

## Happy 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Williams Soil and Water Conservation District!! 1947 - 2017

The Williams SWCD is celebrating 70 years of service to Williams County this year.

Soil conservation began in our country from the concerns of the Dust Bowl during the 1930s. The drought of the 1930s along with extremely poor farming methods caused "black blizzards" of dust to form which constantly menaced the Plains states during the 1930s. On May 11, 1934, a massive dust storm two miles high traveled 2,000 miles across the country before hitting the East Coast. For five hours, a fog of prairie dirt covered landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty and the U.S. Capitol. On that day, lawmakers inside the Capitol were debating a soil conservation bill. The massive dust bowl greatly helped the lawmakers establish the United States Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service in 1935.

The Williams SWCD brochure *Soil Conservation Leads to Prosperity* states that the Williams County Soil Conservation District was "legally organized to conserve and increase the productiveness of the soil, and thereby promote the welfare of the people." "Our single greatest natural resource is our soil. The future of our nation and our civilization depends upon our ability to keep the soil in high production for the generations yet unborn". There are four resources that all life needs in order to live - they are water, air, soil, and the sun. The Williams SWCD works to conserve two of these necessary resources every day: soil and water. We promote programs for proper land use and soil and water conservation.

The highlights below describe the beginning of the Williams SWCD founding story:

- **June 5, 1941** - The General Assembly of Ohio House Bill No. 646 is signed by Governor John W. Bricker and provides for the organization of Soil Conservation Districts (SCD) in Ohio.
- Organization of the Williams District was a project of the Agriculture Policy Committee of Williams County, which was sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Service (now OSU Extension) to guide the development of agricultural programs of the county to acquaint farmers with the need for an organized program of soil and water conservation. Farm Bureau and Grange assisted in the promotion of the organization of the District.
- **April 12, 1947** - the Williams County SCD was formally authorized by a referendum vote of Williams County landowners. At that time, we were known as the *Williams County Soil Conservation District (SCD)*. We were the 58<sup>th</sup> county to join Ohio's Soil Conservation Districts. Highland County was the first county to join in 1942 and Lucas County was the last to join in 1964.
- **April 21, 1947** - Williams County SCD was approved by the Ohio Soil Conservation Committee
- **May 24, 1947** - Williams County local farm leaders from five different townships were elected as the first Board of Supervisors. The charter members were Albert S. Adsmoond (Pulaski Township), Ray C. Borton (Brady Township), Leo H. Dietsch (St. Joseph Township), Ellsworth E. Briner (Bridgewater Township), and Galen F. Newcomer (Center Township). Supervisors are elected for three-year terms and serve at their own expense without pay.
- **June 11, 1947** - Charter Board organizes: Galen Newcomer elected as Chairman, Albert Adsmoond elected as Vice President, and Ray Borton elected as Secretary-Treasurer.
- The first action of the Board was to develop a Program and a Work Plan. A Memorandum of Understanding and joint meetings were then used to make full use of the resources available to the District. All work of the District initially completed by the Board of Supervisors.
- Since the County Agricultural Extension Service guided the development of the Williams SCD, the first informal cooperative agreement was with the County Agricultural Extension staff for a continuous educational and publicity program. Since the State law did not provide for office facilities, meetings were originally held at the Extension office and the secretarial work was handled by the Extension office.

- **August 1947** – As a result of a request for assistance, a Memorandum of Understanding was entered into with the Soil Conservation Service of the US Department of Agriculture (now NRCS) to receive the services of a full-time technically trained farm planner. A part-time agricultural engineer and soil scientist were available on a one-fifth time basis.
- **September 18, 1947** - Robert H. Mills was assigned to the District as a full-time USDA Farm Conservation Planner. The SCS staff with the local guidance of the district supervisors assisted cooperating farmers to develop and apply complete farm conservation plans. These plans outline the steps to permanent, profitable farming of cropland, pastureland, woodland, and wildlife land. Additional aid was given to the District through the help of a conservation aide, John W. Hartman.
- **Tile drainage in 1947** – The following was written in the 1947 first Williams SCD Annual Report: “A survey revealed that at the present time only two tile ditching machines are available in the district. There are many hundreds of acres of tile drainage which are needed if most efficient use is to be made of the crop land. Tile is slowly becoming available, but equipment to install it is not available.”
- **February 5, 1948** – First Annual Meeting for all cooperators
- **1948** - Completed a formal working agreement with the Ohio Division of Wildlife
- **June 1948** – Informal working agreement with the Division of Forestry is written
- **August 12, 1948** – First Field Day held in Edgerton by the request of the Edgerton Community Institute which was a one-day face lifting on a local farm (R. T. Priest) to show what could be done to help erosion. There was an estimated 5000 people in attendance.
- **February 17, 1949** – Annual Meeting – Albert Adsmund and Leo Dietsch were re-elected
- **1949** – First trees and three kinds of grasses were distributed.
- **February 8, 1950** – Entered into an agreement with the Williams County Conservation League to aid cooperators who desire assistance with developing wildlife resources on their farms.
- **February 17, 1950** – Annual Meeting – Ray Borton, Ellsworth Briner, and Galen Newcomer were re-elected.
- **May 2, 1950** – To help with the huge conservation plan workload, the Board appointed seven assistant supervisors from each township where there was no supervisor. They were met quarterly with the Board. They were Roy Miller, Harvey Fackler, Beuclair Cummins, John Thiel, Albert Snyder, Jerome Hartman, and Vernon Sloan.
- **May 6, 1950** – Participated in the county-wide plowing contest of the six vocational agriculture departments.
- **October 12, 1950** – First Forestry Management Field Day with three stops: William Koerner & Sons in Edgerton, Spangler Candy Company, and P. M. Neideraur of Bryan
- **November 8, 1950** - In the beginning, the district did not levy taxes or assessments. To obtain money for expenses the Board adopted a uniform voluntary contribution plan where each applicant was asked to contribute \$1.00 for the first 80 acres in the farm and \$0.25 for each additional 20 acres.
- **1951** – District joins the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts (NACD)
- **1951** – First Affiliate Membership Contribution of \$25.00 is received by Cranson Poole of the Edgerton State Bank (which is the same contribution amount today)

Follow the growth of the Williams SWCD each month as we continue our story. This story and each subsequent update will be found on our web page, Facebook page, or once a month in The Bryan Times.