



## **RFR RESPONSE SUBMISSION**

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS  
DIVISION OF CONSERVATION SERVICES**

**RFR ID: ENV 24 DCS 08**

**COMMBUYS BID: BD-24-1042-ENV-ENV01-96064**

**RFR TITLE: CHALLENGE GRANT IMPLEMENTING THE  
COMMONWEALTH'S HEALTHY SOILS ACTION PLAN**

**APPLICANT NAME:** THE BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
**ADDRESS:** 78 CENTER STREET, SUITE 102, PITTSFIELD, MA 01201  
**E-MAIL:** CHAIR@BERKSHIRECONSERVATION.ORG  
**WEBSITE:** WWW.BERKSHIRECONSERVATION.ORG  
**PRIMARY CONTACT:** ADAM GALAMBOS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Galambos', is positioned on the left side of the page.

**Authorized Signature**

Adam Galambos, Board of Supervisors Chairman

**Print Name Title**

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Project Description.....	4
Goals and Objectives.....	4
Alignment/Advancement of HSAP Objectives.....	5
Methods.....	6
Outcomes.....	7
Project Budget.....	8
Organizational Capacity.....	10
Key Personnel and Roles.....	11
Project Timeline.....	13
Project Evaluation and Monitoring.....	14
Sustainability Plan.....	15
Risk Assessment.....	16
Attachments.....	18

## Executive Summary

The Berkshire Conservation District (the District) conducts outreach and provides education to farmers and landowners to increase the adoption of conservation tillage practices. In advance of the 2023 rental season, the District established a *Soil Health Pilot Program* to conduct a needs assessment and to inform strategic planning to highlight challenges with our equipment rental program and the engagement methods to promote its adoption. These issues seem to disproportionately affect smaller farms (smaller in area and revenue), which represent an estimated 94% of all farms across the Commonwealth – most of which are hay farms.

Currently, renters of the District's 12-foot no-till drill must have access to a 125-horsepower tractor to operate the 12-foot no-till drill - a bigger tractor than most small farms have access to. In addition, a vehicle rated for towing 9,000 pounds (without trailer brakes) is required to tow it to the field. Expanding adoption rate of no-till/reduced-till practices to the numerous small farms in the County is impossible given these obstacles. Compounding these equipment challenges, the District's outreach and engagement efforts lack the necessary resources to be well attended and impactful. Of the farmers that we engaged with, most were unaware of the activities of the District and the relationship was cultivated through direct outreach by the soil health program coordinator. Without added capacity and resources to address these issues, engagement and participation in our programs will not grow.

The work described in this proposal will increase the attendance of our outreach and engagement events, demonstrations, and field trips by 40%, leading to 15 new program participants and 150 acres of additional no-till planting on small farms during the 2024 rental season.

To achieve these outcomes, the District will immediately implement a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy including the addition of no-till demonstration sites, expert panel discussions, educational workshops, farm visits – all professionally recorded and produced for the digital learning library. To ensure the success of these activities, the District's current soil health coordinator will take on the additional responsibilities and time under the new role of Soil Health Program Manager. This increase in dedicated time and resources will cultivate and grow relationships with area farmers. To address equipment rental obstacles, the District will add a 7-foot Esch No-Till Seed Drill to its rental equipment library, making no-till farming practices accessible to smaller farms that previously faced equipment limitations. This drill is able to be operated with a 50 horsepower tractor and transported using a ½ ton tow vehicle, both of which are much more common on smaller farms. The BCD is prepared to take delivery of the equipment as soon as April 2024.

The total cost to achieve these outcomes is \$84,385 and we have received in-kind and cash contributions totaling \$4,385. As such, the District is requesting \$80,000 to achieve the described outcomes, 60% of which is planned to be spent by the end of FY24 with the balance being spent by the end of FY25.

## **Project Description**

### **Goals and Objectives**

The District has set forth an ambitious agenda with well-defined goals and objectives, aiming to significantly enhance sustainable agricultural practices within the community. At the heart of this initiative is a goal to boost participation in the District's outreach and engagement activities. Specifically, the District aims to increase attendance at its events, demonstrations, and field trips by 40%. This heightened participation is seen as crucial in expanding the community's awareness and understanding of sustainable farming practices.

