



**White River  
Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
District**

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# White River / Ottauquechee Conservation Districts’ 2024 Local Working Group Report and FY2025 Local Funding Pool Request

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## I. Local Working Group (LWG) Purpose

Conservation districts across the United States are integral to managing local agricultural practices and natural resource conservation efforts. Districts facilitate the locally-led conservation process<sup>1</sup> and Local Working Groups (LWG)<sup>2</sup>, which consist of individuals and representatives from various sectors within the agricultural community including farmers, foresters, ranchers, federal, state, and local governments,

<sup>1</sup> USDA 440 Programs Manual, Part 500, Subpart A: Locally-led Conservation  
<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/landingpage/14606>

<sup>2</sup> USDA 440 Programs Manual, Part 501, Subpart B: Local Working Groups  
<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/landingpage/14602>

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and non-governmental organizations. The purpose of these groups is to provide community-based recommendations on local issues, conservation priorities, and program implementation.

## **Objectives and Functions of Local Working Groups:**

- **Community-Led Recommendations**

LWGs serve as a platform where local knowledge and experience direct the conservation activities that are most appropriate and necessary for the community. By focusing on local priorities and leveraging local knowledge, LWGs ensure that conservation practices are not only scientifically sound but also culturally and economically suited to the local area.

- **Assessment of Local Needs**

LWGs assess the needs of the community with respect to natural resource management and agricultural practices. This assessment helps to prioritize issues, set local conservation goals, and outline strategies to achieve these objectives. LWGs foster greater community involvement in natural resource management decisions. This engagement helps to build a sense of ownership and responsibility among local stakeholders, crucial for the sustainable success of conservation initiatives.

- **Guidance on Resource Allocation**

LWGs advise on the allocation of USDA resources in the district. They play a crucial role in determining how initiatives like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are implemented locally. Input from LWGs helps to streamline program delivery and increase the efficacy of conservation efforts by ensuring that the strategies and resources meet the specific needs of the community.

- **Enhancement of Programs and Practices**

The LWG recommends modifications to conservation programs to suit local needs better. This might include suggesting changes to practice standards, program criteria, payment rates, and funding mechanisms. These groups facilitate adaptive management by continuously updating and refining program strategies based on local feedback and changing conditions. This approach helps to maintain the relevance and effectiveness of conservation efforts over time.

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## II. Methods

Over the past four months, the White River NRCD coordinated a public participation process by conducting a survey with over 20 responses from community members, and hosting community meetings to solicit local input into priority resource concerns and conservation practices. On February 22, and February 23, 2024, the White River NRCD held virtual meetings which included over 35 participants from the variety of agricultural, forestry, and technical service sectors across the White River and Ottauquechee Conservation Districts. The following report and attached appendix is a summary of the priorities identified by our community.

## III. Issues Raised

### Economic Challenges

Affordability of Locally Produced Goods:

- There is a challenge in making locally produced goods, including food and fiber, affordable for community members. This impacts local consumption and the sustainability of local agriculture. Farmers expressed relying on conservation programs to help with bringing their farms “into the black”.

Economic Viability and Competition:

- Vermont farmers face significant economic pressures from heavy taxation compared to farmers in neighboring states like New York, which offers more supportive policies such as a 10% investment tax credit for farmers, a benefit Vermont does not provide. This disparity affects the competitiveness of Vermont's farmers in the region.

High Infrastructure and Waste Management Costs:

- The costs associated with sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices, such as waste management systems, are described as almost prohibitive. There is a call for investments in community infrastructure that could support multiple farms, making such systems more economically viable.

Access to Land and Capital:

- Farmers experience difficulties in accessing affordable land for farming and securing the necessary capital to support agricultural ventures. This challenge is crucial for maintaining a diversified food system and involves not just the acquisition of land but also the accessibility of financial resources needed to cultivate it.

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## Environmental and Regulatory Challenges

### Tight Regulations on Farmers:

- There is concern over increasing regulatory pressures that may impact farming practices and economic viability. These regulations could potentially make it difficult for farmers to operate without facing significant compliance costs.

### Impact of Development Pressure and Large-Scale Solar Installations:

- Residential and commercial development expansion threatens agricultural lands and natural habitats. This development pressure can lead to loss of green spaces, habitat fragmentation, and increased pollution, which collectively pose significant environmental challenges. The potential for large-scale solar projects to consume valuable farmland and forests poses a challenge. There is a need for policies that balance renewable energy development with conservation and agricultural needs, ensuring that land is used sustainably and does not disproportionately favor non-agricultural developments.

### Invasive Species Management:

- There is difficulty in managing invasive species such as smooth bedstraw and other noxious weeds without resorting to undesirable practices, like spraying chemicals, that farmers prefer to avoid. The regulatory and incentive frameworks around how to manage these species can complicate the ability to use more natural remedies, leading to a reliance on chemical solutions that many in the community wish to reduce. There is a concern about the efficacy of natural remedies and a call for innovative solutions to these environmental challenges.

