



Fertilizer best management practices match nutrient supply with crop requirements, while minimizing nutrient losses.

COST-SHARE

Nutrient Stewardship with the 4Rs

The Soil and Water Conservation Program (SWCP) is always exploring options for new practices that can be offered through the cost-share program. One tool the commission has used to test practices for statewide availability has been to do pilot projects. The idea is to determine practice viability in a limited manner before a full scale, statewide rollout. In October 2019, the Soil and Water Districts commission approved the development of a 4R Nutrient Management pilot program in up to six counties. The development of the 4R nutrient management cost-share practice is a great example of the SWCP working together with new partners to provide an innovative cost-share opportunity for farmers. This pilot project is a result of collaboration between the SWCP, Missouri Fertilizer Control Board and fertilizer retailers across the state.

The Missouri Fertilizer Control board (MoFCB) was created through legislation in 2016 and has a primary task of ensuring the quality of fertilizer sold in Missouri. In addition to quality control, the Missouri Fertilizer Control Board is tasked with the research, education and outreach of fertilizer use efficiency. As part of their outreach efforts, the MoFCB has developed the Show-Me Nutrient Stewardship Platform to create a discussion around practical, economical and agronomical nutrient stewardship practices. Part of MoFCB's education efforts are with Missouri's ag retailers and has led to the implementation of 4R Certification for those retailers. According to Andrea Rice, Director of Research, Education and Outreach for MoFCB, "Ag retailers who become 4R Certified have been through a 19 point audit process including 4R training and education of employees and customers, science-based recommendations of nutrients, application of nutrients and proper documentation."

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The 4R program is an international collaboration between The Fertilizer Institute and The Nature Conservancy. Nutrient stewardship following the 4Rs recommends using nutrients from the Right Source, at the Right Rate, at the Right Time, and in the Right Place. This is a common sense approach to nutrient management that seeks to maximize the efficiency of fertilizer use. This is done by implementing fertilizer best management practices that match nutrient supply with crop requirements, while minimizing nutrient losses. 4R nutrient management helps to meet the water quality goals outlined in the Missouri Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, while helping farms to be more productive and profitable.

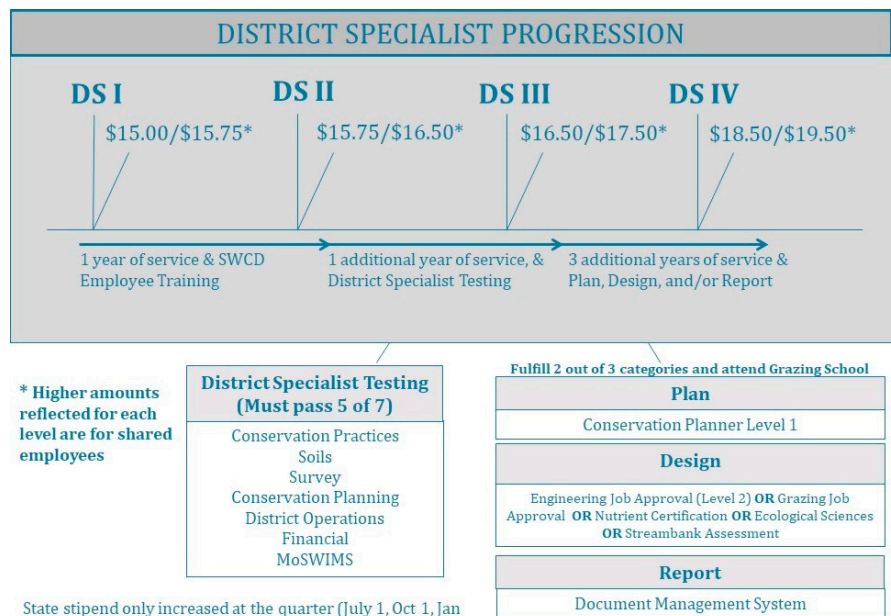
There are currently two soil and water conservation districts involved in the pilot program, and the commission has approved adding up to a total of six districts. This program provides a per acre incentive for landowners to use a certified fertilizer retailer to help them implement the 4Rs. If you would like to know more about the pilot program, contact Jim Plassmeyer in the program office.