Another critical objective is to bring in new members to the program. The District is targeting the recruitment of 15 new participants, a move that directly contributes to an increase in the adoption of sustainable farming practices locally. This effort is in line with the District's broader mission of promoting environmental stewardship and sustainable agriculture in the region.

A significant focus of the District's efforts is the expansion of no-till farming practices. The objective here is to facilitate the adoption of these practices across an additional 150 acres of small farms during the upcoming 2024 rental season. This expansion is not just a numbers goal but is envisioned to serve as a successful model of sustainable land use, demonstrating the practical viability and benefits of such methods to the farming community.

Furthermore, the District is dedicated to enhancing the overall awareness of its role in the community. By fostering a supportive and knowledgeable environment, the District seeks to illustrate its commitment to sustainable farming practices across various scales of agricultural operations. From large, sprawling agricultural enterprises to the more modest, family-owned farms, the District's goal is to nurture a community-wide embrace of sustainable practices.

Ultimately, through these focused objectives, the District aims to make a significant contribution to environmental conservation and bolster the resilience of the local agricultural sector. By encouraging a widespread adoption of sustainable practices, the District is looking to create a ripple effect, leading to a more sustainable, productive, and environmentally conscious agricultural landscape in the region.

## Alignment/Advancement of HSAP Objectives

The District's project is closely aligned with the objectives of the HSAP, focusing on agricultural soil conservation and management. At the core of this initiative is the commitment to educate farmers about sustainable practices, such as no-till planting, through the deployment of our comprehensive marketing and outreach campaign. Educational resources and hands-on workshops provide the necessary knowledge and skills to implement these practices<sup>1</sup>. This educational drive supports HSAP's objective to encourage the adoption of methods that are not only sustainable but also enhance soil health. The project's dedication to improving soil structure, biodiversity, and overall soil health through conservation-minded practices is a direct response to HSAP's aim to elevate soil quality<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, the project places a significant emphasis on combating climate change through carbon sequestration. Sustainable land management practices, especially those that minimize soil disturbance, play a vital role in trapping carbon, aligning seamlessly with HSAP's goal of using soil health as a tool to mitigate climate change effects. In an effort to expand the reach and impact of these sustainable practices, the project has made strides in acquiring a more accessible no-till seed drill. This not only makes sustainable agriculture more feasible for a wider range of farmers but also aligns with HSAP's objective of making sustainable practices more inclusive and accessible.

The project's approach is not just about implementing sustainable practices; it also focuses on building community engagement and fostering strong relationships with landowners. This mirrors HSAP's strategy of involving diverse stakeholders in soil health initiatives, which is crucial for widespread adoption and long-term success. Moreover, the project employs a data-driven approach for continuous improvement, regularly monitoring and evaluating its impact on soil health and carbon sequestration. This aligns with HSAP's evidence-based approach and underscores the project's commitment to adapting to climate change by enhancing ecosystem resilience. Overall, the District's project embodies HSAP's goals through its practical, community-focused, and data-driven methods, promoting sustainable soil management, improving soil health, aiding in climate change mitigation, and fostering inclusive and equitable access to sustainable farming practices.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Increase economic support in order to incentivize implementation of healthy soils practices." HSAP, Soil + Land Management, Recommendations, page 78.

<sup>2</sup> "This practice shows impressive sequestration both of SOC and aboveground woody biomass..." (HSAP, pg 74)

## Methods

A pivotal component of this proposal is strengthening the District's leadership and staff capacity. The support for this initiative ensures that the District's Program Manager continues to forge essential relationships with local farmers, landowners, and organizations - a cornerstone of the District's Healthy Soils Programs' success. Recognizing the significance of this role, the District's Board of Supervisors has approved promoting the Healthy Soils/No-Till Program Coordinator to the role of Program Manager. These expanded duties are critical for effectively coordinating and delivering soil health-related outreach and education. Moreover, enhancing staff capacity is key to forming productive relationships with influential organizations within the community, in line with the HSAP's long-term goals.

To mitigate equipment accessibility issues identified in the pilot program, the District plans to acquire more suitable equipment. The 2019 acquisition of a 12-foot Esch 5512 no-till seed drill, while effective, posed limitations for smaller farms. The proposed funding will enable the District to purchase a 7-foot Esch 5607 no-till seed drill, compatible with smaller trucks and tractors, thus significantly expanding rental capacity and potentially impacting an additional 150 acres in the first season.

