



Van Buren Conservation District April 2023 Program Update

Submitted by *Emily Hickmott, Deputy Administrator*

Farming for the Future, our annual farmer education program, was a great success in March and the perfect kickoff for our field days scheduled for June 14 and August 17. Details will be available on our website in the coming weeks. Recycling collections start in April, so please promote those events. Please encourage folks to register their tires before the events so that we make sure we have space for them. You can access recycling collection information on our website here:

<https://vanburencd.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections/>

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - More than 150 local farmers came together at the Van Buren Conservation District's annual "Farming for the Future" conference on March 7 to learn about nutrient management, improving soil health, cost share opportunities, and more. Neal Kinsey of Charleston, Missouri, internationally recognized agricultural consultant and author of the book *Hands-on Agronomy*, was the keynote speaker. VBCD staff also discussed new research and cost-share programs that can offer funding to farmers to try conservation practices. Speakers from University of Notre Dame, MSU Extension, and MDARD also spoke during breakout sessions targeting grain, grazing, and fruit growers. See the end of this report for evaluation results for this event.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian*) - In March the CISMA focused on preparations for the summer. We extended offers to our two seasonal strike team crew members and both accepted. We also applied for funds from MDARD to survey for spotted lanternfly across our three counties. CISMA staff is now commercially certified to apply pesticide.
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - March was a busy month for the specialist. Several farm visits were conducted as well as Re-Verifications (both systems) for two farmers in South Haven. There are several more that are on deck for Re-verification and 2 New Verifications and 2 Re-Verifications are already scheduled for the month of April. This month, the technician also took time off to give presentations to the Van Buren Technology Center Fire Science Class, helped with a prescribed burn, gave guidance to a farmer looking to start a chicken operation in Bloomingdale, and helped several farmers report their water use to the Department of Agriculture. As busy as March was, April is looking to be even busier.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - Applications for Conservation practice cost share through the EQIP program in 2023 total more than \$1,000,000 for Van Buren County. This is larger than 2021 and 2022 allocations combined.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service Technical Assistance** (*Gabe Francisco*) - This past month has been a race indeed, trying to get everyone entered and ranked into IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) funding pools, but with the expert help from the team, the technician was able to keep up and get everything entered and adjusted for our area livestock managers and grazers.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - Another successful Tree Sale is in the works! Pre-orders were due April 7 and pickups occurred the week after. The 2023 Van Buren County Food, Farm, and Fun Guide has arrived, promoting local food and the County's outdoor recreation opportunities.



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- **Resource Recovery Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall*) - The Resource Recovery Program has undertaken a new adventure this month. Kalli is coordinating with municipalities to bring funding to expand recycling for residents and to improve recycling infrastructure. This project aims to improve nine transfer stations to expand services and capacity for Van Buren County residents and landowners.