

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

CONSERVATION AROUND THE NECK

2025 Area III Spring Meeting

On Wednesday, March 26, the Northern Neck SWCD hosted the 2025 Area III Spring Meeting. Virginia consists of 47 Soil & Water Conservation Districts that are divided into 6 areas. Area III consists of 8 districts – Colonial SWCD, Hanover-Caroline SWCD, Henricopolis SWCD, Monacan SWCD, Northern Neck SWCD, Three Rivers SWCD, Tidewater SWCD, and Tri-County/City SWCD. Every year, the host for the Area III Spring Meeting is rotated throughout the 8 districts. Rotating this meeting provides the host district with the opportunity to showcase specific conservation practices in their district. **Conservation's Role in Local Farm to Table Efforts.**

For the 2025 Area III Spring Meeting, we chose a popular and well-known venue within the Northern Neck, Menokin Road Farm. This venue is surrounded by cover crop fields planted by producers who participate in the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program. To showcase Conservation's Role in Local Farm to Table Efforts, we invited two local businesses – Grapewood Farm and Healthy Harvest Food Bank & Fresh.



To tie our theme of the meeting together, the amazing catering company, Denson's Grocery, owned and operated by Rocky & Blair Denson, utilized various ingredients from Grapewood Farm and Healthy Harvest to provide a delicious and heart-healthy meal. Grapewood Farm provided the flour to make the biscuits, cookies and breading for the fried tilapia bites and fried oysters. The tilapia and salad greens were provided by Healthy Harvest and the oysters were locally sourced from Captain Faunce Seafood. Fun Fact: Healthy Harvest Fresh is an aquaponics production facility that grows tilapia and filters the nutrients from their tanks to grow premium quality vegetables.

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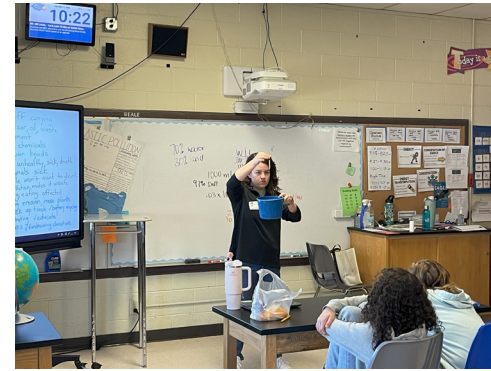
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Education & Outreach

During the fall, Lowery & Kelly taught a lesson on the importance of water conservation with the first semester 6th grade science classes at Montross Middle. In March, we had the opportunity to teach the same lesson to the second semester 6th grade science classes. Lowery's favorite lesson for this particular class is called "A Drop In A Bucket". Throughout this lesson students practice their literacy and math skills while also learning about science. Due to a warm, sunny day, the last class had the opportunity to go outside and view a MWEE project that was created by a 6th grade class several years ago. A MWEE is a Meaningful Watershed Education Experience made up of several components that include indoor and outdoor learning. The students at the time noticed an erosion issue on the school grounds where the stormwater runoff was going straight into a drainage pipe without filtration. The students decided to create a bioswale with native plants as their MWEE action project. A bioswale is a vegetated trench designed to capture and infiltrate stormwater runoff by slowing down the waterflow and filtering out pollutants to improve water quality. This project was funded by a Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) MWEE grant.



Household Hazardous & Electronic Waste Collection

Saturday, March 22 marked the first household hazardous waste (HHW) & electronic waste (e-waste) collection event of 2025. This event was for Lancaster County residents & property owners only. A total of 217 vehicles came through the line and almost every trunk, trailer, and truck bed were full. It is so exciting to see residents take advantage of this amazing opportunity to properly dispose of all their household chemicals, used oil, bulky electronics, and so much more. There are 2 more Spring HHW events coming up so be sure to mark your calendars.

- **Northumberland Co. Spring HHW - Saturday, April 26, 2025**
- **Westmoreland Co. Spring HHW - Saturday, May 17, 2025**

Please note: the April 26th event is restricted to Northumberland County residents and property owners only. The May 17th event is restricted to Westmoreland County residents and property owners and this event does not collect electronic waste.



NNSWCD's Producer Conference



The 2025 Northern Neck SWCD Producer Conference was held on Thursday, March 6, 2025 at the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department in Lively. This free event is open to all agricultural producers in the Northern Neck and a catered breakfast was provided by Excellent Eats.