To achieve the ambitious outcomes set forth in this proposal, the District is implementing a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy. The District will organize expert panel discussions, educational workshops, and webinars offering an in-depth exploration of various aspects of soil health and sustainable farming. Farm visits are also planned to provide a hands-on learning experience, allowing for a direct connection with the day-to-day realities of implementing these practices. The teaching methods for these events will be diverse, aimed at maximizing attendance and engagement. This strategy includes the introduction of a no-till demonstration site, which will be used to showcase the use and adoption of no-till planting methods. Farmers can observe firsthand the processes and outcomes of no-till farming, including improved soil structure, and potential yield benefits. This practical demonstration helps demystify the process, showing that such practices are not only feasible but also beneficial in real agricultural settings. The hope is that this site becomes a focal point for learning and discussion, offering an opportunity to see the long-term effects of no-till practices on soil health, such as improved water retention, reduced erosion, and enhanced carbon sequestration.

To enhance the impact and reach of these activities, all events will be professionally recorded and produced for inclusion in the District's digital learning library. This approach ensures that the valuable insights and knowledge shared during these events are accessible to a broader audience, extending the educational benefits beyond the immediate participants.

In terms of increasing the adoption of conservation practices, the District will implement targeted outreach, identifying potential acres and landowners for program expansion through mapping and local data analysis. An essential component of this approach is providing technical support to landowners who are adopting no-till and other sustainable practices. This support will encompass follow-up visits, troubleshooting, and consulting time with soil health experts.

## Outcomes

This proposal is poised to deliver substantial outcomes that align with the objectives of enhancing sustainable agricultural practices in the community. A primary outcome is the projected increase in attendance at our outreach and engagement events, demonstrations, and field trips by 40%. This heightened participation is expected to directly lead to the recruitment of 15 new program participants. These participants represent a tangible increase in the adoption of sustainable farming practices in our community.

Another significant outcome is the anticipated expansion of no-till farming practices across 150 acres on small farms during the 2024 rental season. This expansion not only represents a considerable increase in sustainable land use but also serves as a model for environmentally responsible farming in the region. By adopting these practices, the small farm owners contribute to the broader goal of environmental stewardship and sustainable agriculture, demonstrating the practical viability and benefits of such methods.

The success of this project will also increase awareness of the District and its role in promoting sustainable practices. Through strategic partnerships and public engagement, the District aims to foster a community that supports and exemplifies sustainable farming practices on various scales, from large agricultural operations to small family farms. This approach is expected to create a ripple effect, encouraging more landowners and farmers to adopt sustainable practices, thereby contributing to environmental conservation and community resilience.

## **Organizational Capacity**

The District, with its skilled Board of Supervisors, staff, contractors, collaborators, and partners, is well-equipped to effectively, efficiently, and expeditiously implement the initiatives detailed in this proposal. With a history of effecting visible change in the community, such as establishing native plant pollinator gardens and increasing the adoption of healthy soils best management practices across the county and its borders, the District has demonstrated its commitment and capability in environmental stewardship.

The relationships the District has cultivated are not only widespread across the county but also extend beyond, all poised to fulfill commitments in engaging with constituents through robust outreach, education, and demonstration projects. These partnerships will play a crucial role in ensuring quick progress through the planning and contracting phase, thus expediting fiscal expenditures in the first four months of the project timeline.

Being a pioneer in the state, the District was the first to introduce a no-till rental equipment program in 2019. This program has not only been successful within the District but has also set a precedent for neighboring regions, guiding them in supporting their farmers in a similar manner. Since the launch of this rental program, the District has engaged with over 30 unique farmers, leading to the seeding of over 400 acres in the last year alone. Throughout the life of this program in Berkshire County and neighboring towns, renters have no-till seeded 1,159 acres. With over 200 acres already committed to no-till usage by renters for the upcoming year, and an expected increase post-outreach in March, the District is set to continue its impactful journey. This enduring impact, boosting the conservation of agricultural soils and enhancing the long-term health of these working lands, underscores the public benefit and the significant role the District plays in the region.



## **Key Personnel and Roles**

### **Adam Galambos, Chair, Board of Supervisors**

chair@berkshireconservation.org

Adam brings substantial full-scope grant administration experience to the District, leading the team from initial research and proposal writing to the detailed work of final reporting and closure. Adam works closely with all members of the project team to ensure accountability, efficiency, and clear tracking of outcomes. He brings organizational leadership to the District and serves on the Board of Directors of Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) and serves as the District IV representative on the State Commission for the Conservation of Soil, Water, and Related Resources.

