

# LEWIS COUNTY VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



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August 31, 2023

2021-2023 Biennial Report

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## STATUS OF PLAN AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The goal of the Lewis Conservation District has been to visit every farm in Lewis County. While there may be a few farms we missed, the District was successful in covering the entire County looking for farms. A total of 589 individual stewardship plans have been completed since we have started the Voluntary Stewardship Program. A total of 22 best management practices were completed by farmers in this time period. We also recommended 342 practices that would benefit critical areas.

### Targeting Watersheds

The District has continued the successful method of targeting watersheds by mailing postcards and then visiting in person. The entire Newaukum River basin was our first focus basin during this time period. We sent out 747 postcards to landowners as this area has a high concentration of agriculture. The main types of farms we encountered were dairy, poultry, beef and miscellaneous small farms.

The final basins that we targeted in the County were the Lacamas Creek and Upper and Lower Salmon Creek basins. A total of 526 postcards were sent out to this area. This area included a large variety of farm types including crops, Christmas trees, beef, poultry, horse farms and miscellaneous small farms.

District staff has targeted all the watersheds contacting farmers and completing surveys. We will continue to look for new farmers but less of a targeted approach.



## Workgroup

The work group members have been stable with only a few members being replaced. Meetings are generally well attended and the attendees have lively discussions. This is a vital component of a successful VSP program as these members are active in the local agricultural community. For example, Dave Fenn, a crop and beef farmer, was an early adopter of fish screens and has had other farmers consult with him to see how well they function. Maynard Mallonee, an organic dairy farmer, often rents the no-till drills that the District owns. He seeds in novel cover crops into his fields. He occasionally hosts events at his farm to showcase his successes and failures. Other members raise beef, are active in salmon restoration, serve on the local weed board, grow various crops and were previously involved in local government.

Staff were able to secure several speakers. Norman Dick informed the group about his Carbon Capture Foundation. He stated that the Lewis Conservation District has been the most involved with his foundation that was founded in 2019. Norman has mostly funded this with his own money but has received grants. He wants to continue to expand to continue the Foundation's goal of planting trees to pull carbon out of the air.

Scottie Jones gave a presentation on her website, Farm Stay USA (<https://farmstayus.com/>). She has owned Leaping Lamb Farm since 2003, offering farm stays in 2007 to supplement her income. This was presented as a way for farmers to get extra and is most viable for smaller farms. It also is a way for travelers to learn about farms.

Danika Davis of the Lewis County Noxious Weed Control board gave a presentation on fall weed control strategies and upcoming programs.

Allen Branscomb of Oregon State University led an exercise on the needs of local farmers. Top issues identified include infrastructure, water rights issues, and farm finance.

Dani Gelardi gave a presentation on the Washington State Soil Health Initiative. The five key areas of improving soil health include: minimize soil disturbance, increase biodiversity, continual living roots, integrate livestock, and maximize soil cover.

Presentations were also made on buckwheat farm trails and Conservation Northwest-improving wildlife habitat. The guest speakers have been a valuable part of the work group meetings. Staff will continue to work to bring interesting presenters and to have an active work group.



## New No-Till Drill and Other Equipment

Farm sizes have been trending down. As of 2017, the average farm size was 71 acres and the median size was 28 acres. This makes it impossible for farms to own all the equipment that is needed. The District has owned a 10 foot wide John Deere 1590 no-till drill but it needs a 85 horse power tractor to use. This limited it for use by only larger farmers.

A new 6 foot wide no-till drill was purchased in 2023 through the Sustainable Farms and Fields grant. This equipment is being offered at a reduced rate per acre throughout 2023 to help make it more accessible for farmers. As of June 2023, the new drill has been used on 193 acres.

A 1.3 cubic yard and a 6.7 cubic yard manure spreader are also available to rent. We also have soil probes that farmers can borrow to take soil samples. Staff can provide technical advice on soil sampling and will send the sample to a lab for a fee. A hay probe is also available to take core samples. These samples can also be sent to a lab for a fee. Sampling of soil and hay can provide valuable information to the farmer.

Another program that continues to be successful is the poultry butchering equipment that is rented out. This has many people that use it on a regular basis to process poultry for personal consumption or to sell fresh off the farm.

The District may add other equipment in the future. Things that have been looked at are a lime spreader and an even smaller no-till drill.





## VSP promotion

The District has added information to our website, [https:// lewisconservation.wordpress.com/](https://lewisconservation.wordpress.com/) for people that want to know more about the program. We will continue to improve the website as time allows. We can look to see how many visitors that the site receives each day. The week we mail postcards to a new area, we see a spike in views. When we go out and do in person site visits, we also see a spike in views. The Lewis County permit center regularly refers people to the District.

