



Berkshire Conservation District
78 Center St., Suite 102, Pittsfield, MA 01201
Phone: (413) 443-1776 x102
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www.berkshireconservation.org

FISCAL YEAR 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 1, 2022 - JUNE 30, 2023

Background

Berkshire Conservation District (BCD, the District) is a non-profit, tax-exempt state organization founded in 1946 as one of more than 3,000 conservation districts across the country established under state law to carry out programs for the conservation and wise management of soil, water and related resources. Guided by an elected volunteer Board of Supervisors, BCD works with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other Berkshire area non-profit environmental, conservation and agricultural organizations. The District is dedicated to environmental education, the conservation of natural resources and best land use and agricultural practices in Berkshire County, MA. The District does not receive regular state aid for its operations and available programming is dependent year-to-year on funds provided by grant awards, fundraising income, and private donations. Past programming has included District funding of environmental scholarships for local students at Berkshire Community College and UMass Amherst, hosting educational workshops, and providing community/school programs.

Mission

“The Berkshire Conservation District helps farmers, landowners and land managers improve and protect their natural resources. In cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we offer assistance through education and outreach.”

Programming

The District submitted a grant request to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) in July 2022 to focus our efforts on promoting Regenerative Farming Best Practices. On June 7, 2023, the District was awarded the FY23 grant from EOEEA. This delay, without the option to request retroactive reimbursements for that time period, resulted in uncertainty for the future of the District. As soon as the grant award was announced, the District Supervisors held a planning meeting to map out our programming goals and objectives. We started offering a promotional ‘no per-acre fee in 2023’ for farmers renting our no-till seeder in addition to subsidies for soil testing. We continued to reach out to farmers to promote adding native pollinator plantings among their crops, and finalized our plans for a September native plant sale. In July 2023, the District partnered with Hamden-Hampshire Conservation District and CISA to offer an in-person reduced till/perennial clover trials event at Sawyer Farm in Worthington MA.

The No-Till Seeder rental program continues to offer Berkshire area farmers a more sustainable way to plant crops while saving time, fuel and money as well as maintaining soil health. This program allows farmers to try the no-till method for seeding as an alternative to purchasing the equipment. The concept of no-till practices is to minimize disturbing the soil structure when planting to reduce erosion and decrease evaporation. The seeder is housed by our Caretaker, a local hay farmer, and is available for rent by farmers who share the use of the machine over the growing season. The daily rental rate and a per-acre fee contributes to maintenance of the seeder and administrative support. The seeder was used on approximately 235 acres between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. While this is similar to the acreage in the previous fiscal year, once we were able to implement a no per-acre fee, the acreage increased dramatically and we ended the



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2023 calendar year with having it used to plant over 450 acres. The early summer abundance of rain also contributed to a slow start to the season. The District is deeply grateful to our Associate and Caretaker of the seeder, Mike Balawender, for his time and expertise in interacting with farmers and facilitating the rentals, as well as our No-Till/ Healthy Soils Coordinator Ambrose Clausen for revitalizing this program and reaching out to many farmers directly.

We also want to thank all of our friends who have supported us within the last year. We could not have done it without all of your generous support! Most especially:

- The District Board of Supervisors: Adam Galambos, Ron Kujawski, Donna Kittredge, David Ellis and Ned Kirchner.
- Plant Sale Coordinator: Dorothea (Dottie Lou) Kratt
- Natural Resources Conservation Services: Sylvia Muniz-Gaya, District Conservationist
- Thomas Anderson, Executive Secretary, State Commission for Soil, Water and Related Resources, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.
- Michael Leff, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts
- Other MA Conservation Districts
- Our fellow conservation/environmental/agricultural community partners, including BEAT, Berkshire Grown, Housatonic Valley Association, Berkshire Natural Resources Council and Berkshire Agricultural Ventures.

Looking Ahead to FY 2024

In addition to the on-going No-Till and native plant sale programs, the District prepared a grant proposal to EEA for a Resilient Soils Campaign Initiative, to be a comprehensive public outreach campaign that advocates for the utilization of compost and biochar, emphasizing their role in enhancing soil health and resilience.. If funded in a timely manner, the District will launch this new program to promote resilient soils as a method to mitigate the effects of climate change by building healthy soils, improving air and water quality and increasing carbon sequestration. This will include educational workshops and hands-on demonstrations, as well as resource materials, technical assistance and support. We will also plan for another fall native plant sale to benefit pollinator species.

The goals and objectives of the District in FY24 include:

- Conduct at least one in-person workshop aimed at educating farmers, gardeners, and community members about the benefits and methods of using compost and biochar.
- Develop printed and digital/web-based brochures, flyers, and instructional guides that offer information about composting, biochar production, and their application.
- Set up a demonstration plot(s) in a community garden or local farm showcasing the results of using compost and biochar.
- Coordinate available resources to provide hands-on technical support and consultation services for individuals or organizations wanting to begin using compost and biochar.



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- Conduct at least one digital training session or webinar that individuals can attend or access at their convenience.
- Collaborate with neighboring conservation districts and other organizations for joint events, information sessions, or shared resources.

Board Members (Supervisors)

The District is currently seeking conservation-minded individuals interested in serving on our active board. Board members are essential to the success of the District as they help guide the focus of the District and volunteer for special events offered throughout the year. The District welcomes new input and ideas as they relate to conservation of natural resources of Berkshire County. If you are interested or know of someone who would be a great fit, please contact the District via email, admin@berkshireconservationdistrict.org

BCD Board of Supervisors

Adam Galambos, Chair
Ron Kujawski, Vice Chair
Donna Kittredge, Secretary
David Ellis, Treasurer
Ned Kirchner

Associate: Mike Balawender

District Administrator: Cynthia Grippaldi
Healthy Soils/No-Till Coordinator: Ambrose Clausen
Plant Sale Coordinator: Lou Kratt
Bookkeeper: Lynn Browne