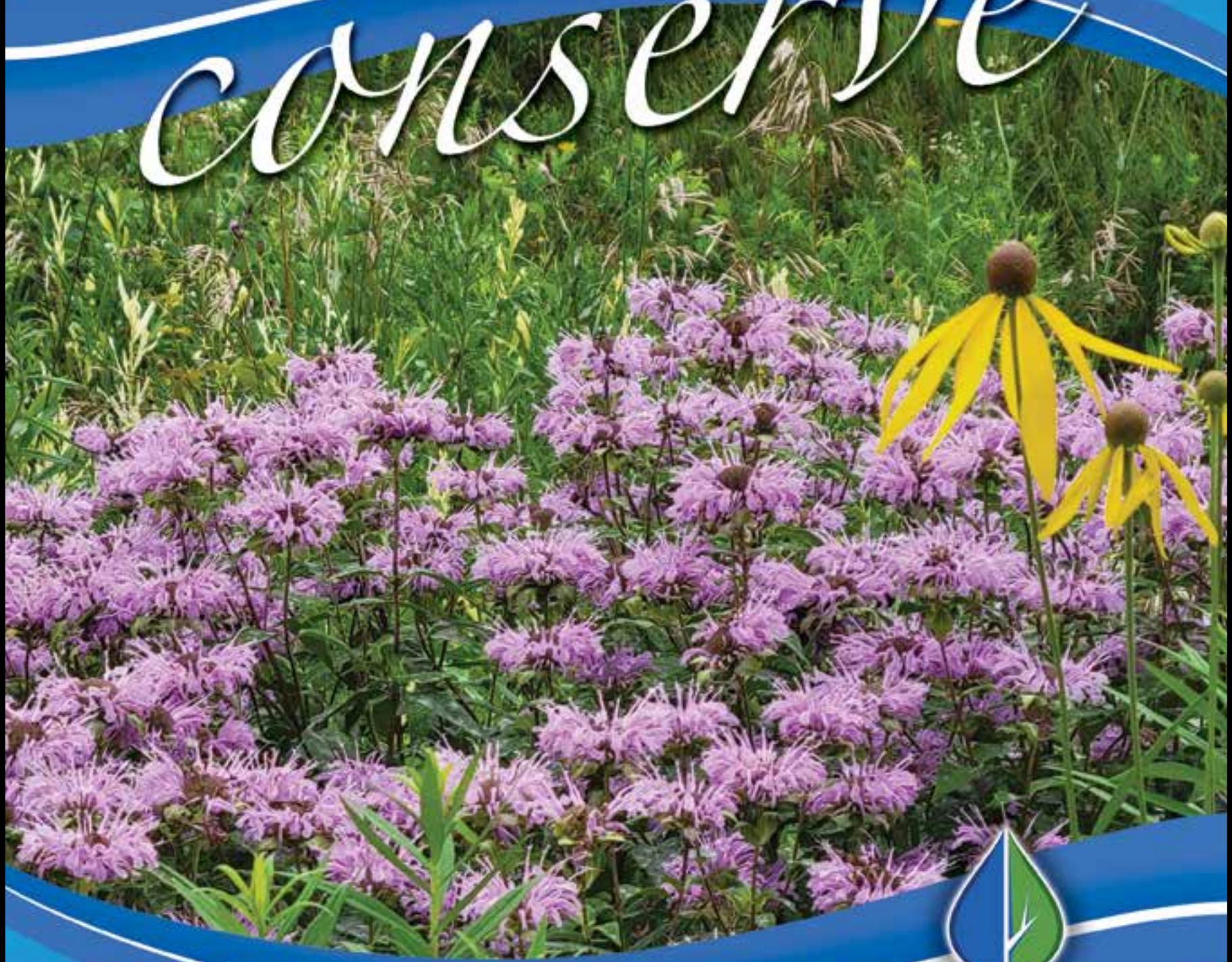


2021 Shiawassee Conservation District Annual Report

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District Honors MAEAP Verified Farms

The Shiawassee Conservation District (SCD) assists farms of all shapes, sizes, and commodities to work through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). These services are free-of-charge and confidential. Working closely with the SCD, 165 MAEAP verifications on 90 farms have been completed.

The following are the most recent to receive the distinction of becoming MAEAP verified farms during 2021:

- Shiawassee County Jail Garden newly verified in the Farmstead system
- Steve Shine of Shine's Derry Farm reverified in the Farmstead, Livestock, and Forest, Wetland and Habitat Systems
- Suzanne Akhavan-Tafti of Full Circle Organic LLC reverified in Farmstead and Livestock Systems
- Mark Hinterman reverified in Farmstead and Cropping Systems
- Thomas Albaugh reverified in Farmstead and Cropping Systems
- John and Marc VanAgen of VanAgen Sod Farm reverified in the Farmstead System
- Robert Carlin reverified in Farmstead and Cropping Systems
- David Mitchell reverified in Farmstead and Cropping Systems
- Nathan Allen of Allen Family Farms reverified in Farmstead, Cropping and Livestock Systems
- William Spike reverified in Farmstead and Cropping Systems
- Mitch Glover reverified in the Cropping System
- Lee Ash reverified in the Cropping System
- Matthew Streeter reverified in the Cropping System
- William Baker reverified in the Cropping System
- Thomas Braid reverified in the Cropping System

Many other producers in Shiawassee County are working towards verification. While becoming MAEAP verified is not an easy task, it can benefit you and your farm in many ways.

