



# NRCS Local Working Groups

What are they and should I attend?



## What are Local Working Groups (LWGs)

LWGs are where farmers and community members can share their thoughts and priorities for conservation with USDA NRCS and their county Soil and Water Conservation District. LWGs are the first rung on the ladder of "locally-led conservation." Not only can local conservation priorities be set by LWGs, but they also help inform state and national ag conservation strategies.

## Who can participate in LWGs?

These groups are often hosted by the local conservation district and should include farmers, private landowners, people representing natural resources and agriculture interests from soil, water, forestry and other areas that are familiar with agriculture and natural resources in the community. They should also include historically underserved farmers.

## Should I consider attending?

Unless farmers that represent the kind of production and/or management system that you use participate in these local groups, the issues you face will not be represented nor will the resources to address them. That means that when the state office prioritizes environmental concerns or local funding it may not be targeted to producers like you.

*Many decisions about how federal conservation programs work on the ground are made at the local level.*

## How do you become a member of a LWG?

The first step can be simply showing up to your LWG, which is open to the public. Reach out to your local conservation district to learn when and where the next LWG will be held. If you want to engage more, you can submit a request to the NRCS State Conservationist. They should make sure your information is shared with the Soil and Water Conservation District.

## What kind of issues does the LWG address?

Local working groups meet at least once each year to make recommendations to the State Conservationist on the local natural resource priorities and criteria for funding conservation activities and programs. Including recommendations and input supporting smaller-scale, diversified, organic and historically underserved farmers is critical to make sure that these federal programs recognize and support all production systems. LWGs discuss resource concerns in the county and the best practices to deal with those concerns.



For example, if soil quality and prevention of erosion is the main concern, they might rank filter strips, buffer strips or other perennial practices higher for the county. NRCS could also target program funds to encourage producers to expand rotations to include small grains and legume and/or the use of cover crops to increase water retention and hold soil throughout the year.

*Ideally, State Technical Committees monitor what each LWG recommends and may adjust their priorities based on those issues identified locally.*

LWG recommendations can have significant impact on the implementation of programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) which emphasizes both national and state priorities.

***Participation on LWGs does not take a lot of time and you can make significant positive change in your community***