

*Agriculture Newsletter
Summer 2026*



**The History of
Conservation Districts**

This year as we celebrate the District's 80th Anniversary, we reflect on the history of why and how Conservation Districts were formed, and the importance of conserving our natural resources.

The Dust Bowl

During the early 1930's a perfect storm evolved into what is known as the Dust Bowl following economic and ecological calamities.

In the 1910s through the 1920s, the southern Great Plains was profitable and enticing for farmers; federal policies provided incentives to move west, and the rich soil of the deep rooted grasslands provided the basis to grow an abundance of wheat that was in high demand during World War 1. However, after the war, wheat prices dropped significantly, and the Great Depression set in. Farmers cultivated even more land to make ends meet.

The extensive plowing of the great plains soil, the overgrazing of the grasslands, and the severe drought that lingered at the time deteriorated and eroded the soil to such an extent that it created large dust clouds as the wind swept it away. The dust storms swept across the nation, reaching as far as the East Coast. Over 100 million acres of farmland was impacted; farms and homes were left abandoned, leaving families homeless. Hundreds of lives were lost to dust pneumonia.

Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, was a turning point for the country as it saw the worst dust storm of its time. The storm evoked fear that it was the Armageddon as the dust clouds were so thick that it blackened the sky as it blocked out the sun. The pictures on the following page give you a glimpse of what it was like during the time.

In this Edition:

**Jefferson Conservation District
is Celebrating 80 Years!**
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**The History of  
Conservation Districts**  
~~~~~

District Open House
~~~~~

**Sykesville Ag & Youth Fair**  
~~~~~

Jefferson County Fair
~~~~~

**Ag Progress Days**  
~~~~~

**Save the Date!
Meadowlark Farm
Grazing Field Day**
~~~~~

**REAP: Resource Enhancement  
And Protection Program**



## The History of Conservation Districts : Pictures of the Dust Bowl Era



*Center photo:* A dust storm approaches fields and farm houses in Perryton, Texas, on Black Sunday, April 14, 1935. Photo credit: The Perry Studio, Perryton, Texas. Source: Deaf Smith County Museum, Hereford, Texas/ University of North Texas.

*On right:* A dust storm approaches a farm on Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, in Boise City, Oklahoma. Source: Norma Gene Young Collection.



*Above:* In Lakin, Kansas, three children prepare to leave for school wearing goggles and homemade dust masks to protect them from the dust in 1935. Source: Green Family Collection.

*On right:* A dust storm blows over the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, March, 1935. Source: Carson County Square House Museum, Panhandle, Texas.



*All photos and captions are from the Public Broadcasting Service Website:*

<https://wpsu.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/dust-storms-ken-burns-the-dust-bowl/ken-burns-the-dust-bowl/>



## The History of Conservation Districts *continued*

Following Black Sunday, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Soil Conservation Act on April 27, 1935 “To provide for the protection of land resources against soil erosion...” and led to the formation of The Soil Conservation Service (now known as the Natural Resources Conservation Service) across the nation. In 1937, the first County Conservation District was established in North Carolina by soil scientist Hugh Hammond Bennett to connect federal resources with local farmers.

The effects of the Dust Bowl subsided by the 1940s as the drought ended, over-cultivated land was abandoned, and farmers started adopting conservation practices to keep the soil intact.

The PA Conservation District Law was passed in 1945, allowing for the establishment of conservation districts in Pennsylvania to help farmers protect natural resources on a local level, and today there is a conservation district in every PA county except one.

The Jefferson County Conservation District was created on March 1, 1946 by the County Commissioners following the interest of local farmers in protecting their land. Jefferson County Conservation District’s first directors were appointed at the July 5, 1946 Commissioner’s Meeting, including Donald T. Smith, Silas A. Weaver, Merton E. Shields, Irvin J. Allhouse, and Arthur I. Eberhart. The District was organized on September 13, 1946.

The District is governed by a board of directors consisting of a representative of Jefferson County Government, 3 farmer members, and 3 public members. Associate directors assist the board in its mission. Individuals are recommended for board membership by nominating organizations having interests in natural resources conservation. County Commissioners appoint the directors who, in turn, appoint associate directors. All serve on a voluntary basis.

