



Clean Water Indiana 2021 SWCD Led Competitive Grant Application

Contact Information

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| Lead District | LaGrange County SWCD |
| Address | 910 S Detroit St |
| City, State, ZIP | LaGrange, IN 46761 |
| Lead District Contact Name | Martin Franke |
| Email Address | Martin.franke@in.nacdnet.net |
| Phone | 260-463-3166 x3 |
| Amount Requested | \$150,000 |
| Authorized Signatory Name | Robert Cart |
| Authorized Signatory Email | Cartrobeert63@gmail.com |
| Participating District(s), if applicable | N/A |

Project Information

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| <i>Project Title</i> |
| Best Management Practices for Water and Soil Quality |

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| <i>Project Description</i> |
| <p>LaGrange County, Indiana, is the only county in the state that is wholly contained within the St. Joseph River Basin draining to Lake Michigan. It contains 74 glacially formed lakes. Soils in the county are predominantly light and sandy with rapid water permeability, but some heavier clay soil formations occur in the southern portions of the county. The county is divided naturally into four watersheds: the Elkhart River (North Branch) to the south (15 %); the Pigeon River (40%) running diagonally across the center (40%); the Little Elkhart River (25%) in the southwest; and the Fawn River (15%) along the northern border with the state of Michigan. Surface drainage of the county is directed ultimately into the St. Joseph River, which enters Lake Michigan at Benton Harbor, Michigan.</p> <p>Demographically, LaGrange County is unique. The Elkhart-LaGrange Amish settlement is the third largest in the world. The Amish and related groups comprise 44% of the county's population. Much of LaGrange County's farmland, particularly in the west half of the county, is owned by Amish farmers. Farming practices are very traditional and low-tech. Intensive conventional tillage is utilized to produce row crops, and livestock are raised in large numbers. These practices add significantly to sedimentation in surface drainage, topsoil loss through erosion, degradation of soil structure, and excessive nutrient loading in bodies of surface water. On a more positive note, Amish farmers do have a sense of responsibility and stewardship, and have been open to the adoption of practices such as management intensive rotational grazing, no-till or reduced-till cropping practices, exclusion fencing and filter strip establishment, and more modern manure storage and fertilizer management practices.</p> |

The purpose for this proposed project is to continue to assist all LaGrange County landowners to be aware of the importance of practicing sustainable land use strategies and to substantially improve water quality, soil health and general environmental conditions while maintaining productivity. To date, the District has pursued these goals through the promotion of USDA farm bill programs, Lake and River Enhancement and IDEM 319 grants and Great Lakes Commission grants to encourage the Amish, a minority, traditionally underserved community, toward the adoption of more environmentally friendly farming practices. There is a continued reluctance amongst the Amish population toward involvement in federal farm bill cost-share, which has necessitated District efforts in funding from alternative, perceptibly more locally controlled sources. The practices we have chosen to fund through this project include heavy use area installation, manure management storage facilities, exclusion fencing, stream crossings, bank stabilization and invasive species control. The goals of these practices are to address the specific soil, water and related natural resource management concerns identified in our District Long Term plan (current 2019-2023).

Provide the specific issue, problem or need that the project will address.

Much of LaGrange County's 245,760 total acres are utilized for agricultural pursuits. Amish farms are heavily oriented toward livestock production. In other parts of the county, products include soybeans, wheat, corn, and some specialty crops like seed corn, edible green beans and potatoes. Agricultural land use creates concerns related to soil degradation and erosion, excess nutrient loading of surface water, sedimentation in drainage systems, odor and air quality concerns, and chemical drift and residual effect.

The 74 lakes in the county have created another demographic influence in the county. Many lake residences have been constructed in the county over the last century. Lake residents tend to be retired and typically come from an urban background. Lake concerns relate to recreational use of resources such as fishing, swimming, boating and associated water sports. Major concerns here are water quality, clarity, and chemical content.

Primary resource concerns for many years have been toward the maintenance of good surface water quality and healthy, productive soil conditions. The concerns that these land-use demographics create and that this project is designed to address are summarized as follows:

- Surface Water: water quality, clarity, purity and ability to sustain life are critical. Water is to be conserved for residential use, agricultural production including irrigation, and recreational opportunities. Proper drainage unimpeded by excess accumulation of sediment is also crucial.
- Soil health: Livestock production makes nutrient management, particularly proper manure use, storage, and land application, vital in maintaining healthy environmental conditions. Soil structure and compaction are major agricultural concerns. The construction of adequate manure storage facilities and HUAPs should address these concerns.

Describe each partner and their specific contributions and anticipated match to the project.