Every year at the Southwest Washington Fair, staff maintains a booth that reaches a wide variety of the population. Staff periodically attend Farm Bureau meetings and have given a presentation at the Farm Forestry Association. VSP was promoted at the Onalaska Apple Harvest Festival and at Lewis County Stream Team Events.

One August 11, 2023 the District was able to participate collaboratively with Washington State University, Washington Soil Health Initiative, Lewis County Farm Bureau, and the Washington State Department of Agriculture on hosting a Soil Health Workshop. Over 30 people attended this hands on workshop in Randle where they learned about soil characteristics and how to take soil samples. The District plans on being more involved in workshops in the next couple of years.



## Service Clubs/Organizations

In the previous two years, Lewis County Stream team members have helped plant trees and shrubs on two farms. The Stream Team has held several educational events and have invited farmers to attend.

The District was able to once again recruit a Department of Veterans Affairs Intern in January 2023. He has assisted by helping with our outreach program, controlling noxious weeds on farms, and has even written a couple grants to help implement practices.

## Individual Stewardship Plans

We are continuing to write Individual Stewardship Plans for farms. These plans detail practices that the landowners have completed and ones that planners think would be beneficial. Maps of critical areas are given to the landowners. A detailed list of resources for farmers is included. The volume of new plans is expected to decrease due to us no longer targeting basins. The District gets contact from new farms on a regular basis. Lewis County has an influx of new

residents as old residents have moved away. There is a need to update some of the older plans. Staff is working to keep up to date on new practices that have been installed.

## Viability of Agriculture

Maintaining the viability of agriculture is a major concern in Lewis County. Most of the people that we work with are not farming land that is zoned as agriculture. This land is rapidly converting to housing and other non-agricultural uses. When staff are out talking to these residents, taxes are a major concern. The District provides information to landowners to try to convert their property to open space taxation. Others that were already in open space taxation complained about the paperwork that the County Auditors



office required. Several dairy farmers have went out of business citing the low price for milk and the higher operating costs. One large nursery in Mossyrock went out of business due to retirement with no buyers so far. Farms are interested in farmland preservation easements but the opportunities to avail of these types of easements are rare. Taking farm equipment down roads is a necessity but farmers have concerns about drivers not giving them space. We have heard complaints from newer residents about normal agricultural practices. As development becomes more prevalent, these conflicts may become more of an issue. The District will work with the farms to help minimize conflicts such as planting hedgerows and composting manure before spreading.

The District has participated in the Soil Health Initiative in partnership with Washington State University and the Washington State Department of Agriculture for two years. Ten fields with a variety of crop and pasture types were sampled in the Boistfort Valley the first year. The second year, we focused on ten fields in Mossyrock since the soil and crop types are different. By participating in this program, a standard can be created for what constitutes a good soil vs. an inferior one. It will also show the impacts of different management styles. The results of these tests will help us better assist farmers with nutrient management.

The District continues to have a successful program of renting poultry processing equipment. There are also two different sizes of no-till drills that can be rented. The smaller one is wearing out and we have applied for grants to get a new one. The District also promotes soil and hay testing by having equipment available. The people bring the samples to the office and we send it to the lab. The results help them decide if their soil is fertilized properly. We also have two sizes of manure spreaders that farmers can rent for a nominal fee.

## Protecting Critical Areas

As part of the planning process for farms, staff recommends improvement practices that are often too expensive for the farmer to implement. The District was able to fund three livestock exclusion fences with almost 4000 feet of fence installed. The areas next to the streams were also planted with vegetation which will help to cool the water in the future. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife was able to fund two fish screens for farmers irrigation intakes.

Chris Volmert, Veteran Intern, was able to contact all the previous farm plans that had been completed to see what they may need for cost share. He made a list of practices that people wanted and started looking for cost share opportunities. Currently, we are waiting to see if two wetland enhancement projects and one manure separator have been funded. The District will continue to look for other opportunities to fund project. There are over 300 recommended practices in our database but many of them are not eligible for current funding sources. We will also provide technical assistance for farmers that are implementing projects on their own.

## Looking Forward

The Lewis Conservation District will continue to work with farmers to implement the Voluntary Stewardship Program. The farms are facing unprecedented hardships from development pressure and economic issues. Critical areas need to be protected and continuing to maintain farmland is one of the best ways to do this.