### Erosion and Flooding:

- Erosion and flooding are significant concerns affecting local ecosystems, communities, and agricultural productivity. Effective watershed management and flood prevention strategies are needed to mitigate these issues. Challenges exist in water retention and conservation due to historical changes in land use from forested areas to flat pastures. This transformation has led to problems with water management, emphasizing the need for innovative solutions to retain water and enhance soil health.

### Impact of Climate Change:

- The variability of climate conditions, including issues like unexpected droughts and excessive rainfall, affects water management strategies and the overall predictability needed for effective farming practices.

### Soil Health:

- The need to improve soil health for sustainable agriculture and environmental resilience is emphasized. Practices like rotational grazing and soil decompaction are suggested to enhance soil quality and productivity.

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## Access and Awareness Issues

Lack of Awareness of Available Programs:

- There is a significant issue with farmers not being aware of the various support programs and resources available to them. This lack of awareness results from insufficient outreach and information dissemination, which leads to underutilization of potentially beneficial programs.

Complexity in Program Applications:

- The process to apply for and participate in agricultural support programs is often seen as overly complex and cumbersome. This complexity can deter farmers from engaging with these programs, especially if they require navigating bureaucratic procedures or understanding intricate eligibility criteria.

Need for Better Coordination and Communication:

- Improved coordination and communication are needed within the agricultural community and between different sectors such as dairy, vegetable growers, and beekeepers. Effective collaboration and clear communication, such as utilization of Farm Teams, can help in overcoming divisions and ensuring that farmers are aware of and can access available resources, grants, and opportunities.

Educational Resources and Opportunities:

- The potential for educational programs to increase knowledge and awareness about sustainable practices and local ecosystem management is significant. Community workshops, training sessions, and formal educational initiatives like "Agriculture in the Classroom" are suggested to foster greater community involvement and awareness.

## IV. Specific Conservation Practices Recommended for Focus

**Wetland Restoration:**

- Restoring wetlands and enhancing upland wildlife habitat along tributaries to slow down water flow into rivers and streams, will help enhance natural water management and provide environmental benefits. This is particularly emphasized for areas like the Ompompanoosuc watershed.

**Riparian Area Management:**

- Managing areas adjacent to water bodies to improve water quality, stabilize stream banks, and enhance wildlife habitat, again with specific focus in the Ompompanoosuc watershed. The recommendation is to include funding maintenance for riparian forest buffers using methods like mowing and flash grazing. Riparian Forest Buffers could be multi-functional and toxin free, mass producing species such as improved silver maple,

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bur oak, pecan, elderberry, red mulberry, yellowbud, and shellbark, would provide a safety net of local oil and flour production potential.

## **Agroforestry and Silvopasturing:**

- Incorporating silvopasturing (integrating trees and pasture) into agricultural practices to manage water flow, reduce erosion, increase shade, and improve pasture and forage quality. Implementing agroforestry practices, which integrate trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes, can provide diverse habitat for wildlife, increase carbon sequestration, and improve overall farm biodiversity.

## **Stormwater Management Practices:**

- Implementation of structures or natural solutions to capture, store, and slowly release stormwater runoff from agricultural lands, helping to mitigate the impacts of stormwater.

## **Rotational Grazing and Deep Tillage:**

- These practices are recommended to contribute to soil health by enhancing soil quality, reducing erosion, decompacting soils, and improving water infiltration.

## **Contour Farming and Keyline Design:**

- Utilizing contour farming techniques and Keyline design to manage water usage efficiently on farms and to prevent soil erosion. These practices involve aligning certain agricultural activities like plowing parallel to contours of the land to maximize water absorption and minimize runoff.

## **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):**

- A recently released study by USDA and Texas Tech University found disturbingly high levels of PFAS in the most commonly used pesticides and herbicides: [//peer.org/substantial-pfas-contamination-found-in-pesticides/](https://peer.org/substantial-pfas-contamination-found-in-pesticides/)
- Encouraging the use of IPM to control pest populations through natural predators and biological agents rather than relying heavily on chemical pesticides. This approach helps maintain ecological balance and reduce chemical runoff. Physical controls could be promoted to reduce reliance on chemical controls.

## **Invasive Management:**

- Invasive/noxious plants could be reanalyzed for their food and fodder potential. We should take into account outsourcing destruction, reducing externalized feeds and the embodied energy of practices. Fund approaches to managing invasive species focuses on sustainable and ecological strategies rather than destructive methods. Planting and maintaining trees is recommended to naturally phase out invasive plants by gradually increasing canopy cover that restricts their growth. Additionally, controlled flash grazing around field edges can help manage these species while building farm resilience by providing extra fodder and maintaining nutrient balance, especially beneficial during droughts. The utilization of invasive plants is also encouraged; for example, Knotweed

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can be used as a lemon juice substitute and its shoots marketed as "red asparagus," while also being recognized for its medicinal properties, including high levels of resveratrol for treating Lyme Disease. Autumn Olive and Honeysuckle, with their nutrient-rich profiles, offer further food and medicinal benefits.