MAEAP is open to any Michigan farmer, and a farm can become verified in any of the four categories: Cropping, Livestock, Farmstead, and Forests, Wetlands and Habitat. The SCD will work with you to identify environmental risks on your farm – with no risk of being reported for any regulatory violations – and will help you to complete the necessary paperwork.

Numerous farms across the state have already become MAEAP verified. Not only does this recognize you as a good steward of the land, but it also comes with certain regulatory benefits and additional access to financial assistance for other environmental programs. To learn more about MAEAP, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

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Greg Lienau, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician, is pictured surveying a Shiawassee County property. He is designing a livestock pipeline. The pipeline will be used to decentralize the location of water for livestock. This will improve the management of the farms grazing plan and save energy. This pipeline is one of many improvements made by this farm to protect natural resources with Conservation District and NRCS technical assistance.

Protect Your Farm With An Emergency Plan

Give yourself peace of mind by becoming prepared to respond if an emergency occurs. A farm emergency plan contains emergency contact information, as well as farm maps and information for handling chemicals and manure stored on the farm. First responders and firefighters use the plan to quickly decide how to handle farmstead hazards, such as fires or chemical spills.

An emergency plan should contain an up-to-date inventory of stored products (pesticides, fertilizers and farm flammables) and their storage locations, along with a list of the farm nearby emergency equipment and supplies. This list of chemicals is critical to emergency responders and helps them to know how to help if a disaster occurs. Emergency plans should be dated and filed in at least three locations on the farm--the farm office, in the emergency tube or in farm vehicles/tractors. Plans stored in emergency tubes should be protected from moisture with an air-tight plastic bag, laminated paper or plastic paper. The plan should also be filed with the local fire department, 911, and the local emergency planning committee.

Taking time to consider the risks on your farm will help in developing your emergency plan. The Conservation District can help! "A Farm*A*Syst is a confidential risk assessment based on the Michigan Right-to-Farm generally accepted agricultural management practices, or GAAMPs," stated Agricultural Technician Andrea Wendt. "We are available to help you understand and identify risks to protect your farm, family, and natural resources."

Emergency planning protects your family and your farm. A customized farm emergency plan and confidential risk assessment helps you take precautions to protect people, food, water, and the environment. A farm visit is the place to start. Contact the Conservation District to schedule yours today!

Cover Photo

The cover photo was taken July 21, 2021 in a filter strip on a Shiawassee County farm. The filter strip is working to protect the stream that runs through the farm, provide habitat for wildlife, and add beauty to the landscape. The photo features two native wildflowers – bergamot (purple) and gray-headed coneflower (yellow).

Gray-headed coneflower is also called yellow coneflower, drooping coneflower, and pinnate prairie coneflower. The seed heads are eaten by birds in the fall and the flowers attract several species of butterflies and other pollinators.

Bergamot is also known as bee balm and horsemint. Many kinds of bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds use the curved, tubular flowers for nectar. The seeds are eaten by goldfinches and other birds.

Both plants are great options to plant in filter strips. In general, native wildflowers have deep roots to help to control erosion. They attract native bees, which increases pollination and increases crop yields. They attract insects, which provide food for young pheasants and other wildlife and provide important winter cover for pollinators and bird species.

Contact the Shiawassee Conservation District for help developing your conservation plan to protect water and wildlife at (989) 723-8263 ext 3.

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A thank you note written to SCD staff by a Perry Middle School student.



A drawing of the groundwater flow model from a Perry Middle School student.

Conservation Education with Perry Middle School

The Shiawassee Conservation District met with over 70 fifth grade students at Perry Middle School for a socially distanced school program last November. Topics included groundwater, watersheds, pollution sources, and water quality. The program showcased the importance of conservation in keeping our water and natural resources protected.

The groundwater flow model and EnviroScape watershed model were utilized to demonstrate concepts of nonpoint source pollution and aquifers. Nonpoint source pollution includes runoff from roads, sidewalks, yards, and farm fields. An aquifer is an underground layer of rock and/or sediment that holds groundwater. Groundwater enters an aquifer as precipitation seeps through the soil.

“We enjoyed the opportunity to teach the students at Perry Middle School about water conservation and protecting our natural resources,” stated SCD Agricultural Technician, Andrea Wendt. “Using our groundwater and watershed education models provides us the chance to help students learn about natural resources and build smart habits that will last a lifetime.” Educational programs are available for groups of all ages and sizes throughout Shiawassee County. For more information, contact the District today!

2022 Spring Tree Sale

It might be winter, but the Shiawassee Conservation District is thinking spring! Orders for the Spring Tree Sale are being accepted through April 1 and will be ready for pick up April 21 and 22. The order form and species descriptions can be downloaded from the Districts website www.shiawasseeccd.org.

The Shiawassee Conservation District promotes establishing native plants for reforestation and to conserve natural resources. Native trees and shrubs offer many conservation benefits including improved wildlife habitat, erosion control, and improved air quality. “All of the tree and shrub species we are offering are native to Michigan,” stated Executive Director Melissa Higbee. “Native species are adapted to our climate and promote biological diversity.” Fourteen species of trees and shrubs are available including a few species the District hasn’t offered in recent years including mapleleaf viburnum, allegheny serviceberry, and black gum.

Orders will be taken on a first-come first-served basis and supplies are limited. It is encouraged that customers call the District office to check availability before placing their order. For more information and to request an order form, contact the District at (989) 723-8263 ext. 3.

Andrea Wendt Honored at MACD Fall Convention

Shiawassee Conservation District Agricultural Technician Andrea Wendt was awarded the MAEAP Technical Assistance Award for her outstanding conservation work over the past year. The award was presented during the 2021 Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Fall Convention.

