

Indiana SWCD Spreadsheet for Marketing Benefits of Conservation Districts vs. Costs to Local Governments

SWCD Spreadsheet Purpose

Indiana's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) receive financial, technical and educational support from a number of federal and state agencies in addition to county government. They also receive direct or in-kind operational support from other public and private organizations that support the mission of soil and water conservation districts. County government support is vital to district operations to carry out district programs. Too often county councils and commissions are reluctant to extend additional funding to districts because they are unaware of the significant federal and state dollars, as well as private funding, that a district brings into their respective counties to support the local economy, improve the soil, water and related natural resources of the county and, in turn, improve the quality of life for its citizens.

It is hoped that this leveraging spreadsheet will assist SWCDs to demonstrate the significant amount of non-county financial support that comes into their respective county through the network of partners working with and through their district. We encourage districts to carefully complete the spreadsheet and use it to present their local officials with a “bigger picture” of how their district impacts their local economy and the quality of life in the community.

SWCD Spreadsheet Construction & Data Entry

Completion of the SWCD spreadsheet is relatively simple for those experienced with Microsoft Excel software. Items or programs are simply entered under the appropriate heading with the correct dollar amount to the far right, and the spreadsheet calculates most subtotals and totals, as well as the leveraged impact of the SWCD on the local community. For best results, SWCD supervisors, staff and conservation agency partners should discuss individual programs, practices, and funding amounts *as a group* to best represent total conservation efforts in your county.

Contribution sources will vary depending on the agency or outside program being listed. For local sources, individual SWCDs and staff will identify and list those resources they received from the local community. For state and federal grants, SWCDs will also list the source for non-traditional funds they are receiving such as EPA 319 grants, LARE funds, Clean Water Indiana grants, foundation grants, private or commercial donors, etc. .

Technical agencies, average salaries and support figures are provided within the spreadsheet to allow SWCD staff to complete these sections.

For the ISDA Division of Soil Conservation District Support Specialist and Resource Specialist staff, you will need to locate the appropriate tables for each position located on the extreme right of the spreadsheet (follow blue arrows from main spreadsheet). The value of support for each position will be calculated by providing an estimated number of days each position has assisted your District and its programs.

For USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service staff, select the section at the bottom of the spreadsheet labeled “NRCS Salary & Support Info”, and select the averaged salary and support information needed based on the number of NRCS staff, their grades, and appropriate support (i.e. office rent, vehicles, supplies, etc.) for staff stationed in your District.

Installed conservation practices and their respective costs (which is a value to the local economy) are available from the USDA-NRCS P.R.S. reporting system, with assistance from your local NRCS District Conservationist. At printing, the conservation practices section of the spreadsheet should be printed on the **back** of any handouts generated for further discussion with officials on what the supervisors and local partnership staff have accomplished in your county and what these practices are worth to the general public. Note: If you prefer not to include the information on the value of conservation practices applied you can use only page one of the worksheet by itself, however adding the information on conservation practices applied provides a more complete picture for your local officials of the total benefits of your district, the county, and its taxpayers.

Utilizing Spreadsheet Data

Once the spreadsheet is completed, the marketing begins! The spreadsheet is designed as a tool to assist SWCD supervisors and staff in one-on-one discussions with County Councilmen, Commissioners, and other appropriate local officials. **However**, we recommend that under no circumstances should the spreadsheet be printed and mailed to these individuals unless accompanied by a well written letter detailing how these figures are derived. Local leaders will not see the true value of what your District brings to the county without a detailed explanation. Without an explanation by someone in your District, officials may regard some figures as highly inflated. They need to know that even though the district doesn't directly control some of the non-county dollars, they do however strongly **influence** these dollars coming into the county. They also need to know that some other non-county appropriated dollars shown (i.e. 319 grants, the state grant for operations) are in the direct control of the district.

Items To Promote & Discuss With Public Officials

Once the spreadsheet is complete and desired handouts are created, there are several items of budgetary significance that SWCD Supervisors and support staff should discuss with local officials:

- 1.) Explain to your local official how your District is the local governmental agency responsible for determining **their** constituents' needs and for setting local conservation policies carried out by various agencies and organizations. Assisting the SWCD with increased funding allows for better-trained and equipped SWCD staff to better meet the soil and water quality needs in the county.
- 2.) Discuss how establishing specific agricultural and/or urban practices aids in controlling erosion and run-off, while reducing expenses to other county agencies by solving problems like ditches filled with sediment, decreased property values, poor water quality at water treatment plants, animal waste run-off, urban sedimentation in city streets, or any number of other challenges that your SWCD helps the county address or prevent.
- 3.) When speaking with local officials, discuss facts such as how many dollars from outside sources are matched for each dollar invested by the county (many competing county agencies will not have such matches, so demonstrate why it is wise for the County to invest in **your SWCD and its programs**).
- 4.) Bring attention to the fact that SWCDs are a key mechanism for federal NRCS assistance to local landowners, meaning that all salaries, office space, equipment, and all technical and financial assistance may not be available to your officials' constituents without your District's continued presence. NRCS and DOSC staff often live and make purchases in the counties in which they work, adding to the local economy. Practices installed through NRCS also utilize local construction firms, materials, seed, etc., further stimulating the local economy.
- 5.) Demonstrate to local officials your District's future plans for addressing county concerns by explaining your SWCD's recent Business Plan or Long Range Plan, and explain how your budget is needed to accomplish your plans. Show your District's goals for solving local challenges as well as your administrative ability to do so!

For additional assistance, your local ISDA - Division of Soil Conservation District Support Specialist or USDA - NRCS Assistant State Conservationist is willing to assist with completing your spreadsheet. They will probably not have individual financial data for your county, but may be able to suggest resources and contacts to find the needed information.