*Adam earned his B.S. in Environmental Science from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and an M.S. in Resource Management and Conservation from Antioch University.*

### **Ambrose Clausen, Program Manager**

bcdnotill@gmail.com

Ambrose will be responsible for managing all phases of the work described in this proposal in coordination with the Board of Supervisors and the District Administrator. He brings 12+ years of agricultural experiences to his current role and has worked on and managed farms in both Hampshire and Berkshire County which has informed his sense of community, reverence for living soils and practical problem solving.

### **Cynthia Grippaldi, District Administrator**

admin@berkshireconservation.org

Cynthia's role in the implementation of the Challenge Grant will be to work closely with the Board of Supervisors and Program Manager to ensure that goals and objectives are carried out in a timely and relevant manner as well as reporting. She will be working closely with our bookkeeper and treasurer to track all expenses related to this grant and request monthly reimbursements from EEA.

*Cynthia earned a B.S. Environmental Science from Stockton University*

### **Dan Harris, Board of Supervisors**

danonthefarm@gmail.com

A recent addition to the District's Supervisor board, Dan's skills and experience focus on soil science and environmental sustainability, including teaching courses on these topics at MCLA. He is a subsistence farmer focused on soil carbon enhancement and other agroecological principles.

*Dan has earned his Masters of Science in Soil Science from UMass Amherst and currently serves as an Environmental Analyst within the Watershed Protection Division of Mass. DCR and has also served as Adjunct Faculty within the Environmental Studies Department at MCLA.*

## **Ronald F. Kujawski, Vice Chair, Board of Supervisors**

Ron is an educator originally focused on biological and environmental science. He is skilled at writing, teaching, problem assessment, communication and mass media. His later career as educator dealt with agricultural production and specialized in integrated pest management and soil nutrient management.

*Ron earned his Bachelor and Master of Science, and PhD in Biological Science from SUNY Albany. He developed and directed the Environmental Studies Program at Simon's Rock College. He was a long time Agricultural Extension Educator in Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry at the University of Massachusetts and currently is a part time Extension Educator for UMass.*

## **Donna Kittredge, Treasurer, Board of Supervisors**

As a Supervisor for the Berkshire Conservation District, Donna has served in the role of secretary. She has put her graphic design skills to use for the District by producing promotional materials from signs, posters, mailers, and informational handouts.

*Donna earned a Graduate Diploma in Graphic Design from Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, MA*

## Project Timeline

<b><u>Q1 24(Jan 1 - March 30)</u></b>		
<i>(Dates are based upon timely selection of grant funding. Adjustments will be made at the discretion of the Board of Supervisors as necessary.)</i>		
1	Planning Meetings	January
2	Expected Selection Notification	February
3	Purchase and Delivery of Esch, Engage with Presenters	March
<b><u>Q2 24(April 1 - June 30)</u></b>		
4	Marketing Campaign Phase 1	April
5	LivingSoil and Composting Webinar with Guest Presenters	April
6	Composting Demonstration Community Event	May
<b><u>Q3 24(Jul 1 - Sep 30)</u></b>		
7	Marketing & Survey Campaign Phase 2	July
8	Equipment Demonstration Event with HHCD	July
9	Equipment Demonstration Event with HLF	August
10	Native Plants and Lawn Conversion Webinar	September
<b><u>Q4 24(Oct 1 - Dec 31)</u></b>		
11	Marketing & Survey Campaign Phase 3	October
10	Soil Health and Our Forests Event	October
12	Soil Testing and SoilFoodWeb Webinar with Guest Presenter	November
13	Berkshire Ag. Soil Health Overview and Findings Presentation	December
<b><u>Q1-2 25(Jan 1 - June 30)</u></b>		
14	Marketing & Survey Campaign Phase 4	January
15	Farmer to Farmer Soil Health Gathering North County	January
16	Farmer to Farmer Soil Health Gathering South County	February
17	Soil Health & Community Resilience Pilot Program Event	April

## **Project Evaluation and Monitoring**

The District will be reporting monthly on performance metrics in the form of acres, attendance, programmatic subsidies, and new engagements with the District to ensure we objectively assess our progress during the grant cycle. Based on immediate feedback to our program by farmers, the assistance to use our rental equipment will be evaluated and altered accordingly. Flexibility and accommodating real time updates to our programs is essential to remaining a viable community organization in our erratic climate.