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is a voluntary program that works individually with producers to identify and reduce environmental risks on farms that could result in water contamination. Producers can work with Andrea to identify steps they can take to reduce nutrient runoff from their land through farm-specific assessments. Farms that address all identified environmental risks can take the next step of becoming a MAEAP verified farm. Getting MAEAP verified shows peers and neighbors that the farm has a high level of commitment to agricultural stewardship and protecting the environment.

The MAEAP Technical Assistance Award recognizes an individual who has shown exceptional service to landowners and farmers. Andrea serves farmers in Shiawassee and Livingston Counties. She has been with the Shiawassee Conservation District in multiple roles for over 15 years and has served as the MAEAP technician for the last two years. She has 36 verifications, 281 risk reductions, and 63 assessments. Andrea worked with crop producers that properly manage nutrients applied to growing crops in a way that protects soil, water, animals, and plants on 13,690 acres. Andrea, along with the entire Shiawassee Conservation District staff,



Andrea Wendt, SCD Agricultural Technician, received the 2021 MAEAP Technical Assistance Award for her outstanding service to Shiawassee and Livingston County Farms to help them protect natural resources.

work together with one goal in mind and that is to connect with producers to get needed conservation on the ground. Andrea is dedicated to connecting with producers even during the challenges of COVID-19.

“The Conservation District staff play an invaluable role in helping Shiawassee County producers protect the natural resources that are important to all of us,” stated SCD Chair Josh Crambell. “Andrea has gone above and beyond this past year to provide technical assistance to both Shiawassee and Livingston County farmers to help them identify environmental risks on their farm, develop conservation plans, and implement conservation practices to protect our natural resources.”

Join us in congratulating Andrea for this recognition! For more information about MAEAP, contact Andrea at the Conservation District office by calling (989) 723-8263 ext. 3.



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Cover crops and no-till are great conservation practices on their own, but by combining them you can achieve maximum conservation benefits including higher yields over time, reduced nutrient loss, greater water infiltration and holding capacity, increased organic matter content, moderate soil temperatures, reduced weed pest pressure, and control erosion. Pictured: Corn no-tilled into a cereal rye cover crop.

The Key to Improving Soil Health

Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes. The key to improving soil health is to follow four basic principles: keep the soil covered as much as possible; disturb the soil as little as possible; keep plants growing throughout the year; and diversify as much as possible by using crop rotation and cover crops. The Shiawassee Conservation District offers free and confidential conservation planning to help land managers maintain and improve their soil health.

Soil is a living system, and healthy soil should look, smell, and feel alive. Soil performs five essential functions. Soil **regulates water** by helping to control where rain, snow-melt and irrigation water goes. Soil **sustains plant and animal life**. The diversity and productivity of living things depend on soil. Soil **filters potential pollutants**. The minerals and microbes in soil filter, buffer, degrade, immobilize, and detoxify organic and inorganic materials, including industrial and municipal by-products and atmospheric deposits. Soil **cycles nutrients**. Carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and many other nutrients are stored, transformed, and cycled in the soil. Soil **supports structures**. Buildings need stable soil for support and archeological treasures are protected in soils.

Soil has both inherent and dynamic qualities. Inherent soil quality is the soil's natural ability to function. For example, sandy soil drains faster than clay soil. These characteristics do not change easily. Dynamic soil quality is how soil changes depending on how it is managed. Management choices affect the amount of soil organic matter, soil structure, soil depth, and water and nutrient holding capacity.

Managing for soil health is one of the most effective ways for farmers to increase crop productivity and profitability while improving the environment. Positive results are often realized within the first year and last well into the future. Soil health management

Continued on Page 11

Why You Should Get a Nutrient Management Plan

Nutrients are essential to produce strong, healthy plants. If there are not enough nutrients in the soil to grow good plants, more nutrients will have to be added. These additional nutrients can come from fertilizers, manure, or compost. Using these soil nutrients as efficiently as possible to improve productivity while protecting the environment is known as nutrient management.

Nutrient management is not just for farmers. It is also important for anyone who fertilizes their lawn or garden. When plants receive the proper nutrients, they will be healthier and more productive. However, overapplying nutrients can cause excessive plant and algae growth, killing fish and impairing wildlife habitat. Water used for drinking, recreational uses, and for the care of our pets and livestock can also be affected. Nutrient management plans can be created for a wide variety of properties ranging from one acre to over hundreds of acres.

Nutrient management is the process of managing the rate, source, timing, and method of nutrient application. This is also known as the 4R's: right source, right rate, right time, and right place. This may seem overwhelming, but the Shiawassee Conservation District is here to help. We can help you develop a detailed nutrient management plan for your operation that protects against excessive nutrients impacting natural resources.

A major principle of nutrient management is to prevent the over application of nutrients. "Extra nutrients that are not taken up by plants can leach into the groundwater or runoff into nearby surface waters," stated Shiawassee Conservation District Watershed Technician Colleen Gleason. "Applying more nutrients than the plants can utilize impairs water quality, and can cause algal blooms that ruin swimming, fishing, and boating opportunities."

Soil tests are essential for a good nutrient management plan. These tests should be conducted to determine what soils are on your land and where nutrients are needed most. The results can help prevent over fertilization, optimize plant growth, increase profitability and protect our natural resources.

The key to effective nutrient management is to develop and follow a yearly plan. It is incredibly important to record the rate, method, and timing of all nutrient applications. It is also essential to note the source of nutrients, whether it was commercial fertilizer, manure, biosolids, or legumes. The Conservation District works one-on-one with landowners and agricultural producers to help develop effective nutrient management plans.