- To effectively manage these invasive species, several management and policy recommendations are proposed. These include employing non-chemical methods such as mowing, using rhizome barriers, and chipping to control plants like Knotweed. Development of phased invasive management plans should aim for long-term suppression of these species through increased canopy coverage. Incorporating flash grazing into regular grazing schedules can help control invasives and enhance soil nutrition and drought resilience. Furthermore, it is suggested to revise policies to permit temporary grazing in restricted zones like riparian buffers, which could lead to improved ecosystem health and increased farm productivity.

## **Cover Cropping:**

- The use of cover crops to improve soil health, enhance water permeability, increase biodiversity, and control weeds. Cover crops such as clover or ryegrass are planted during off-season times when primary crops are not being cultivated. The timing of cover crop contracts is not reflective of diversified agriculture and agroforestry systems, especially in beginning transitional years where farms are trying to build up the soil. In some cases, a farmer would need to submit their application over a year in advance of planting. This is especially burdensome for beginning farmers.

## **Nutrient Management Plans:**

- Developing and implementing comprehensive, holistic nutrient management plans to efficiently use manure and fertilizers, ensuring that nutrients are effectively recycled on farms and minimizing nutrient runoff into nearby water bodies.

## **V. Recommendations to Improve Access to Agricultural Programs**

### **Streamlining Programs:**

- There is a significant focus on streamlining agricultural programs to make them more accessible and less confusing for farmers. This includes setting consistent dates for grant deadlines and simplifying the application processes so that farmers can easily understand what programs are available and how they can benefit from them.

### **Direct Outreach and Communication:**

- Enhancing direct outreach to farmers through personal and direct methods of communication, such as phone calls or direct mail, is emphasized. This approach is recommended over reliance on digital communications (like emails), which may not reach all farmers effectively.

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## Creating a Comprehensive Service Provider List:

- Developing a comprehensive list of service providers for farmers is suggested. This list would help ensure that farmers know where to go for services and help prevent confusion from receiving conflicting recommendations from different groups.

## Promoting Local Food Systems:

- Suggestions include creating events like local feasts and potlucks that feature local farmers and their products. These events would not only support farmers but also build community connections and increase awareness and appreciation for local food systems.

## Inclusion of Local Grocers and Retailers:

- Including local grocers, coops, and retailers in the agricultural network is proposed to enhance the connection between local food producers and retailers. This could open up new opportunities for farmers to sell their products and strengthen the local food economy.

## Infrastructure and Support for Sustainable Practices:

- Improved infrastructure to support sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices is highlighted. This includes shared waste management systems that can be used by multiple farms, and mobile chicken housing for livestock rotation, nutrient management, and soil health.

## Educational Resources and Initiatives:

- Expanding educational resources to include more comprehensive programs like "Agriculture in the Classroom" and workforce development initiatives, such as Regeneration Corps, Farm Force, and the Virgin Islands/Vermont partnership spearheaded by White River NRCD. These programs aim to foster a deeper connection and understanding of agriculture from a young age and to equip farmers with the skills needed for modern agricultural practices.

## Enhanced Program Accessibility:

- There is a call to make all programs more accessible by reducing bureaucratic barriers and simplifying entry points into programs. This could involve centralizing information and resources from the state and federal government to make it easier for farmers to find and apply for the support they need.

## Adaptive Management and Feedback Systems:

- Current "edge of field" monitoring and simplistic, shallow, random soil sampling/monitoring does not provide the level of landscape feedback required, nor do SSURGO soil maps. Implementing adaptive management practices, feedback systems, and 3D soil mapping spearheaded by LandWEB that allow for continuous improvement of agricultural programs based on farmer input and environmental monitoring. This would help ensure that programs are responsive to the needs of the community and the landscape.



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## VI. Recommended New Practices for Vermont

The Local Working Group requests the USDA-NRCS' consideration to "turn on" the following practices in Vermont:

324 Deep Tillage

331 Contoured Orchard and other perennial crops

548 Grazing Lands Mechanical Treatment

**Deep tillage and grazing lands mechanical treatment** (or subsoiling) are beneficial for soil for several reasons, particularly in its ability to improve soil structure and enhance crop growth conditions. Deep tillage can penetrate and break up compacted soil layers, often referred to as hardpans. These layers can restrict root growth and reduce soil drainage, affecting plant health. By breaking up these layers, deep tillage enhances root penetration and improves water infiltration, which is vital for plant growth. By disrupting compact soil layers, deep tillage increases the soil's ability to absorb water. This not only helps to prevent surface runoff and erosion but also ensures that water can reach deeper into the soil profile, where roots can access it during drier conditions. The loosening of the soil improves aeration, which is crucial for root respiration and the overall health of the soil microbiome. Good aeration facilitates the exchange of gases between the soil and the atmosphere, helping roots and soil organisms to breathe more easily and perform better. Deep tillage can help mix the soil and distribute nutrients more evenly. It can bring up nutrients from deeper layers of the soil to the surface, where plant roots are more concentrated. This can be particularly beneficial for nutrients that are less mobile in the soil but essential for crop health. Deep tillage can help in preparing a better seedbed for planting. It creates a looser soil structure, which can facilitate better seed-to-soil contact and potentially enhance germination and early growth stages of crops.