The Program Manager will adjust outreach efforts based on results of early findings and capturing survey data prior to the end of each event. By comparing data on in-person event attendance versus interest in a recording or virtual event, we will discover which strategies will be most effective.

The District will continue to provide quarterly reports to the EEA. These reports will outline specifically how impactful our subsidies are based on our metrics. By focusing on direct subsidies to farmers, we will have more opportunities for contact and assessment of our programs as well as increased rental interest.

At our annual meeting we will report on the results of our programmatic impact on our participants. Adoption of each practice will be reported and categorized using the Recommendation Summary Matrix with the HSAP. Based on this evaluation technique, we can assess which land covers we are missing out on and where opportunities for collaboration across conservation and land management entities is possible.

Regular monitoring and evaluation are key components of the District's approach. This includes establishing metrics for soil health, outreach efficacy, and practice adoption rates, and conducting periodic evaluations using surveys, soil testing, and other data collection methods. The District will also ensure that its activities are in sync with HSAP's evolving strategies and recommendations and participate actively in HSAP-related forums.

## **Sustainability Plan**

The District will measure our grant project sustainability over the life of the grant and use metrics of engagement to guide our future activities. We will measure continued engagement with partnering organizations based on how many connections were made during the grant cycle and reflect these findings in our quarterly reporting and at the District's annual meeting. In order to acknowledge cross-organizational collaboration, it will be essential to include those groups in our activities moving past the grant cycle and maximize the lasting impacts of those relationships.

Advancing initiatives with partnering organizations requires sustained contact with participating bodies to execute plans, report on results and continue to grow our respective programs within a sustainable range. Our organizational capacity is well set up in this grant to follow-through and keep supporting our partnering organizations to expand their reach. The District has already gained a number of new contacts for organizing potential events with partners across forestry, farming, youth education and pollinator networks.

The District will broaden our impact and continue to build relationships for collaborations with other local conservation and environmental groups. Partnering with other organizations will give us a wider reach for promotion, and therefore potentially expand the pool of individuals who may receive funding. We will continue to make resources more accessible across the county by focusing on localized efforts such as peer-to-peer farmer events so that geographically proximate participants can benefit from a network of shared equipment, thereby avoiding prohibitively costly purchases.

## **Risk Assessment**

In its strategic planning, the District has conducted a comprehensive risk assessment to identify potential challenges and obstacles that could impact the success of its initiative. This proactive approach is essential to address issues effectively and ensure the smooth execution of the program.

A significant risk involves the potential for lower-than-anticipated attendance at the District's outreach and engagement events. Despite the objective to increase participation by 40%, actual attendance might fall short. This shortfall could be due to various reasons such as scheduling conflicts, insufficient publicity, or a lack of interest among the target audience. To mitigate this risk, the District is preparing to launch a robust marketing strategy and schedule events at times convenient for the farming community.

Another area of concern is the recruitment of new program participants. The goal of adding 15 new participants may not be achieved if the program does not resonate with potential participants or if they are unaware of the benefits. In response, the District is planning to enhance its outreach methods, highlighting the practical benefits of participation and leveraging word-of-mouth promotion within the farming community.

The expansion of no-till farming practices, particularly among small farms, presents its own set of risks. The success of this goal depends on farmers' willingness and capacity to adopt new practices, which may be hindered by concerns over costs, unfamiliarity with the methods, or reluctance to change traditional ways. To address these concerns, the District intends to offer comprehensive support, including training and technical assistance, and to demonstrate the benefits through no-till demonstration sites.

The District's reliance on a digital strategy also poses risks. The assumption that all farmers have sufficient internet access and technical skills to utilize digital learning materials might not hold true. To mitigate this, the District plans to provide alternative formats and hands-on learning opportunities for those who might face digital access challenges.

Additionally, in 2023, the District faced challenges with its rental program when four potential renters had to reschedule cover crop sowings due to impassable field conditions. Extreme weather events causing flooding, soil saturation, and erosion impacted many farms, resulting in no sowing on over 80 acres. This highlights the need for a smaller, lighter drill seeder to assist in situations where farmers are unable to access fields. Expanding the rental capacity with additional equipment is anticipated to increase seeding opportunities, addressing the issue of the existing rental program being fully booked in the fall.