There is a financial incentives program available to agricultural producers who farm in the Looking Glass River Watershed to implement a nutrient management plan. To learn more about managing nutrients on your property, scheduling a Crop*A*Syst, or to find out more about financial and technical assistance available, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District at (989) 723-8263 ext. 3.

This project has been funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy under the Clean Michigan Initiative Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Fund and Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act.



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Allowing nature to take its course or neglecting forestland will not often produce the greatest benefits for a forest owner. Forest systems are dynamic and ever-changing and so is the social and economic environment in which they exist. Management of forestland is important to assure it will be healthy, productive, and achieve the owner's desired purposes. Forest management can be more complicated than what many people might think. Hiring a professional forester to assist with forest management planning, and other activities can help achieve desired outcomes.

The first step to reach any goal is to make a plan, and forest management should be treated the same. A Forest Management Plan will provide a detailed description of the woodlot's current condition, the goals of the owner, and outline the forestry practices that need to happen to reach those goals. A plan is very beneficial for any forestland, no matter the size or type.

A Forest Management Plan should be prepared by a professional forester. All plans are not the same, as each owner has their own desires for their forestland and each forest is made up of different plant species, soils, and climates. For these reasons, the forester works closely with the landowner to ensure the plan will meet each individual need.

The Shiawassee Conservation District is a local source for forestry information, including a list of consulting foresters that can be contacted for assistance. Furthermore, the District is a source for programs that provide technical and financial assistance to enhance forestland.

Farm Bill conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provide technical and financial assistance to prepare Forest Management Plans, as well as management activities including controlling brush, controlling invasive species, planting trees, and releasing crop trees. In 2021, seven Forest Management Plans were completed with financial assistance through EQIP. These plans covered 364 acres of forestland and the EQIP program provided approximately \$13,300 in financial assistance to develop them.

The largest portion of Michigan's forest belongs to family forest owners. Management of these resources is critical for Michigan's wildlife as well as the families who own them. For more information about forest management, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

Looking Glass River Watershed Project Annual Recap

The Looking Glass River Watershed Restoration Project kicked off in 2021. This project is part of a grant awarded to the Shiawassee Conservation District in fall of 2020 through the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) Nonpoint Source Program. The goal of this project is to conserve and protect water quality by helping agricultural producers incorporate conservation practices into their operations.

Included in this project is the Agricultural Incentives Program (AIP). This program aims to assist agricultural producers and landowners in the Looking Glass River Watershed improve water quality through voluntary programs. Conservation practices adopted voluntarily have proven effective in protecting our natural resources. Producers can receive technical and financial assistance to incorporate conservation into their operations. Conservation practices available through this program include cover crops, nutrient management, no-till, and filter strips.

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Left to right: Andrea Wendt, SCD Agricultural Technician, Greg Lienau, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician getting kissed by an alpaca, and Gabrielle Baker, owner and operator of Feighner Family Farms.

Reaching Diverse Farms with MAEAP and Conservation

Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state, second to California. In Shiawassee County, farming operations range from traditional row crops to orchards, pastures, and specialty crops. The county also has diverse livestock operations. One such operation is the Feighner Family Farms located in the southwest corner of Shiawassee County. Their specialty livestock are alpacas, and they are working with the Shiawassee Conservation District to protect soil and water from activities on their farm.

Alpacas are intelligent, inquisitive, and gentle animals that are relatively easy to handle and train. They produce a high-grade natural fiber, which can be described as a combination of the best qualities of wool and cashmere. Alpaca fleece can be used in a variety of clothing and textiles and are prized for their warmth and softness.

Alpacas are hardy animals that thrive in a pasture setting. They have very strong herding instincts and must be kept with other alpacas. They are native to the Andean mountains in South America and survive on sparse low-protein grasses, while ingesting key minerals from the rocky terrain. In Michigan, these minerals must be provided as a supplement to their diet.

The Feighner Family Farms have been raising alpaca since 2018. "We are one of the only alpaca breeders that specialize in friendly, easy to handle alpacas and we pride ourselves on their small environmental footprint. To further that mission, we are happy to be working with the Shiawassee Conservation District to incorporate conservation into our operation." states Gabrielle Baker, owner and operator of Feighner Family Farms.

Alpacas on the Feighner Family Farm are raised humanely and are well socialized. A herd of alpacas will consolidate their dung piles in the pasture. The management of manure is one aspect of the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Program (MAEAP) that is key for this farm.

MAEAP is a voluntary program that helps farms of all sizes and all commodities voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks. This program is designed to reduce farmers' legal and environmental risks through a three-phase process: 1) education; 2) farm-specific risk assessment; and 3) on-farm verification that ensures the farmer has implemented environmentally sound practices. The program's four systems — Farmstead, Cropping, Livestock, and Forest, Wetlands and Habitat — each examine different aspects of the farm. After becoming MAEAP

Continued on Page 11

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Andrea Wendt, SCD Agricultural Technician, taught elementary students about forestry during the Shiawassee County Farm Bureau's Project R.E.D. event in September 2021. Part of the District's mission is to create an awareness of conservation issues and educating our youth about the importance of conservation is a great way to do that!

Wildlife Food Plots

Good wildlife habitat provides cover, water, space, and food for the desired wildlife species. If any of these elements are missing, that element becomes a limiting factor for the wildlife population. If food is a limiting factor, food plots may be planted to improve the habitat.