**Contour orchard planting** is a valuable agricultural practice that offers several important benefits, particularly for managing water use and reducing soil erosion on sloped lands. One of the primary advantages of contour farming is its effectiveness in reducing soil erosion. By plowing and planting crops in rows that follow the natural contour lines of the landscape rather than straight up and down the slope, water runoff is significantly slowed. This reduction in runoff velocity decreases the soil's erosion potential by preventing water from gathering momentum and washing soil away. Contour lines create natural barriers to water flow, which increases the time water spends on the slope, thus enhancing the opportunity for water to infiltrate into the soil. This improved infiltration helps to ensure that more water is available to crops and less is lost to surface runoff, which is particularly beneficial in arid and semi-arid regions where water conservation is crucial. Because contour farming improves water retention and reduces soil loss, plants have better soil conditions and moisture availability. This can lead to healthier crops and potentially higher yields because the plants are less likely to suffer from drought stress and have more nutrients available to them.

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## VII. Local Funding Pool Requests

### Beaver Habitat, Wetland Restoration and Riparian Area Plantings in the Ompompanoosuc watershed:

- This year, we are requesting a local funding pool for \$200,000 for small scale wetland plantings, riparian area plantings, and upland wildlife habitat along tributaries of the Ompompanoosuc River to slow down water flow into rivers and streams.
- The Ompompanoosuc River currently has a TMDL for e-coli, and built infrastructure in this watershed has been increasingly stressed and damaged by the recent floods. Beavers are crucial in Vermont for their role in creating and maintaining wetland habitats, which support biodiversity by providing a habitat for many species and acting as natural water filtration systems. Additionally, their dam-building activities help to regulate water flow, reduce soil erosion, and mitigate flood risks, contributing significantly to the ecological health and water quality of the region. Focusing on practices that in turn create more beaver habitat would enhance natural water management and provide environmental benefits for years to come.

### Community Scale Agriculture and Agroforestry Practices:

- Last year, our \$150,000 Local Funding Pool for community scale agriculture received 13 applications, totalling \$405,000 in requested funding. This year, we are seeking to expand the practice list to include agroforestry practices, and are requesting \$800,000 in a local funding pool for farmers and land stewards in the White River and Ottauquechee Conservation Districts.
- Agroforestry and community-scale agriculture practices are increasingly vital as they offer multifaceted benefits by integrating trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes, enhancing biodiversity, and improving resilience against environmental stresses. These practices help in soil conservation, increase water retention in the ground, and promote sustainable land use, which mitigates the impact of agricultural runoff and erosion. Furthermore, by diversifying crop production and providing additional income sources through the sale of wood, fruit, and other by-products, agroforestry supports local economies and strengthens community ties. Community-scale agriculture fosters local food security and reduces dependency on large-scale industrial farms, encouraging healthier diets and reducing carbon footprints through minimized transportation distances, making it an essential strategy for sustainable development.

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## APPENDIX A

Local Working Group Survey Responses - as of February 22, 2024

Over the past several months, the White River NRCDC coordinated a public participation process by conducting a survey. The 20-plus survey responses reflect a community closely connected to its natural environment and agricultural heritage. There is a strong desire to preserve and enhance these assets through sustainable practices, community engagement, and thoughtful planning. The community is concerned about environmental degradation, the sustainability of agriculture, and the inclusivity of planning processes. Proposed solutions aim to address these concerns by fostering education, collaboration, and policy adjustments to support a resilient and vibrant community future.

Stories of Vermont's agricultural community at its best:

**Community Support in Crisis:** One story highlighted how the community comes together to support one another during times of crisis. When a neighbor's barn blew down due to a storm, another farm took in their herd for several months, demonstrating the solidarity and mutual aid prevalent within the farming community.

**Generational Farming and Infrastructure Challenges:** Another participant shared their journey from starting a farm 35 years ago with 120 cows to expanding their operations to milking 1700 cows with their sons. This story underscored the challenges and opportunities that come with scaling up operations, including dealing with infrastructure needs and community support during natural disasters.

**Local Feast and Potluck Initiatives:** A proposal for creating local feasts and potlucks was discussed as a way to build community bonds and support local farmers. By featuring local food, such events could help foster a deeper connection among community members and raise awareness of local agricultural products.

**Collaboration and Synergy:** Stories were shared about the importance of collaboration among farmers, highlighting efforts to work together for mutual benefit. This includes sharing resources, such as manure management systems, and supporting each other through challenges like invasive species management and environmental conservation efforts.