Lastly, external factors such as changes in agricultural policies, economic downturns, or adverse weather conditions are risks that could affect the availability of resources, the viability of farming practices, or

overall community engagement. The District recognizes these risks and is committed to remaining flexible and adaptive, ready to adjust its strategies in response to changing external conditions.

Overall, the District's risk assessment has identified key areas of concern that could potentially impede the success of its initiative. By acknowledging these risks and planning proactive strategies to address them, the District is better positioned to navigate these challenges and achieve its goals of promoting sustainable agricultural practices within the community.

## Attachments

### A - Zimmerman Equipment Quote



#### 2023 ESCH 5607



USD ▼ **\$27,500**

Machine Location: [180 School Rd Bethel, Pennsylvania 19507](#)

#### Seller Information

Zimmerman Farm Service (717) 400-7031  
Contact: Sales [Video Chat](#)  
Bethel, Pennsylvania 19507



[Hide Thumbnails](#)

#### Description

New Technology High Speed Drill, 8mph! planting, 7 FT Drill. Small grass seed box, We deliver to US and Canada for reasonable rates. Will plant bin run grain, Ask about \$430 a month, Weight 4500 LB

#### Specifications

Year 2023 | Manufacturer ESCH | Model 5607 | Condition New |





---

**Hampden-Hampshire Conservation District**

195 Russell Street, Suite B6

Hadley, MA 01035

January 30, 2024

Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

100 Cambridge Street, 9th Floor

Boston, MA 02114

**Re: Letter of Support – BCD Healthy Soils Challenge Grant proposal**

Dear Review Committee:

The Hampden-Hampshire Conservation District (HHCD) is pleased to submit this letter of support for the Berkshire Conservation District's (BCD) Challenge Grant proposal, which will allow them to expand and strengthen their Soil Health Program, and increase their impact and presence within the region.

We understand that BCD's proposal will implement a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy including the addition of no-till demonstration sites, expert panel discussion, educational workshops, and farm visits – all professionally recorded and produced for the digital learning library. Their current soil health coordinator will take on additional responsibilities and time under the new role of Soil Health Program Manager. BCD will also add a specialized no-till seed drill designed to make no-till practices accessible to smaller farms.

HHCD launched a Healthy Soils Program in 2023, that includes no-till equipment rentals, soil analysis, no-till mentorships, and outreach. Since the beginning of our program, HHCD has worked collaboratively with BCD to promote and facilitate the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices in western Massachusetts. This partnership supports both districts' mutual goals to reduce soil erosion, improve soil health, prevent nutrient pollution and sediment runoff into nearby waterways, and increase the sustainability and economic viability of local farms.

BCD's Challenge Grant proposal aligns with, and complements, the proposal and initiatives developed by both HHCD and the Franklin Conservation District. We strongly endorse the BCD proposal, and look forward to cultivating a robust regional partnership for many years to come.

Please reach out to me if you have any questions. You can reach me by phone at (413) 357-8829, or through email at [leonripley@icloud.com](mailto:leonripley@icloud.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Leon K. Ripley'.

Leon Ripley  
HHCD Chair



---

**Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts**  
319 Littleton Road, Suite 205  
Westford, MA 01886

January 30, 2024

Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge Street, 9th Floor  
Boston, MA 02114

**Re: Letter of Support – BCD Healthy Soils Challenge Grant proposal**

Dear Review Committee:

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is pleased to submit this letter of support for the Berkshire Conservation District's (BCD) proposal to move beyond their initial soil health pilot program and develop an expanded and strengthened Soil Health Program with greater impact and extended reach.

MACD represents the 13 Conservation Districts of the Commonwealth. We support our member Districts in their efforts to provide education, outreach, technical assistance, and other activities designed to promote sustainable stewardship of natural resources for all members of our communities. We strive to do this by increasing public visibility, access to funding, connections to government activities, opportunities for fruitful collaborations, and overall technical and financial capacity.

We understand that BCD's proposal will implement a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy including the addition of no-till demonstration sites, expert panel discussion, educational workshops, and farm visits – all professionally recorded and produced for the digital learning library. Their current soil health coordinator will take on additional responsibilities and time under the new role of Soil Health Program Manager. BCD will also add a specialized no-till seed drill designed to make no-till practices accessible to smaller farms.