There are two main types of food plots, grain plots and green browse food plots. A grain food plot offers wildlife a place to forage for food in late fall, winter, and early spring after field crops are harvested. Green browse food plots provide attractive and nutritious forage for wildlife grazing, and supply seeds for wildlife in the fall and winter. They also attract an abundance of insects which are vital for game birds such as turkey and pheasant in the spring and summer months.

Palatability of food plot plantings vary between species. Therefore, food plot seed mixes and planting location should be targeted towards the desired wildlife species.

Continued on Page 10

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The Enviroscope® model demonstrates how water quality is affected as water moves across our landscape. Colleen Gleason, SCD Watershed Technician, had the opportunity to teach middle school students last fall about the importance of water conservation and protecting our natural resources.

Multiflora Rose, A Pesky Invader

Multiflora rose is one of the most-commonly found invasive species in Shiawassee County. As its name suggests, multiflora rose is a rose – complete with pretty flowers, rose hips, and nasty thorns. Its thorns were part of its original appeal; it was introduced in Michigan as a “living fence” to control the movement of animals and people. Trying to walk through woods or a field full of multiflora rose is not easy!

Its tenacious and unstoppable growth habit can form impenetrable thickets. It can invade many habitats such as pastures, fence rows, roadsides, forest edges, and margins of swamps and marshes. It reproduces by seed and by forming new plants that root from the tips of arching stems that contact the ground.

Like many invasive plants now found throughout Michigan, multiflora rose was also planted as a food source for wildlife. Small bright red fruits, or rose hips, develop in the summer, and remain on the plant into the winter. However, the rose hips have lesser nutritional value for birds and other animals than the native species that multiflora rose displaces.

Multiflora rose is a multi-stemmed, bushy shrub with long, arching thorny stems. Thorns are curved with wide bases and sharp narrow points. The clusters of 5-petaled white flowers bloom in May and June. The plant can grow 4-6 feet tall and is typically spread wider than it is erect.

You can identify multiflora rose in the summer by looking at its leaves. Unlike other rose species, multiflora rose has hair-like “fringes” near the base of each leaf. The leaves are alternate and the leaflets are oval and toothed. If the leaves have already dropped,



This photo of a multiflora rose was taken on a forest edge late September in Shiawassee County. Notice the oval and toothed leaflets that are part of the larger leaf. The leaves are alternate. You can see the fringed stipule at the base of the leaves, which is a distinguishing trait from other rose species. This invasive shrub can outcompete native, more beneficial plants if it is not controlled.

Continued on Page 10

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What's the Deal with Phosphorus?

Phosphorus is an essential nutrient for sustaining all life. It is needed for growth, energy, and is essential for building and repairing cells. In freshwater systems, phosphorus is a limiting nutrient meaning that it controls the amount of plant growth taking place. If all phosphorus were used up, plant growth would cease. Phosphorus is naturally present in low amounts. Adding phosphorus to soils promotes root growth and plant hardiness. Plants that are low in phosphorus are often stunted and produce poorly. Because of its high demand, plants quickly pick up unattached or "free" phosphorus. Phosphorus not picked up by plants binds to sediment usually in the upper layers of the soil.

Aquatic environments are especially sensitive to phosphorus. An abundance of phosphorus in water causes excessive plants and algae to grow. As these plants die, they decay causing oxygen levels to drop and pH to rise, damaging aquatic communities and killing fish. Phosphorus can enter waterways from point (a pipe) and

nonpoint (overland flow) sources. Sewage treatment plant discharges are an example of a point source contributor of phosphorus. Human waste and industrial products such as toothpaste and detergents contain phosphorus. Municipal treatment removes up to 30% of phosphorus from wastewater. When water is discharged, the remaining phosphorus is released with it.

Nonpoint sources of phosphorus include natural and human sources. Natural sources include erosion, weathering, and leaching of phosphate deposits and rocks. Sediment in lakes and reservoirs release phosphorus during seasonal overturns. Human sources include runoff from agricultural, urban, and residential areas. Fertilizers, leaching septic systems, and wastes from livestock, pets, and wildlife are all nonpoint sources of phosphorus.

When excess phosphorus reaches waterways, it can trigger toxic algal blooms posing public health risks. Harmful algal blooms are not just coastal or Great Lake issues. In Shiawassee County, instances of toxic blue-green algae in water causing dangerous conditions have been reported. Fortunately, there

are ways to combat these conditions by addressing the sources of phosphorus using conservation practices.

Runoff from lawns is a phosphorus issue. In much of Michigan, home lawns are grown on soils that do not need additional phosphorus for healthy grass. Soil testing should be done first to determine the type and amount of fertilizer needed. Leaving lawn clippings, composting, and maintaining vegetation around surface water are also good practices.

Agriculture is the primary land use in Shiawassee County. Controlling erosion and managing phosphorus inputs and livestock wastes are important in minimizing phosphorus from agricultural land. Conservation practices such as nutrient management, cover crops, filter strips, and no-till are key elements in preventing runoff leaving agricultural fields and impacting water quality.

The Shiawassee Conservation District works one-on-one with Shiawassee County residents to protect our natural resources. Additionally, financial incentives

Continued on Page 10

Shiawassee County Benefits from MAEAP

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is an innovative, proactive program that helps farms of all sizes, and all commodities voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks. When you see signs along the road that read "This Farm is Environmentally Verified" it means that the landowner has voluntarily taken steps to meet state and federal environmental regulations and Michigan Right to Farm guidelines. MAEAP teaches farmers how to identify and prevent environmental risks and comply with state and federal environmental regulations. Farmers who successfully complete the phases of a MAEAP system are rewarded by becoming verified in that system. They gain regulatory protections and earn preferred consideration for technical assistance and cost sharing.