**Environmental and Agricultural Challenges:** Participants discussed historical changes in land use and their impact on water retention and soil health. The transformation from forested areas to flat

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pastures has led to challenges in water management and conservation, prompting discussions on innovative solutions to retain water and enhance soil health.

**Vision for Sustainable and Inclusive Farming:** The stories also touched on visions for the future, including the desire for a more sustainable, diversified, and inclusive agricultural system. Participants expressed hopes for initiatives that could support local food systems, enhance environmental conservation, and ensure the economic viability of farming operations.

## Q1: What do you love about your community?

- **Natural Beauty and Environment:** There's a clear admiration for the natural surroundings, with frequent mentions of the beautiful Black River, Connecticut River, and Ottauquechee River, rural landscapes, access to open and natural spaces, and an abundance of water and trees. The scenic beauty of green hills, valleys, wildlife, trees, streams, ponds, and wildflowers in mostly quiet areas offering beautiful views stands out as a significant aspect.
- **Community Spirit and Neighborliness:** Respondents value the sense of community, describing it as small, connected, and characterized by conscientious and friendly people. There's a strong emphasis on neighbors helping each other out, celebrating rural living together, and a collective effort to maintain a clean and healthy environment.
- **Access to Local Resources:** Access to local food, produced often on a small scale, and the support for a food system that favors locally produced goods are important. This includes an appreciation for families, farms, forests, and the diversity of local food.
- **Recreational and Outdoor Activities:** The availability of recreational spaces and activities is cherished, including walking through trail systems in forests and meadows, exploring biodiversity, and enjoying the sounds and smells of the environment. Access to nature and the ability to participate in outdoor activities are highly valued.
- **Community Resilience and Sustainability:** There's an awareness and recognition of the importance of community resilience. Efforts to keep local environments clean and healthy, as well as supporting a sustainable local food system, are mentioned as noteworthy.

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Q2: What is your vision for the future of your community as it relates to Agriculture and Food Security?

## 1. Support for Small Family Farms

- The future vision includes a strong emphasis on encouraging and supporting small family farms. This reflects a desire to maintain and strengthen the community's agricultural roots by ensuring that small-scale farmers have the resources, support, and infrastructure necessary to thrive. The focus is on creating a viable economic environment where family farms can prosper, contributing to the local food system and community well-being.

## 2. Development of Local Markets

- Another significant aspect of the vision is the development and enhancement of local markets for locally produced foods. This entails creating stronger connections between producers and consumers within the community, fostering a local food economy that supports farmers and provides residents with access to fresh, nutritious, and sustainably produced food. Enhancing local markets can also contribute to food security and reduce the environmental impact associated with long-distance food transportation.

## 3. Preservation of Agricultural Soils

- The preservation and long-term stewardship of agricultural soils for food production are highlighted as crucial components of the future vision. This reflects an understanding of the importance of soil health not only for current agricultural productivity but also for ensuring that future generations have the resources needed to grow food. The focus on soil preservation aligns with broader environmental conservation goals, recognizing soil as a vital natural resource that supports biodiversity, water filtration, and climate regulation.

## 4. Sustainable and Regenerative Practices

- Respondents envision a future where sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices are the norm. This includes methods that enhance soil health, reduce dependency on chemical inputs, promote biodiversity, and conserve water and other natural resources. The adoption of such practices is seen as essential for creating a resilient agricultural system capable of withstanding environmental challenges and contributing to the overall health of the ecosystem.

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## 5. Community Engagement and Resilience

- Lastly, the vision encompasses a strong sense of community engagement and resilience in the face of challenges. This includes not only supporting local agriculture and food systems but also fostering a community culture that values and actively participates in food production, conservation, and sustainability initiatives. Building a resilient community involves education, collaboration, and shared responsibility among all stakeholders, including farmers, consumers, local businesses, and policymakers.

### Q3: What is your vision for the future of your community as it relates to Natural Resources and the Environment?

#### 1. Fully Functioning Watersheds and Stream Restoration

- Respondents envision a future where watersheds are fully functional, and streams have been restored to their natural states. This includes managing water resources in a way that supports biodiversity, reduces erosion and flooding, and ensures clean water for all community members. The emphasis is on holistic watershed management practices that take into account the interconnectedness of land use, water cycles, and ecosystem health.

#### 2. Preservation of Agricultural Soils for Food Production

- The preservation of agricultural soils is highlighted not just for its importance to agriculture but also for maintaining the overall health of the environment. Respondents see a future where agricultural soils are protected and managed sustainably, ensuring their long-term viability for food production and their role in sequestering carbon, filtering water, and supporting biodiversity.

#### 3. Long-term Conservation of Natural Habitats

- A key part of the vision involves the long-term conservation of natural habitats, including forests, wetlands, and grasslands. This reflects an understanding of the critical role these habitats play in supporting wildlife, storing carbon, and maintaining ecological balance. The goal is to protect these areas from development and degradation, ensuring they continue to contribute to the health of the planet and provide recreational and educational opportunities for the community.