MACD would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with BCD as needed on all activities outlined in their Healthy Soils Challenge Grant proposal. Among other things, we can assist with the development of educational materials, promotion of events, and dissemination of technical information, as well as sharing resources across the state. We strongly endorse their proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Leff'.

Michael Leff  
MACD Executive Director

January 29, 2024

Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs  
Attn: Thomas Anderson  
100 Cambridge Street, 9th Floor  
Boston, MA 02114

**Re: Letter of Support – Berkshire Conservation District Healthy Soils  
Challenge Grant Proposal**

Dear Review Committee:

As the Director of Stewardship for the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC), I am pleased to submit this letter of support for the Berkshire Conservation District's proposal in response to the "Challenge Grant Implementing the Commonwealth's Healthy Soils Action Plan". The proposed and ongoing work of the District is aligned with BNRC's mission which is to "protect and preserve the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the Berkshires for public benefit and enjoyment".

I understand that the District is seeking your financial support to add strategic improvements to their Healthy Soils program. We support these critical improvements that they have identified through their Healthy Soils Pilot Program to address program management challenges and also allow for wider adoption of rental equipment by addressing limitations of use and transport.

Additionally, I want to support the District in their efforts to conduct outreach and education on soil health and the importance of reduced tillage by collaborating on the development of a no-till demonstration site in Berkshire County. The specific arrangement will be formalized through further planning, but BNRC owns farmland that may be eligible to serve as this site.

I am pleased to support this work to preserve and improve soil health across the Berkshires. The work of the District amplifies BNRC's long-standing role in land conservation across the Berkshires and I urge you to consider their proposal for funding.

Sincerely,



Doug Brown  
Director of Stewardship  
Berkshire Natural Resources Council



**Berkshire Natural  
Resources  
Council**

**Board of Directors**

Jenny Hansell, President  
Tim Crane, Chair  
Pat Callahan, Vice Chair  
Kim Seward, Secretary  
Jeffrey Belair, Treasurer

Stephen Alsdorf  
Robert Cundall  
Tom Curtin  
Brian Fairbank  
Henry Flint  
Rachel Hailey  
Ellen Hand  
Caroline Holland  
Brian Horan  
Eric Katzman  
Larry Lane  
John Mancia  
Syd Smithers  
Brian Tobin  
Elena Traister  
Ari Zorn



309 Pittsfield Road, Suite B  
Lenox MA 01240  
413-499-0596  
bnrc.org

Dear Ambrose,

Thank you very much for your interest in having me come to Western Mass. to speak and consult with your members. The work you are doing is so very important. This is true not only for farmers, and gardeners but for all of us. Its now being understood by scientists that developing microbially healthy soils, without tilling, can have an enormous impact on the climate of the planet. It is also now known that healthy soil grows healthy plants, full of beneficial micronutrients for consumers. Truly healthy soils require far fewer inputs whether those inputs are conventional or organic. This can result in greater profits for farmers and lower food costs for their customers. All in all you and your organization are leading the way helping to educate growers about the need to explore new methods that are in harmony with natural biological systems and which will lead us out of the current ecological crises that we all face. I look forward to helping you this year in your endeavors.

As we recently discussed on the phone. I will plan to visit you in person sometime this April in order to give a 1 hour presentation on the benefits of living soil and to answer any questions from participants. My understanding is that at this time the event is being planned for either late afternoon or early evening. We also discussed a second visit sometime in November where I might work more closely with farmers and even do some direct microscopy readings of their soils. I understand that the details of this second event need to be flushed out at a later time. Below I have outlined possible/probable cost estimates for each event.

