to access services.