LaGrange County SWCD has a long history of successfully carrying out watershed planning and best management practice cost share implementation projects. Key to that success has been the ability to partner with a wide spectrum of traditional and non-traditional conservation partners. Most important of these has been a healthy relationship with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The LaGrange County SWCD has been fortunate in having District Conservationists, Tech Team leadership, a Planning Team Leader, and Area Conservationists that have understood the unique demographic makeup of our county constituency and the necessity to pursue a non-traditional approach to program participation and conservation cost-share here. NRCS cooperation in engineering design has been a critical part in the success of past projects. Because NRCS is part of USDA, a federal agency, I have not calculated the in-kind or cash value of NRCS's contributions towards the grant efforts into the budget, although if I could do so, it would be substantial.

LaGrange County government is another critical partner. Most LaGrange County SWCD monthly meetings include representation from both LaGrange County Commissioners and County Council. Recognizing the importance of the District's efforts toward conserving resources sustainably, the County Council has always been generous in providing for the operational and staffing needs of the District. Much of the in-kind and cash match provided for in the proposed project budget is due to support from County Council in terms of District staff salary, provision for a district vehicle for both staff and grant staff use in accomplishing grant project goals, office supplies, and funds used to carry out public promotional activities to accomplish grant objectives. Additionally, a healthy relationship with both the LaGrange County Plan Department and the LaGrange County Surveyor's offices has provided the District with technical and land-use tools it needs to accomplish its objectives in providing community leadership in environmental stewardship. This provides another avenue of significant in-kind support to grant project-related efforts.

Describe how the funds will be utilized.

The funds being requested for this project will be divided into two categories. Category 1 (\$105,000) will be used to provide 75% cost share for the installation of the following best management practices. From analyzing similar projects in the past, these practices will have the greatest appeal, demand and environmental benefit return for the LaGrange County Community.

- Heavy Use Area Protection Pads (Livestock Management practice) FOTG #561
- Waste (Manure) Storage Facility FOTG #313 (Livestock Management practice)
- Exclusion Fencing FOTG #382 & Vegetated Filter Strip FOTG #393 (Livestock Management practice and streambank stabilization for lake or river residential)
- Stream Crossing FOTG #578 (Livestock Management/streambank stabilization)
- Invasive Species Control FOTG #314 (woody) and #315 (herbaceous) (forest stand improvement, recreational woodlands)

Category 2 (\$45,000) will be used to employ one or two part-time field technicians to identify specific resource concerns, contact landowners, promote the installation of appropriate best management practices, coordinate design work with the NRCS Tech team, and carry out as-built inspections. The economic reversal experienced in 2008 resulted in the loss of district staff, including a full-time conservation technician. Funding technical staff in this way will serve to increase district service capacity to the community

What are the primary goals for the project?

"The mission of the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District is to provide leadership and assistance in proper use and management of soil, water and related natural resources to landowners and residents of LaGrange County, IN." This has been the mission statement of the District for many years and is reiterated in the current long-term District business plan covering 2019-2023. Our business plan lists our partners, both private and governmental, identifies critical resource concerns for the county and larger watershed, and sets specific goals for implementation of best management practices to address these concerns.

The District specifies desired outcomes in our Long-Term Business Plan as follows: the achievement of water quality conditions and improved soil health, increased woodland resources and improved wildlife habitat. These results will in turn produce improved quality of life for LaGrange County citizens and an increased awareness of the benefits of natural resources stewardship.

These goals on the part of the District mirror to a great degree the goals set out in the Indiana State Soil Conservation Board Business Plan (2020-2024), which also call for improved water quality, attention to soil health conditions, the identification and management of detrimental invasive species, the prevention of soil loss through erosion, and streambank stabilization for the improvement of surface water quality and soil health. Located at the heart of the St. Joseph River

Basin, a successful application of these best management practices has the potential of improving environmental conditions for a substantial portion of the entire Great Lakes region.

Budget Information

| <i>Item Description</i> | <i>CWI Funds Requested</i> | <i>Cash Match</i> | <i>In Kind Match</i> |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Cost Share for designated Best Management Practice installation | \$105,000.00 | \$29,692.50 | \$7,155.00 |
| Program Promotion Technical Staff Support | \$45,000.00 | \$0.00 | \$37,043.82 |
| Administrative Support Costs | \$0.00 | \$1,800.00 | \$750.00 |
| Totals | \$150,000.00 | \$31,492.50 | \$44,948.82 |

Self Assessment

These items are not specified in district law but are considered essential for district operations and will be considered for CWI 2020.