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## 4. Sustainable Land Use and Development Practices

- Respondents envision a future where land use and development are managed sustainably, balancing the needs of human communities with the preservation of natural resources. This includes smart growth strategies that minimize environmental impact, protect open spaces and agricultural lands, and promote green infrastructure and renewable energy sources.

## 5. Community Engagement in Conservation Efforts

- The vision for the future also strongly emphasizes the role of community engagement and education in achieving conservation goals. Respondents see a need for increased awareness and involvement of community members in environmental stewardship activities. This could involve citizen science projects, conservation education programs, and volunteer opportunities that encourage people to connect with and contribute to the natural world around them.

## 6. Collaborative and Integrated Management Approaches

- Finally, the vision includes a call for collaborative and integrated management approaches that bring together various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profits, businesses, and local residents, to work towards shared environmental goals. This reflects an understanding that the challenges facing natural resources and the environment are complex and interconnected, requiring cooperative and multidisciplinary solutions.

Q4: Can you identify specific or emerging issues in your community related to agriculture and natural resources?

### 1. Agricultural Challenges

- Tighter regulations on farmers: Respondents express concern over increasing regulatory pressures that may impact farming practices and economic viability.
- High cost of agricultural lands: The affordability and accessibility of agricultural lands for farming activities are seen as significant issues, potentially hindering new and existing farmers from sustaining or expanding operations.

### 2. Environmental and Natural Resource Issues

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- Erosion and Flooding: There is significant concern about erosion and flooding affecting local ecosystems, communities, and agricultural productivity. This concern suggests a need for effective watershed management and flood prevention strategies.
- Increased Development Pressure: The expansion of residential and commercial development is viewed as a threat to agricultural lands, natural habitats, and the rural character of the community. This pressure could lead to loss of green spaces, habitat fragmentation, and increased pollution.
- Impact of Large-Scale Solar Installations: The potential for large-scale solar projects to consume farmland and forests raises questions about balancing renewable energy development with conservation and agricultural needs.

### 3. Soil Health and Conservation Practices

- Need for Improved Soil Health: The importance of soil health for sustainable agriculture and environmental resilience is highlighted, with a focus on practices like rotational grazing and reduced tillage to enhance soil quality and productivity.

### 4. Community Engagement and Planning

- Apathy and Disengagement: There is a concern about a lack of community engagement and awareness regarding environmental, agricultural, and conservation issues. This disengagement could hinder collaborative efforts and collective action towards sustainable practices and policies.
- Barriers to Inclusive Participation: The document hints at challenges in ensuring that all community members have the opportunity to participate in planning and addressing resource issues, potentially due to complexity, lack of information, or perceived exclusion from decision-making processes.

#### Q5: What are the main solutions to addressing these issues?

### 1. Education and Training



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- Required Rivers & Roads training for town officials and community leaders: To improve understanding and management of natural resources, particularly regarding erosion, flooding, and infrastructure development. This aims to enhance decision-making and planning processes to better protect and manage water bodies and land use.

## 2. Land Use Planning and Conservation

- Better coordination of land trusts and agricultural conservation efforts: Suggesting a need for more integrated approaches to land use planning that consider both conservation and agricultural viability. This could involve creating more effective partnerships between conservation organizations, agricultural stakeholders, and land trusts to preserve agricultural soils and natural habitats.
- Land owners brought into the process of land-use planning: Engaging landowners in conservation and land-use planning processes to ensure that their knowledge and needs are considered in decision-making. This approach promotes stewardship and sustainable management practices at the local level.

## 3. Community Engagement and Collaboration

- Engaging community members in addressing environmental issues: Suggesting the importance of increasing awareness and involvement of the broader community in conservation efforts. This could involve community workshops, participatory planning sessions, and citizen science projects to foster a collective approach to environmental stewardship.
- Collaborative efforts to address conservation challenges: Highlighting the need for collaborative projects and initiatives that bring together various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profits, community groups, and residents, to work on shared conservation goals.

## 4. Policy and Regulatory Improvements

- Improving regulations to support sustainable practices: While not explicitly detailed, the mention of challenges related to regulations suggests a need for policy adjustments that better support sustainable agricultural practices and environmental conservation. This could involve

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revising zoning laws, streamlining incentives for conservation practices, and creating policies that balance development with environmental protection.

## 5. Sustainable Agricultural Practices

- Encouragement of practices contributing to soil health: Such as rotational grazing and reduced tillage, indicating a push towards more sustainable and regenerative agricultural methods that enhance soil quality, reduce erosion, and improve water management.

**Land Uses**

Check off those land use/uses that will be applicable to the proposed ranking pool

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Crop
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Forest
<input type="checkbox"/>	Range
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pasture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Farmstead
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Associated Ag Land

**Resource Concerns**

In EQIP there are 17 nationally recognized resource concern categories for the program. Zone DCs will select the top 5 resource concern priorities from the list below based on the LWG action plan, where highest priority is 1. Only 5 resource concerns are to be selected, prioritized as 1 through 5, with 1 being the highest priority.