In 2021, MAEAP Verified Farms in Shiawassee County had remarkable participation. Farmers were able to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff, protect water quality, improve crop yields, protect soil health, and receive countless other benefits for their land and surrounding areas. Together, farms in Shiawassee County were able to reach the following environmental outcomes:

- 12,315 acres of cropland included in a nutrient management plan or Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
- 22,470 feet of buffer or filter strips on cropland along waterways
- 1,687 acres of cover crops
- 7,652 acres of reduced tillage
- 2,592 acres of no-till
- 42 gullies stabilized on cropland
- 20 feet of waterways excluded for livestock access
- 3 acres of silage properly stored to protect against leachate
- 12,315 acres of cropland included in an Integrated Pest Management Plan

Continued on Page 10

Trees for Pollinators

You may have heard that three-fourths of the world's flowering plants depend on pollinators to reproduce, and that one out of every three bites of food wouldn't be possible without pollinators. We depend on pollinators, and it is important that we do what we can to help protect them. One way you can help is to plant some trees and shrubs!

Many people imagine pollinator habitat as a field of wildflowers, but it can also be trees and shrubs. Many trees and shrubs are favored by pollinators. They can be planted in windbreaks, hedgerows, wetlands, riparian buffers, and in our yards.

Flowering trees are a great source of pollen in the spring, especially when overwintering bees emerge. When they bloom, they produce a lot of food at one time. Maple, serviceberry, basswood, and tulip trees are native to Michigan, provide quality pollinator habitat, and are preferred by honeybees. The beautiful luna moth caterpillars feed off many types of trees including alder, birch, red maple, white oak, hickories, and smooth sumac.

There are many types of flowering shrubs such as buttonbush, spicebush, and viburnum that support

pollinators and provide beauty to our landscapes. Buttonbush flowers in unique globes of densely packed white flowers. They bloom in the summer and are especially attractive to bees and butterflies, including Monarchs. Mapleleaf viburnum provides a fragrant nectar source in the spring and is a preferred food source for honeybees. It is also a host plant for azure butterflies. In the fall the foliage turns beautiful shades of red, pink and purple adding interest to our landscapes.

The leaves and woody material of trees and shrubs provide nesting sites, shelter from the elements and predators, and protection in the winter. For example, windbreaks and hedgerows reduce windspeed, making it easier for pollinators and other beneficial bugs to fly and visit flowers.

The Shiawassee Conservation District can help you create or enhance pollinator habitat on your property through conservation planning. Once you have a conservation plan, financial assistance may be available to implement it through Farm Bill conservation programs or opportunities through the Conservation District. The District will help guide you through the entire process! Call (989) 723-8263 ext. 3 for more information.



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Benefits of Winter Kill Cover Crops in Michigan

We all know that Michigan's winters are harsh and unpredictable. Many farmers who utilize cover crops prefer species that are hardy enough to survive Michigan's cold winter months, but they require termination in the spring. There are environmental and monetary benefits associated with planting cover crops that winterkill (die off in the winter), even here in Michigan.

Cover crops help prevent soil erosion, suppress weed growth, and add vital nutrients back into the soil after cash crops are harvested from the fields. There are two main groups of cover crops, those that winterkill and those that will require termination in the spring prior to planting a cash crop. Cover crops that die back over winter can create a mulch-like mat on the soil surface helping to keep the soil in place and suppress weed growth in the spring. The dead plants will replenish organic matter in the soil as well as other important nutrients. Some winterkill cover crop species have a sufficient root mass that can help break up soil compaction and increase water infiltration. It is important to plant these cover crops early enough so that they can generate enough biomass and provide soil benefits before their winter die off. Good winterkill cover crop species include oats, radishes, and field peas.

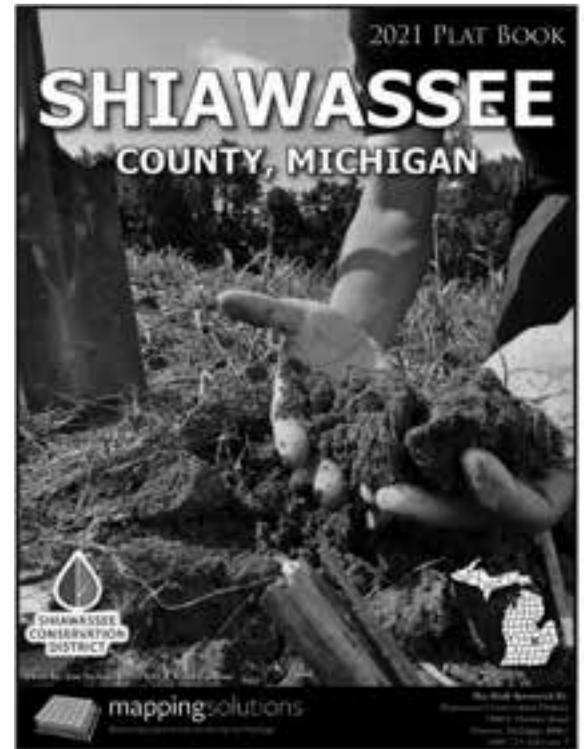
One way to ensure a proper growth window is to fly on cover crops while the cash crops are still on the field. When planting a cover crop earlier in the growing season, there is significantly more time for

the plant to grow (approximately 4-6 weeks more sunlight, warmer temperatures, and potential for fall rains). This allows the cover crop to flourish and provide maximum benefits and maximum return on your investment. Flying on cover crops optimizes organic matter production as well as the improvement in the ability of water and oxygen to infiltrate deeper into the soil (via root channels). This all adds up to enhanced biological activity and overall improved plant growth and yield.

