

# INDIANA NRCS CONSERVATION SHOWCASE



United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

*Helping People...*

*...Help the Land.*

**USDA** Natural Resources Conservation Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



## BUILDING A RESILIENT FUTURE



*Emma Bodnarick (c) and Hanna Garriott (r) learn about surveying during the NRCS Engineering Boot Camp.*



*Jamie Davenport, Hanna Garriott, Sydney Hassfurther and Emma Bodnarick study plant growth at the Bloomington Community Gardens.*



*Emma Bodnarick teaches Morgan County YMCA Summer Camp's attendees about macroinvertebrates and how to identify them.*

The Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) is at the forefront of an ambitious initiative aimed at addressing climate change through the implementation of conservation practices across Indiana. Resilient Indiana: Technical Assistance for SWCDs (Resilient Indiana) exemplifies the collaborative spirit of Indiana's Conservation Partnership, with significant financial backing from an agreement with Indiana's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). To match these funds, the State Soil Conservation Board has allocated more than 1 million dollars of Clean Water Indiana funds, reflecting the project's importance to the state.

"It's because of IRA funding and our state leaders' commitment to climate resiliency that we were able to envision and launch Resilient Indiana," said IASWCD Executive Director, Liz Rice. "We're at a critical point in amplifying our response to climate change, and these investments are just one example of how our partnership gets things done, together."

The heart of Resilient Indiana lies in its threefold mission. First and foremost, the program aims to get essential conservation practices on the ground by working with producers, forest owners, and other landowners who have the potential to make significant positive impacts on climate change. While Indiana farmers are no strangers to conservation, Meg Leader, Resilient Indiana Program Director, acknowledges that convincing conventional farmers to change their ways takes time, connection and consistent outreach. But with help from the Resilient Indiana project, she hopes to make significant progress in this area.

"Agriculture plays a huge part in moving the needle for climate change. In Indiana, where corn and soy rotation dominate, practices like cover cropping, no-till farming, and nutrient management are critical," said Leader. "For livestock producers, managing feed to reduce greenhouse





*Jamie Davenport teaches a group of 6th graders from Washington Elementary school in Warsaw, Indiana about watersheds, wetlands and native/invasive species during an annual rafting trip.*

gas emissions is another important area of focus. And forest land management also plays a vital role in climate change mitigation, helping Indiana landowners create more sustainable and viable operations.”

Resilient Indiana has the ability to help landowners see the intrinsic value in adopting climate smart practices, not just for the financial incentives but for the long-term benefits to their operations and the environment. However, change cannot happen without proper staff and outreach efforts. Many of the soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) across Indiana currently operate with limited staff, often stretched thin with their existing responsibilities. This reality means that landowners may not be receiving the level of service they need to make informed decisions about their land. Resilient Indiana is designed to alleviate this burden by expanding the capacity of these districts with the addition of regional technicians. By increasing the number of people working directly with landowners, Resilient Indiana aims to fill this gap, ensuring that landowners have access to the information and support they need when making conservation decisions for their operation.

“Our technicians have the unique opportunity to build relationships, meeting landowners where they are—whether on the farm, at a local coffee shop, or elsewhere—and helping them understand the benefits of adopting conservation practices,” explains Leader. “This engagement is crucial, particularly as Indiana looks toward more financial assistance programs which could bring even more opportunities for local districts to engage in climate-focused work.”

The final key component of the project is to facilitate workforce development within the conservation partnership. By bringing in young professionals and equipping them with the technical skills necessary to thrive in the conservation field, Resilient Indiana aims to build a strong foundation for the future. Resilient Indiana technicians are given the opportunity to gain valuable, hands-on experience in anticipation of them continuing their career path within conservation agencies or closely related partners, contributing to the long-term goal of getting conservation practices on the ground.

“Getting conservation on the ground takes boots on the ground, and when we invest in people through programs like Resilient Indiana, we inspire and

empower a new generation to choose conservation as their career,” said Rice.

With the pilot team now in place, Leader is currently focused on introducing the concept to the SWCD boards and building enthusiasm among the district staff. Leader anticipates increased interest and adoption as more districts see the benefits of having a Resilient Indiana technician on their team. Additionally, she hopes that the project will demonstrate its value to county councils, leading them to invest in additional staff for local districts, making the program a permanent fixture rather than a temporary solution.

Leader’s dedication to the project is evident, and as she continues to lead this innovative effort, she remains committed to its success. By expanding the capacity of Indiana’s conservation districts, developing the next generation of conservation professionals, and fostering a deeper connection with landowners, the Resilient Indiana project is poised to make a lasting impact on Indiana’s ability to address climate change and protect its natural resources.