	Air Quality Emissions
	Aquatic Habitat
	Concentrated Erosion
4	Degraded Plant Condition
	Field Pesticide Loss
3	Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss
	Fire Management
	Inefficient Energy Use
	Livestock Production Limitation
	Pest Pressure
	Salt Losses to Water
1	Soil Quality Limitations
5	Source Water Depletion
	Storage and Handling of Pollutants
2	Terrestrial Habitat
	Weather Resilience
	Wind and Water Erosion

# FY2025

## Attachment B

### 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC

#### Core Conservation Practices

Check the conservation practices recommended to include in the proposed ranking pool. These practices must address at least one of the five resource concerns selected and ranked above.

	101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity
	102	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
	106	Forest Management Plan
	110	Grazing Management Plan
	116	Soil Health Management Plan
	120	Agricultural Energy Design
	138	Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition
	140	Transition to Organic Design
	144	Fish and Wildlife Habitat Design
	148	Pollinator Habitat Design
	157	Nutrient Management Design and Implementation Activity
	158	Feed Management Design
	159	Grazing Management Design
	160	Prescribed Burning Design
	161	Pest Management Conservation System Design
	162	Soil Health Management System Design
	163	Irrigation Water Management Design
	164	Improved Management of Drainage Water Design
	165	Forest Management Practice Design
	199	Conservation Plan
	201	Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring - Data Collection and Evaluation
	202	Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring - System Installation
✓	207	Site Assessment and Soil Testing for Contaminants Activity
	209	PFAS Testing in Water or Soil
✓	216	Soil Health Testing
✓	217	Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management
	218	Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment
	221	Soil Organic Carbon Stock Measurement
✓	222	Indigenous Stewardship Methods Evaluation
	223	Forest Management Assessment
✓	224	Aquifer Flow Test
	228	Agricultural Energy Assessment
	309	Agrichemical Handling Facility
✓	311	Alley Cropping
	313	Waste Storage Facility
	314	Brush Management
	315	Herbaceous Weed Treatment
	316	Animal Mortality Facility
✓	317	Composting Facility
	319	On-Farm Secondary Containment Facility
✓	325	High Tunnel System
	326	Clearing and Snagging
✓	327	Conservation Cover
✓	328	Conservation Crop Rotation
	329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till
✓	330	Contour Farming
✓	332	Contour Buffer Strips
	333	Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products
	334	Controlled Traffic Farming

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## Attachment B

### 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC

	338	Prescribed Burning
✓	340	Cover Crop
✓	342	Critical Area Planting
	345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till
	350	Sediment Basin
	351	Well Decommissioning
	353	Monitoring Well
	355	Groundwater Testing
	360	Waste Facility Closure
	362	Diversion
	366	Anaerobic Digester
	367	Roofs and Covers
	368	Emergency Animal Mortality Management
	372	Combustion System Improvement
	374	Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation
	378	Pond
✓	379	Forest Farming
✓	380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation
✓	381	Silvopasture
✓	382	Fence
	384	Woody Residue Treatment
	386	Field Border
	390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
✓	391	Riparian Forest Buffer
	393	Filter Strip
	395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
	396	Aquatic Organism Passage
	410	Grade Stabilization Structure
	412	Grassed Waterway
	420	Wildlife Habitat Planting
✓	422	Hedgerow Planting
	430	Irrigation Water Conveyance
	436	Irrigation Reservoir
✓	441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation
✓	442	Sprinkler System
✓	443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface
✓	449	Irrigation Water Management
	464	Irrigation Land Leveling
	468	Lined Waterway or Outlet
✓	472	Access Control
✓	484	Mulching
	490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
	500	Obstruction Removal
	511	Forage Harvest Management
	512	Pasture and Hay Planting
	516	Livestock Pipeline
	520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil Treatment
	521	Pond Sealing or Lining, Geomembrane or Geosynthetic Clay Liner

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## Attachment B

### 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC

	522	Pond Sealing or Lining – Concrete
	528	Prescribed Grazing
✓	533	Pumping Plant
	554	Drainage Water Management
	557	Row Arrangement
✓	558	Roof Runoff Structure
✓	560	Access Road
	561	Heavy Use Area Protection
	570	Stormwater Runoff Control
	574	Spring Development
	575	Trails and Walkways
	576	Livestock Shelter Structure
	578	Stream Crossing
	580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection
	582	Open Channel
	585	Stripcropping
	587	Structure for Water Control
	590	Nutrient Management
	592	Feed Management
	595	Pest Management Conservation System
	601	Vegetative Barrier
	603	Herbaceous Wind Barriers
	604	Saturated Buffer
	606	Subsurface Drain
✓	612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
	614	Watering Facility
	620	Underground Outlet
	627	Wastewater Treatment – Milk House
	629	Waste Treatment
	632	Waste Separation Facility
	633	Waste Recycling
	634	Waste Transfer
	635	Vegetated Treatment Area
✓	636	Water Harvesting Catchment
	638	Water and Sediment Control Basin
	642	Water Well
	643	Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities
	644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
✓	645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
	647	Early Successional Habitat Development-Management
	649	Structures for Wildlife
	654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment
	655	Forest Trails and Landings
	656	Constructed Wetland
	657	Wetland Restoration
	659	Wetland Enhancement
✓	660	Tree/Shrub Pruning
	666	Forest Stand Improvement
	670	Energy Efficient Lighting System
	672	Energy Efficient Building Envelope
	782	Storage Facility – Nursery Substrate
	805	Amending Soil Properties with Lime