Cover crops that die off over the winter will also reduce the need for termination with herbicides in the spring. By reducing the need for herbicides, this can save valuable time and money. Because of recent herbicide shortages, winter-kill cover crops will help you save your valuable herbicide for necessary treatments rather than using it to kill cover crops prior to planting. Reducing herbicide use will help protect water quality and minimize the risk of nontarget spray.

For agricultural producers who farm in the Looking Glass River Watershed, there is technical and financial assistance available to implement cover crop use. If you are interested in learning more about cover crops or the financial assistance that is available to begin planting cover crops, please contact the Shiawassee Conservation District at (989) 723-8263 ext. 3.

This project has been funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy under the Clean Michigan Initiative Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Fund and Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act.



2021 Shiawassee County Plat Books now available! Plat books are a great reference tool for land and business owners, and an invaluable guide for industries such as agriculture, land development, real estate, and more. The plat book features landowner maps, 3D LIDAR aerial maps, county road map, road index, municipal maps, watershed boundary map, and school district maps. They are \$37.50 plus tax each and can be purchased at the Shiawassee Conservation District.



**SHIAWASSEE
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT**

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(989) 723-8263 ext. 3
www.shiawasseeccd.org**



Upper Maple River Watershed Restoration Project

2021 was the fourth and final year for Shiawassee Conservation District's Upper Maple River Watershed Restoration Project. The goal of this project was to improve water quality in the Maple River Watershed through voluntary actions. Two successful programs were included in this project: The Septic System Assistance Program and the Agricultural Incentives Program. These programs helped to address nonpoint source pollution from failing septic systems and agricultural operations. Other notable activities that occurred throughout the lifespan of the project included water sampling, a technical update to the Maple River Watershed Management Plan, 49 Home*A*Systs that helped homeowners address sources of pollution around the home, and numerous outreach activities.

Together, The Agricultural Incentives Program and the Septic System Assistance Program prevented the following pollutants from entering our waterways:

- 538.6 tons of sediment
- 758.5 lbs. of phosphorous
- 1,632.8 lbs. of nitrogen

Continued on Page 11

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**Wildlife
Food Plots**
Continued from Page 6

Careful planning will attract wildlife and provide nourishing food throughout the year, including through the critical winter months. Consider alternating strips of first and second-year food plots to increase food diversity for wildlife species.

Food plots should be located near cover. Although any size food plot would be beneficial, they should be at least ¼ acre in size and no larger than 5 acres. Generally, it is better to have small food plots scattered throughout good cover than to have one large plot. Songbirds, for example, rarely venture to food sites more than a quarter-mile from secure winter cover.

Site conditions such as weed pressure, drainage, erosion and soil type should be considered before planting. Proper soil pH and fertility are necessary for the intended crop. A soil test will determine pH needs and recommend rates of nutrient applications.

If herbicides are needed before planting, follow label guidance. Perfectly weed free plantings are not critical for food plots. Adding diversity to cover and providing protein-rich seeds have wildlife value. Slightly reduced yields resulting from some weed competitions are still acceptable for wildlife value.

Five food plot seed mixes are available to purchase through the Conservation District Spring Tree Sale: Fall & Winter Mix, Forage Pea & Bean Mix, Game Bird Mix, No-Till Deer Plot Mix, and Deer Screen Switchgrass Blend. More information on the seed mixes can be found on the Conservation District website www.shiawasseeccd.org or by calling the District office at (989) 723-8263 ext. 3.

**Looking Glass River Watershed
Project Annual Recap**
Continued from Page 5

In 2021, one producer was enrolled into the AIP with many other applications pending. Letters and flyers were mailed out to agricultural producers and landowners in the project area at the end of the year. The SCD staff conducted many field visits throughout the Watershed, created conservation plans, and helped facilitate the application process for landowners applying for conservation Farm Bill programs. In addition, 3 MAEAP verifications, 1 reverification, and 16 assessments occurred with producers in the Looking Glass River Watershed during 2021.

Another 2021 accomplishment was the development of a social monitoring Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP). The QAPP was created to help determine factors that influence attitudes, decisions, and the likelihood of adopting long-term conservation practices. A survey was created and is included as part of the program application. After practice implementation, a follow up survey will be provided to participants to reflect on their experience and willingness to adopt conservation practices in the future. All surveys will be reported anonymously.

We had the opportunity to participate in a few community events this year. Andrea Wendt, the Conservation District's Agricultural Technician, participated at Project RED discussing forestry and water quality. Wendt and the Conservation District's Watershed Technician, Colleen Gleason, also met with Perry Middle School fifth graders to teach them about watersheds, ground water and how to protect water quality. "We enjoy getting out into the community and instilling conservation lessons in the younger generation that will have a long-lasting impact," stated Gleason.

The Shiawassee Conservation District will continue to work in the Looking Glass River Watershed through the fall of 2023. Funds are available to agricultural producers wishing to participate in the Agricultural Incentives Program. To find out if you qualify, and for more information on how you can make positive changes to help our most precious water resources, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

This project has been funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy under the Clean Michigan Initiative Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Fund and Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act.