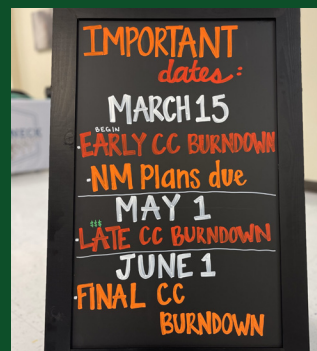


We enjoyed a morning full of networking with producers and partners while hearing from speakers on important ag-related topics. Aaron Saunders, NNSWCD Agricultural Conservation Specialist, provided an update on the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS) and what producers can expect for program year 2026. Each year, NNSWCD looks for a special topic to highlight for agricultural producers. For the 2025 Producer Conference, we invited two guest speakers to speak on two separate topics. Jayson Gill, Perdue Agribusiness Grain Merchandiser, gave a presentation on Grain Marketing Updates for 2025. He explained, in detail, what producers should expect and prepare for the 2025 planting and harvesting seasons. Jayson informed producers to calculate “break-evens” for the 2025 crop year, set target prices, and stay up to date with South America’s harvest progress and geopolitical and foreign policy. Our second guest

speaker was Calvin Balderson, Northumberland Chief of Emergency Services. Calvin’s presentation included Grain Bin Safety. This a perfect time of the year to remind producers of the dangerous hazards that can occur on the farm. He emphasized the importance of properly training all personnel and youth on safety regulations around grain bins, equipment, etc. Remember to use the proper personal protective equipment (PPE), have patience, dress appropriately, and always be aware of your surroundings and the hazards that can occur.



On behalf of NNSWCD, we want to thank all of the wonderful speakers, producers, and partners that attended and participated in this conference. We also want to thank all of our sponsors for donating door prizes that were raffled off to conclude the meeting.



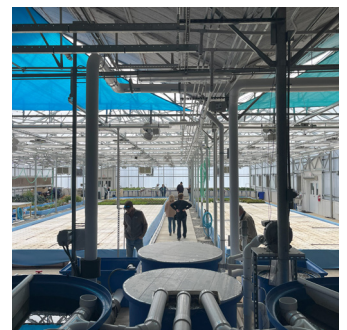
Operations

2025 Area III Spring Meeting (continued...)

Grapewood Farm is a locally owned farm in Westmoreland County along the Potomac River, who has participated in the VACS program. Grapewood Farm is owned and operated by Fred & Cathy Sachs. They are well-known for the center of their operation, the flour mill. Grapewood Farm produces flour for cornbread, cookies, and so much more. *“Grapewood Farm is dedicated to the good stewardship of the land and to managing its natural resources in a sustainable manner. We utilize practices such as no-till and reduced tillage, cover crops and crop rotation to help reduce damage and rebuild soil fertility”* – Fred & Cathy Sachs.



Healthy Harvest Food Bank and Healthy Harvest Fresh offer educational opportunities and extensive solutions to fight hunger and promote the importance of a healthy diet within the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. They offer a variety of programs available to the community. Cindy Balderson, President & CEO of Healthy Harvest, and Tammy Cole, Director of Operations at Healthy Harvest Fresh, gave a presentation on all the wonderful opportunities and benefits they provide to our local community. To conclude the meeting, Healthy Harvest provided attendees an opportunity to tour the facility.



USDA CORNER

I hope everyone had a safe and happy winter. I know the majority of you are gearing up for a super busy spring planting season! Just a few reminders for those of you with active contracts, applications, or potential applications.

In FY24, VA NRCS moved up ALL of our deadlines pertaining to funding new contracts. Here in Warsaw, we have already submitted all of our FY25 applications and are now working on the approval process for those contracts already preapproved. Just a reminder though that we are always taking applications. Even if we can't submit them right away for funding consideration, we will accept it and try to do some field visits prior to planning and ranking. The whole point of this expedited process is to have more work done on applications prior to ranking submission, so please come see us if you think we may be able to help with anything on your farm, forest, or wildlife areas!

Those of you who hold active contracts with us right now received practice reminder letters in the mail. If you have any questions about what the letters included, please give us a call. Reminder, we have many of you signed up for cover crop through various contracts, however, we are modifying those contracts to remove all or a portion of the tracts included so you can receive the higher price per acre through the NNSWCD. You cannot receive payment from both offices, so please be aware that we will have to modify several contracts before we can make payment if you have the same acreage under contract with both agencies.

We will be conducting our LWG (local working group) meeting soon. This is the opportunity where we take feedback and responses from our customers and partners and try our best to integrate change into future programs (within reason; some policy is dictated by the farm bill). If you would like to be included in the invitation to the LWG meeting, please call or email me or my team and we'll make sure you are on the list! If you would like to submit feedback but don't have time to make it to the meeting, we can email you the questions that will be asked (once they are released to us) and you can answer and email back. Or just stop in and let's have a talk about how we can improve! I'm happy to collect ALL the responses I can get so we can better serve everyone.

The application deadline for all FY26 financial assistance programs is October 10, 2025. If you need any assistance on your farm or property, please call or stop in so we can discuss how we can find a good fit for your needs!

We're very lucky here in Warsaw to have a fully staffed NRCS office. The same is not true for most of our neighboring offices. With the hiring freeze in place, most folks on my staff are helping other offices, so please be patient with us as we return phone calls, emails, and personal visits. If you have any issues, please contact me directly and I'll be happy to help in any way that I can. I hope everyone has a safe planting season!