**Attachment B**

**2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - completed by the DC**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	808	Soil Carbon Amendment
<input type="checkbox"/>	810	Annual Forages for Grazing Systems
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	812	Raised Bed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	821	Low Tunnel Systems

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## Attachment B

### 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - completed by the DC

**Applicability and Category Question** (if submitting a geospatial layer request, specify this in the space below and include a detailed explanation of what the boundaries are):

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Is the applicant located in the White River or Ottauquechee Conservation Districts?

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#### Program Questions

Question Number	Question	Points
1	Is the applicant enrolled in CRP-TIP?	5
2	Does the application include more than 3 practices?	25
3	Does the application include at least one CEMA?	20
4	Does the applicant qualify as Historically Underserved?	50
5	Does the applicant qualify as a Small Farm Operation as defined by the VT RAPs?	100
Total Points		200

#### Resource Questions

Question Number	Question	Points
1	Does the application address the water quality resource concern?	40
2	Does the application address the soil quality limitations RC?	40
3	Does the application address degraded plant conditions RC?	40
4	Does the application address terrestrial habitat RC?	40
5	Does the application address field sediment, nutrient, or pathogen loss RCs?	40
Total Points		200

#### Ranking Component Weights

Total ranking component weight must equal 100%. Zone DCs will select vulnerability, program priorities and resource priorities percentages. Percentages for each must be between the minimum and maximum percentage located in the EQIP national ranking template, as outlined below. The planned practice points and efficiency percent are set nationally.

	Min %	Max %	Suggested Weight
Vulnerabilities	10	40	10
Planned Practice Points	15	15	15
Program Priorities	5	15	15
Resource Priorities	20	60	50
Efficiency	10	10	10
TOTAL			100%



# FY2025

## Attachment B

2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - completed by the DC

### Funds Being Requested (\$)

800,000

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### Ranking Pool Deadlines

Check here if the preferred funding cycle for the Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool proposal is to follow the State funding cycle for 2025.

For a separate funding cycle, specific to this proposal, provide the following:

	Suggested Date
Application Sign Up Deadline	
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**Attachment B**

**2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC**

**Land Uses**

Check off those land use/uses that will be applicable to the proposed ranking pool

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Crop
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Forest
<input type="checkbox"/>	Range
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pasture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Farmstead
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Associated Ag Land

**Resource Concerns**

In EQIP there are 17 nationally recognized resource concern categories for the program. Zone DCs will select the top 5 resource concern priorities from the list below based on the LWG action plan, where highest priority is 1. Only 5 resource concerns are to be selected, prioritized as 1 through 5, with 1 being the highest priority.

	Air Quality Emissions
5	Aquatic Habitat
4	Concentrated Erosion
	Degraded Plant Condition
	Field Pesticide Loss
2	Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss
	Fire Management
	Inefficient Energy Use
	Livestock Production Limitation
	Pest Pressure
	Salt Losses to Water
	Soil Quality Limitations
	Source Water Depletion
	Storage and Handling of Pollutants
1	Terrestrial Habitat
	Weather Resilience
3	Wind and Water Erosion

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### 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC

#### Core Conservation Practices

Check the conservation practices recommended to include in the proposed ranking pool. These practices must address at least one of the five resource concerns selected and ranked above.

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**Applicability and Category Question** (if submitting a geospatial layer request, specify this in the space below and include a detailed explanation of what the boundaries are):

---

Is the applicant located in the Ompompanoosuc watershed?

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#### Program Questions

Question Number	Question	Points
1	Is the applicant enrolled in CRP-TIP?	5
2	Will the selected practices improve habitat for beavers?	95
3	Does the applicant qualify as a Small Farm Operation as defined by the VT RAPs?	50
4	Does the applicant qualify as Historically Underserved?	50
5		
Total Points		200

#### Resource Questions

Question Number	Question	Points
1	Does the application address the concentrated erosion resource concern?	40
2	Does the application address the aquatic habitat resource concern?	40
3	Does the application address the wind and water erosion resource concern?	40
4	Does the application address the terrestrial habitat resource concern?	40
5	Does the application address the field sediment, nutrient, or pathogen loss RC?	40
Total Points		200

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