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1971. Elmer Taylor, past SCD Board Member, Ken Haughton, and George Pardonett are pictured taking the time to really study the soil on the Pardonett Farm in Shiawassee County. The photo is labeled "no-till". We don't know how long no-till has been part of Pardonett's operation at the time of this photo, but we do know that no-till is a key practice of soil health management systems. No-till farming means the soil is disturbed as little as possible, through no tillage, when planting, growing, and harvesting a crop. When a farmer's operation includes no-till, the soil health of their field is improved; healthy soil is essential for good plant production. They are also protecting and improving the quality of water, air, plants, and wildlife habitat. Plus, they are saving time and energy! Healthy soil will have an earthy, sweet, pleasant, intense smell. Do you wonder if these gentlemen smelled the soil that afternoon?



**Multiflora Rose,
A Pesky Invader**
Continued from Page 7

you can check for rose hips throughout the winter. The rose hips of multiflora rose are small, red, and found in clusters, unlike many other rose species.

The first thing to do when looking for multiflora rose on your property is to notice where you are. If you're looking at a rose bush in your garden, it could be one of numerous cultivated rose species –

many of which are not considered invasive. If you find a rose bush in the middle of a fallow field, or in your woods, then it's much more likely to be this pesky invader.

Multiflora rose – like many other invasive shrubs – will usually resprout if cut and not treated with herbicide. Herbicide does provide effective control of the plant and can be applied using several different methods.

The Shiawassee

Conservation District can help identify and develop a plan to control multiflora rose and other invasive shrubs on your property. In 2021, the Conservation District assisted Shiawassee County landowners to kill invasive shrubs using technical and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. More 200 acres were treated totaling more than \$40,000 in financial assistance.

**Shiawassee County Benefits
from MAEAP**
Continued from Page 8

Proactive steps made by Shiawassee County's MAEAP verified farmers were integral in reducing pollution from entering Michigan water. In 2021, the following pollution was reduced because of participation in MAEAP:

- 18,023 tons sediment
- 28,872 pounds phosphorus
- 57,681 pounds of nitrogen
- 1,766 pounds of Biological Oxygen Demand from silage leachate

Farms can become MAEAP verified in the Farmstead, Cropping, Livestock, or Forest, Wetland and Habitat Systems. Each system addresses different aspects of agriculture and uses an assessment to determine their level of risk to the environment. The Shiawassee Conservation District's Agricultural Technician will help you work through the assessment. To learn more about MAEAP, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

**What's the Deal
with Phosphorus?**
Continued from Page 8

are available for those who farm in the Looking Glass River Watershed to protect water quality by implementing the conservation practices listed above. Contact the Conservation District for more information.

This project has been funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy under the Clean Michigan Initiative Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Fund and Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act.

The Key to Improving Soil Health

Continued from Page 4

systems include no-till, nutrient management, pest management, cover crops, and crop rotation.

Conservation can be expensive, especially when land managers implement new management systems and practices. Spending money on change can feel like a risk; technical and financial assistance offered through conservation Farm Bill and Conservation District programs helps to reduce that risk. Conservation practices that improve soil, water, air, plants, animals, and energy resources helps everyone who enjoys a clean and healthy environment. In 2021 the Shiawassee Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service provided technical and financial assistance to plant cover crops on more than 8,000 acres totaling over \$203,000. Nutrient management practices were applied to approximately 2,000 acres with financial assistance totaling more than \$33,000.

For more information on conservation practices that improve soil health, and the technical and financial assistance available, contact the Conservation District office.



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Reaching Diverse Farms with MAEAP and Conservation

Continued from Page 5

verified, a farm can display a MAEAP sign recognizing that the farm is environmentally assured.

The Feighner Family Farm is working on becoming MAEAP verified in the Livestock and Farmstead Systems. The MAEAP Livestock System primarily focuses on environmental issues related to livestock activities, including manure handling, storage and field application, as well as conservation practices to protect water and prevent soil erosion. The Farmstead System addresses environmental risks of the entire farmstead, from safe fuel handling to the proper storage of manure, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Important steps taken by the Feighner Family Farm on their way to becoming a MAEAP verified farm include, developing a farm emergency plan, properly storing and managing manure, ensuring containment of livestock medication and farm chemicals, and keeping farm and livestock management records. The farm is currently working with the Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a whole-farm conservation plan to protect soil and water from heavy use areas, enhance pasture plantings, and following a prescribed grazing plan.

“It has been a great pleasure working with the Feighner Family Farm to learn more about raising alpaca in Michigan,” states Andrea Wendt, SCD Agricultural Technician. “They have made important changes to reduce their farm risk to the environment. I’m looking forward to seeing their farm get MAEAP verified and assist them in developing a conservation plan.”

For more information about MAEAP or conservation planning, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

Upper Maple River Watershed Restoration Project

Continued from Page 9

- 1.69E+15 E. coli CFU
- 10,052 lbs. of BOD5
- 6,885 of effluent

Over the 4 years of the project:

- 28 failing septic systems were replaced
- 2,845.6 ac of cover crops were planted
- 1.5 ac of filter strips were installed
- 45.1 ac of no-till and nutrient management were implemented

This project would not have been a success if it wasn't for the ongoing support from our partners, the Shiawassee County Health Department, and the Shiawassee County Drain Commission.

Although this project has ended, the Agricultural Incentives Program has been continued through the Conservation District's Upper Looking Glass River Watershed

Restoration Project. This project began in October of 2020, and there is technical and financial assistance for agricultural producers in the Looking Glass River Watershed to adopt conservation practices. If you are an agricultural producer in the Looking Glass River Watershed and are interested in protecting your farm's resources as well as water quality, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District at (989) 723-8263, ext. 3.

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