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Larger Paychecks for District Employees

The district employee progression line was instituted in FY 2016 with the intent of providing an avenue for district employees to receive salary increases as they accumulated experience and certifications. The starting salary of \$13.13 was a substantial increase from the base rate provided prior to that by the State. Since then, as state employees received cost of living increases, those have also been incorporated into the progression line. In spite of all these changes, many districts have had extreme difficulty recruiting and retaining quality employees recently. In an effort to make district specialist positions as competitive as possible, the District

Operations and Program Delivery Committee adopted this as their main agenda item at the last meeting. Keeping in mind the finite resources available for staff compensation, many different options were examined. Ultimately the conversation settled on increasing the state funded salary for each step on the progression line with the most substantial increases being seen at the DSI, or entry level. According to the presentation given by Jim Boschert at the last Soil and Water Districts Commission meeting, most of the turnover in the past year has been at the DSI level.



State stipend only increased at the quarter (July 1, Oct 1, Jan 1 or Apr 1) only after testing and years of service criteria has been met and appropriate forms received.

District Specialist Progression line effective Jan. 1, 2022. All salaries shown include a minimum 2% increase.

The program office has now updated the progression line with new salaries and training requirements effective Jan. 1, 2022. A DSI will start at \$15 per hour and state funded salaries top out at \$19.50 for a DS IV shared. There were also a few changes made regarding certifications at different levels. The requirements for moving from a DS I-II were revised to include a program office provided new employee training instead of the Introduction to Conservation Planning Modules in Aglearn. For the DS III level, the 12-hour conservation planning provision was replaced with the requirement to pass five district specialist tests, rather than the three previously needed.

Similar to previous changes in the progression line, existing employees will be grandfathered in at their current level. All employees current and future will be subject to the new requirements in order to advance further on the progression line. Increased stipends will automatically be sent with the next district allocation, but boards will still need to document approval of the increase going to their employees in the minutes of the next board meeting.

Finally, it is important to note that these changes are intended as an initial step and conversations about compensation will continue in the near future. In addition, keep in mind that compensation and the associated costs include much more than hourly wages. Additional topics being considered for further discussion are health insurance benefits for dependents and adding a DSV level to the the progression line.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Fiscal Responsibility with Diane Matthews



Diane Matthews

Many of you may never meet Diane, but her work behind the scenes as the SWCP Fiscal and Administrative Specialist is crucial to the Soil and Water Conservation Program. Diane plays an active role in anything that involves money, from creating the budget to reviewing quarterly reports.

Diane's fiscal talents have been developed over two decades beginning with a degree from the University of Central Missouri in Business Administration-Accounting. She immediately put her education to work as a Fixed Asset and Inventory Coordinator for the Department of Corrections. Diane moved on to the Department of Natural Resources in 2006 where she served in various roles for the Accounting program, Division of Environmental Quality and Budget Program. She entered her current role with the SWCP in 2019.

Specific job duties for Diane include preparing the program budget, paying bills, coordinating UMB cards, analyzing revenues and making expenditure projections as well as assisting with quarterly report reviews. If you ever have a question about the budget process or the financial outlook for soil and water conservation in Missouri, Diane has knowledge and skill to explain it.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

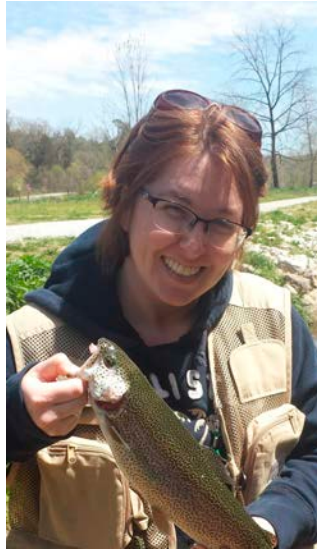
Jan. 27

Commission Meeting

Feb. 7

Information, Education and Outreach Committee

Melissa Simmons has joined the Soil and Water Conservation Program as our newest District Coordinator. Melissa has been with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for seven years where she worked for Missouri State Parks as an Urban Outreach Coordinator. Melissa will be working out of the Kansas City Regional Office and covering the territory that was formerly Jeremy Redden's.



Melissa Simmons



Steve Walker was presented with a plaque and proclamation from the Governor at his retirement party.

Steve Walker has retired after nine years with the SWCP. Steve was instrumental in many of our nutrient reduction efforts and his technical writing skills will be missed. Congratulations Steve!

What topics would you like to hear from the program office about? Please submit ideas and comments to jake.wilson@dnr.mo.gov.