The District continues to coordinated local, state, and federal resources to provide technical assistance to individuals, volunteer organizations, and local governments to protect soil and water quality.

### Resources:

[www.history.com/topics/great-depression/dust-bowl](http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/dust-bowl), The Dust Bowl: A Film By Kevin Burns, [www.jeffersonconservation.com](http://www.jeffersonconservation.com)



## District Open House

To celebrate our 80th anniversary this year, the District is hosting an open house on **Thursday, July 23, 2026** from 11am -2pm at the District Office (1514 Route 28 Brookville PA 15825). We welcome you to stop in, meet the staff, and learn about the various services the District has to offer.



## Sykesville Ag & Youth Fair

The Sykesville Ag & Youth Fair will be held **June 14-20, 2026** at 400 Fairgrounds Rd. Sykesville, PA 15865. Visit [www.sykesvillefair.com](http://www.sykesvillefair.com) or call 814-894-7871 for more information.



## Jefferson County Fair

The Jefferson County Fair will be held **July 19-25, 2026** at 146 Strishock Ln. Brookville PA 15825. Visit [jeffcofair.com](http://jeffcofair.com) or call 814-849-5530 for more information. Be sure to stop by the Conservation District’s Booth!!



## Ag Progress Days

Ag Progress Days will be held on **August 11-13th, 2026** at the Russell E. Larson Research Center, 2710 West Pine Grove Rd. Pennsylvania Furnace, PA 16865. The event includes demonstrations, educational presentations & tours, interactive activities, and more. Admission and parking are free. Visit [agsci.psu.edu/apd](http://agsci.psu.edu/apd) for more information, or call 814-865-2081



## Meadowlark Farm Grazing Field Day

Save the Date! A Grazing Field Day is planned at Meadowlark Farm in Corsica, PA on **October 14, 2026**. Meadowlark Farm is a regenerative, registered South Poll cattle operation owned and operated by Scott and Shelley Allen.

Steve Campbell of Tailor Made Cattle, Idaho and Russ Wilson of Wilson Land & Cattle Co., Pennsylvania will be the guest speakers at the event. The field day will include discussions on improving cattle quality, tips for stockpiling forage, and a close look at the South Poll Cattle Breed.

To reserve your spot early, contact the Jefferson County Conservation District at 814-849-7463 or [megan@jeffersonconservation.com](mailto:megan@jeffersonconservation.com). Cost to attend is \$20.00, with lunch provided. More details regarding the event will be provided in the Fall Ag Newsletter.



## Resource Enhancement And Protection Program

Applications for the 2026-2027 round of REAP are anticipated to start being accepted on **August 1, 2026** by the State Conservation Commission. Through the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program, farmers, landowners, and businesses earn tax credits for implementing "Best Management Practices" (BMPs) that will enhance farm production and protect natural resources.

### ***Eligibility Requirements***

1. Current Plans. Agricultural operations must have a current and up-to-date:
  - Conservation Plan or Agricultural E&S Plan on all acres under mgmt. control at the time of the application.
  - Nutrient Management Plan (for a CAO or CAFO) or Manure Management Plan – required of all operations that have animals or utilize manure.
  - The written plans must be on-schedule for full implementation in order to be considered "current".
2. Properly Protected Barnyards. BMPs necessary to control nutrient and sediment runoff from ACAs must be fully implemented AND/OR the implementation of these BMPs must be included in the application.
3. On-schedule for Full Implementation of Crop Field and other NM BMPs. An agricultural operation with uncompleted BMPs required in an Conservation/Ag E&S Plan and/or a Nutrient Management/Manure Management Plan must be following the schedule for full implementation listed in those plans.

### ***Eligible BMPs***

Best management practices eligible under the REAP program include no-till equipment, manure storages, fencing, livestock watering systems, cover crop plantings, and many more.

Contact the District or visit [www.agriculture.pa.gov](http://www.agriculture.pa.gov) for more information.