



To Our Fellow North Dakotans and ND State Representatives:

The Walsh County Three Rivers Soil Conservation requests a state funding increase for soil conservation districts to support our mission to protect and improve soil health and water quality, preserve wildlife habitat, and promote the general welfare of the people of our great state.

Here in the Red River Valley, soil health is our literal bottom line. Our future as an agricultural region depends upon it. Unfortunately, we have lost over 50% of our topsoil here in Walsh County since 1960. And last year, after decades of farm runoff, our office reported high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen in the Park River and the most toxic algae bloom in the state at Homme Dam, where dangerous microcystin levels were over 3,500 times the reporting limit.

Our office worked tirelessly to improve our water quality by working with farmers to improve soil health practices. In the spring of 2025, we hosted a series of Soil Health Talks with farmers and ranchers at grain elevators and local diners. We wrote articles about soil health practices for our local newspapers and spread the word about soil health and water quality to newspapers throughout the state, from the *Grand Forks Herald* to *The Dickinson Press*. This spring, we planted over 10,000 trees and over 500 acres of pasture and prairie grasses. This fall, our office provided cost-share funds to farmers to plant over 3,000 acres of cover crops in critical areas of the Park River Watershed, which is a dramatic increase in cover crop acres in our county. The combination of public education and direct relationship-building with local farmers has cultivated a real, tangible change in the soil health practices in the region. Although it takes time to improve soil health and water quality, our efforts are now visible from an aerial view of the county, where there are many fields budding with freshly planted cover crops this fall. These cover crops will hold the ground this winter and improve the soil quality and function during planting season next spring.

In addition to our on-the-ground efforts, the Walsh County SCD is dedicated to our public education and outreach programs that serve local schools and communities. We work hard to reach students at every age level, giving away a free tree for Arbor Day to every 1<sup>st</sup> grader in the county; hosting the Water Festival for area 4<sup>th</sup> graders and Eco Ed for area 6<sup>th</sup> graders; and collaborating on projects with local junior high and high school students, such as our "Thinking Like a Prairie" project that brought students to a local bison ranch to collect prairie plants and soils that were converted into homemade paper and paint pigments. The "Thinking Like a Prairie" project was featured in a statewide newspaper article that highlighted the voices of the

students who said that the project changed the way they thought about prairie grasslands and about the environments of North Dakota.

Our office also hires local high school and returning college students each planting season to give them hands-on experiences with local conservation and to introduce them to the important work of relationship-building with farmers, ranchers, conservation organizations, and the public. Some of our former high school and college employees have gone on to pursue careers in environmental and wildlife management and all of them have shared that their experiences working for our SCD helped to change the way they think about land, water, and wildlife, while gaining greater respect for the work it takes to be a good North Dakota farmer and land steward. We believe that the soil conservation district is the ideal place for young North Dakotans to get their start in the workforce and to cultivate a deep love and appreciation for our state, where truly everything we touch begins with the soil.

Although we have a dedicated team here in Walsh County, we cannot afford to continue our efforts without the support of state funding, which goes a long way to helping us to improve soil health and water quality, provide more habitat for wildlife and the hunting community, and to promote healthy and vibrant local communities.

We hope you will see that investing in SCDs is an investment in the economic and cultural future for all North Dakotans, all of whom depend on healthy soil.

Sincerely,

Josh Anderson, District Conservation Manager  
Walsh County Three Rivers Soil Conservation District