Event #1

- A. April talk with Q.and A. 1.5 hours @ 95/hr= \$142.00
- B. In kind contribution costs. Correspondence, 30 min.  
Presentation preparation. 30 min  
Total in kind contribution costs 1 hr @ 95/hr \$190.
- C. Travel from Portland Maine 8 hours at 60/hr \$480

Total Estimated Cost of April Event \$812

Event #2

- A. November talk for farmers with Q.and A. 2.5 hours @95/hr 237.00
- B. In kind contribution costs Correspondence 30 min  
Presentation preparation 30 min  
Total in kind contribution costs 1hr @95/hr 95
- C. Travel form Portland, Maine 8 hours at 60/hr \$480
- D. Direct Microscopy Readings  
Four one hour readings at 75/reading \$300  
Consulting time explaining results 4 hrs at 95/hr = \$380
- E. One hour consultation with MAPS, regarding soil health education for early childhood and middle school children \$95
- F. Total Estimates for Cost of November Event. \$1587

Yours,  
Spero

Spero Latchis —-Certified Soil Health Consultant- Soil Food Web School  
President —Living Soil Network  
South Portland, Maine  
[www.livingsoilnetwork.com](http://www.livingsoilnetwork.com)  
207 299 2738



---

**Franklin Conservation District**  
55 Federal Street  
Greenfield, MA 01301

January 29th, 2024

Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
Division of Conservation Services  
100 Cambridge Street, 9th Floor  
Boston, MA 02114

**Re: Letter of Support – BCD Healthy Soils Challenge Grant proposal**

Dear Review Committee:

The Franklin Conservation District (FCD) is pleased to submit this letter of support for the Berkshire Conservation District's (BCD) proposal to strengthen and grow their existing Soil Health Program with greater impact and extended reach.

We understand that BCD's proposal will implement a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy including the addition of no-till demonstration sites, expert panel discussion, educational workshops, and farm visits – all professionally recorded and produced for the digital learning library. Their current soil health coordinator will take on additional responsibilities and time under the new role of Soil Health Program Manager. BCD will also add a specialized no-till seed drill designed to make no-till practices accessible to smaller farms.

FCD celebrates the advances and outreach impact that our neighbor Conservation Districts are pursuing for the western Massachusetts region. Our Districts have an established relationship that shares resources to further our common work in the region. We would be pleased to continue collaborating with BCD on program development, marketing, and delivery of the activities outlined in their Healthy Soils Challenge Grant proposal. We heartily endorse their proposal.

Sincerely,

Caroline Ness, FCD Chair





support local food + farms

PO Box 983  
Great Barrington, MA 01230  
413-528-0041  
buylocal@berkshiregrown.org  
berkshiregrown.org

**Berkshire Grown  
Board of Directors**  
Allison Rachele Bayles  
Ariel Bock  
Molly Comstock  
Tom Curtin  
Sarah Gardner  
Katherine Hand  
Jake Levin  
Dawn Masiero  
Peter Platt  
Amy Rudnick  
Jim Schultz  
Katy Sparks  
Lee Venolia

**Executive Director**  
Margaret Moulton

Tom Anderson - EEA Division of Conservation Services  
Massachusetts Executive Office of  
Energy and Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge Street, 9th Floor  
Boston, MA 02114

January 30, 2024

Dear Mr. Anderson and Grant Committee,

This letter indicates Berkshire Grown's support for the Berkshire Conservation District's application to the EEA HSAP Implementation Challenge Grant Initiative. Berkshire Grown is the leading advocate for local agriculture in the Berkshires. We support and promote local agriculture through programs that bring together farmers, producers, and consumers, including organizing eight winter farmers' markets and producing workshops, farmer-to-farmer networking events, and offering technical assistance to farmers and food producers in the Berkshire region. We believe this support will result in a more robust and resilient local food system where consumers have more access to locally produced agricultural products.

BCD has a No-Till Rental Program with a 12' seeder which in the last year helped farmers seed over 540 acres, and over the past 5 years they seeded 1,200 acres.

However, there are some farms show scale makes it impossible to use the 12' no-till seeder. This grant award will fund the purchase of a 7' version of that larger and it will also offer reimbursable soil tests and will be piloting an inputs subsidy program this year.

They proposed activities are to:

- Purchase 7' version of the No-Till drill which would add an estimated 150-200 acres to years' total in No-Till land use;
- Organize a 10 event series highlighting our interconnection with living soil, soil microbes, and the food that feeds the soil. Events will be hosted on farms, conservation land and restaurants from Adams to Egremont, we aim to make our activities more broadly accessible.

We strongly support the Berkshire Conservation District's application and can clearly see how it will help farmers in our county. Berkshire Grown will provide outreach support for these programs through our newsletters, social media, and in-person farm visits where we often see the potential use of a no-till seed drill.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Margaret Moulton  
margaret@berkshiregrown.org