Lucee Kossler

USDA-FSA Dates to Remember:

- ECAP Signup will close on August 15, 2025. Applications are pre-filled for all eligible producers
- Please report all land changes ASAP

USDA-NRCS:

Lucee F. Kossler, District Conservationist
Caroline Lancaster, Soil Conservationist
Brody Ellis, Soil Conservationist
Dylan Lockwood, Natural Resource Specialist
Karen Balentine, Soil Conservationist
Brooke Jenkins, Farm Bill Program Assistant

USDA-FSA:

Abigail Davis, County Executive Director
Kelsey Keyser, Program Technician
Tara Brann, Program Technician
Sarah Cole, Program Technician

Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS)

Planting a cover crop has numerous benefits to an agricultural field. Such benefits include preventing soil erosion, conserving soil nutrients, and water quality improvement. Typically, producers will plant rye, wheat, barley, clover, and/or a mix of these seeds to use for cover crop. Did you know cover crops can be used in gardens, also? Regardless of the size, planting cover crops can provide the same benefits to your garden that it does to an agricultural field.

Cover Crop Dates:

Be sure to keep these important cover crop dates in mind:

- Begin Kill or Destroy - March 15, 2025
- Additional \$10/acre - May 1, 2025 (or after)
- Final Kill or Destroy - June 1, 2025

Once have completed destroying all your cover crop, you must call our office to report it in order to receive payment. Keep in mind, the longer a cover crop stays planted, the more benefits your agricultural field will receive. Our technical staff recommends waiting on burning cover crops in your soybean fields until you are ready to begin planting.

PY26 VACS Sign-Ups

It's hard to believe that the 2025 planting season is upon us. While producers are working hard to get their spring crops into the ground, NNSWCD is working hard to finalize all program year 2025 payments and bring the fiscal year to a close. July 1, 2025 is the first day of program/fiscal year 2026 for NNSWCD and the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program. With that being said, it's time for all agricultural producers who participate in the VACS program to begin planning their 2026 crop rotation and cover crop plantings. Northern Neck SWCD's VACS sign-up period for program year 2026 will begin on Tuesday, July 1, 2025 and run through Friday, August 8, 2025. Keep in mind that appointments are required.



NORTHERN NECK
SOUTH WEST COASTAL DISTRICT

**VIRGINIA AG
COST-SHARE
SIGN-UPS**

**TUESDAY, JULY 1 -
FRIDAY, AUGUST 8**

CALL TO MAKE YOUR APPOINTMENT TODAY!

804-313-9102
brandon.dillistin@nnswwcd.org
aaron.saunders@nnswwcd.org
www.nnswwcd.org

Cover Crops
Stream Exclusion Fencing
Preserving Wetlands
Nutrient Management

*Appointments are required

DCR Erosion Surveys

In March, NNSWCD's technical staff, Brandon and Aaron, spent several days with DCR Engineer, Raleigh Coleman, completing erosion surveys. They surveyed several different erosion issues within 4 different sites.



Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

From January through March, one living shoreline project has been completed. There are 11 approved projects in various phases of construction. The deadline for 2025 projects to be completed is May 9. Between now and then, Lowery will be busy working with contractors, tide charts and SEAS to inspect each project throughout the construction process. We look forward to many successful projects.

Upcoming VCAP application deadlines:

- May 2
- June 6



Living Shorelines

On April 7th, Lowery was asked to give a living shorelines presentation to the Northern Neck Extension Master Gardeners during their monthly meeting. This meeting took place at the Healthy Harvest Fresh Education Center. The Northern Neck Extension Master Gardeners (NNEMG) are volunteers who educate their communities on sustainable landscape management environmentally robust gardening practices. This specific chapter of Master Gardeners serves Essex, Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland counties through various grants from Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. The NNEMGs have referred over 60 homeowners and/or landowners to VCAP through their Shoreline Evaluation Program. Throughout this presentation, Lowery explained the detailed VCAP application process Northern Neck SWCD uses and various living shoreline projects that have recently been completed and approved. We appreciate the NNEMGs for reaching out and giving Lowery the opportunity to educate their group on living shorelines and highlight all her hard work with VCAP.





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Kelly Brann, Marketing & Outreach Specialist
Aaron Saunders, Agricultural Conservation Specialist

Elected Directors:

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Frank A. "Bert" Johnson, Jr., Vice-Chair (Richmond)
J. Vince Garland, Treasurer (Richmond)
Benson C. Braxton (Westmoreland)
James A. "Aaron" Rowland (Lancaster)
Robert G. "Bobby" Vanlandingham (Northumberland)
Lewis K. Walker III (Lancaster)
Richard E. Wilkins (Westmoreland)

Appointed Directors:

Louis Gregory "Greg" Basye, At Large Appointed Member (Northumberland)
Stephanie Romelczyk, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent



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