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| <i>District Annual Meeting Information: January 1, 2020</i> | Yes | |
| <i>Updated SharePoint Directories: Within 30 days of changes</i> | Yes | |
| <i>The district has a current business plan.</i> | Yes | |
| <i>The district has had at least one current supervisor/staff/active associate attend a Leadership Institute workshop session since 2008. *Note that in order for an associate supervisor to count toward this item, they must be listed in the SharePoint directory.</i> | Yes | |
| <i>The district has at least one current supervisor/staff/active associate graduate of the Leadership Institute program. *Note that in order for an associate supervisor to count toward this item, they must be listed in the SharePoint directory.</i> | Yes | |
| <i>District Staff or supervisors participated in fall 2019 cover crop transects.</i> | Yes | |
| <i>District has applied for a grant other than CWI in the last 3 years.</i> | No | |
| <i>If so, how many?</i> | 0 | |



LaGrange County Commissioners

114 West Michigan Street
LaGrange, IN 46761

Phone 260-499-6310
Fax 260-499-6401

August 19, 2020
Indiana State Soil Conservation Board
One North Capitol Ave., Suite 600
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The LaGrange County Board of Commissioners has supported the important work in agriculture and environmental stewardship carried out by the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District for many years. We frequently partner with the SWCD, its Board of Supervisors and District staff in their efforts in leading our community in the proper and sustainable use of our natural resources. With LaGrange County's abundance of prime farmland, 74 natural glacial lakes, and diverse population, we recognize the importance of these resources, and share with the District the sense of responsibility of taking care of them adequately.

It is our understanding that the LaGrange County SWCD is applying for Clean Water Indiana funding in a project designed to further improve soil and water quality conditions in our county, while maintaining the agricultural productivity that is so vital to our community and our state. We stand in support of this effort, and hope to see this project funded, not only for our own benefit, but also for greater good of the Great Lakes region of which we are a part.

Sincerely,

Larry Miller, President
LaGrange County Indiana Board of Commissioners

August 21, 2020

Martin A. Franke, District Manager
LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District
910 South Detroit Street
LaGrange, Indiana 46761

Dear Mr. Franke:

This letter is regarding your request for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to provide technical assistance for your Clean Water Indiana Grant proposal that will address resource concerns in four watersheds located in LaGrange County. This proposal calls for cost share on the installation of six conservation practices: heavy use area protection, waste storage facilities, exclusion fencing, roof runoff structures, stream crossings and alternative watering facilities.

As you are aware, NRCS in Indiana works one-on-one with private landowners to help them conserve and protect our natural resources. We assist them with finding solutions to their resource issues (like erosion, invasive plants, drainage, flooding, forestry management, etc.) and help them develop and carryout plans that will reach their goals.

Subject to the availability of Farm Bill funding for technical assistance and in accordance with the State Conservationist's priorities, NRCS agrees to provide the following type of assistance to this project:

- Training to local staff or contracted employees in conservation planning of conservation systems
- Oversight of conservation planning relative to addressing natural resource concerns
- Certification of conservation plans that meet the criteria set forth in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH)
- Survey, design, review and approval of engineering plans, layout and review of conservation practices constructed to meet the standards and specifications set forth in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) that receive funding from the proposed project

Please let me know if you have any questions or need more information.

Sincerely,

JERRY RAYNOR

Digitally signed by JERRY
RAYNOR
Date: 2020.08.21 11:35:43 -04'00'

JERRY RAYNOR
State Conservationist

cc: Sherman Liechty, Northeast Area Conservationist, NRCS, Fort Wayne, Indiana

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August 25, 2020

Brad Dawson, Chairman
Indiana State Soil Conservation Board
One North Capitol Ave., Suite 600
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Re: Clean Water Indiana Funding For LaGrange County

Dear Chairman Dawson,

On behalf of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC), I write to express support for the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District's (SWCD) application for Clean Water Indiana funding. Their proposal to target technical assistance and financial support to the Amish community will fill a critical conservation gap in our basin. Better management of private land is necessary to improve water quality and reduce flooding. As our Amish population continues to grow, it becomes more important than ever to reach this traditionally underserved community.

The SJRBC exists to provide a forum for the discussion, study and evaluation of water resource issues of common concern in the St. Joseph River Watershed of Lake Michigan. LaGrange County is the only county in Indiana that lies entirely within the watershed. Its abundant natural resources and prime farmland are the heart of our basin. It is also the home of the largest Amish population in the state. Serving this community requires a different approach, and the LaGrange County SWCD has a proven track record in doing so.

With this letter of support, we urge the Soil Conservation Board to fund the application submitted by the LaGrange County SWCD. The SJRBC looks forward to assisting with this project to protect and improve our watershed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Meersman".

Matt Meersman
Director
St. Joseph River Basin Commission