

Kalamazoo Conservation District

Annual Report 2021



*"Protecting Soil & Water for Generations;
not only today's generation but future generations."*

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Kalamazoo Conservation District is a governmental agency established under state law to carry out programs for conservation, use and development of soil, water, and related resources at the local level.

Established in 1946, KCD is an independent county level resource assisting Kalamazoo County residents in resolving natural resource concerns. The District was self-funded in 2021, serving the public with revenue obtained through an annual tree and shrub fundraiser sale, grants, sponsorships and donations.

At KCD, we partner with federal and state agencies to coordinate and implement conservation and environmental programs throughout the community. We have capabilities in protection, development and management of natural resources.

Conservation District Board of Directors

Ed Cagney, Chair

Lynn Coville, Vice Chair

Mike Klooster, Treasurer

Tricia Keala, Director

David Benac, Director

Conservation District Staff

Linda Zabik & Molly Buckham, MAEAP Technician

Elizabeth Rochow, Manager

Fallon Chabala & Zach Whittacre, BCK-CISMA Invasive Species Coordinator—housed at Barry CD

Patrick Gordon, Produce Safety Technician—housed at Berrien CD

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Staff

Di'Shun Melbert, District Conservationist

Brandon Fisher, Soil Conservationist

2022 BOARD SCHEDULE

The KCD Board is scheduled to meet at 8 am on the third Friday of the month at the District Office.

Please check the district website for up-to-date meeting information.

These meetings are open to the public and everyone is welcome to attend!

January 21
February 11
March 18
April 15
May 27
June 17
July 15
August 19
September 16
October 21

Dear Friends of the District,

In 2021 despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Conservation District was able to deliver conservation programming in Kalamazoo County. KCD continued to actively provide land owner assistance through MAEAP (Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program), BCK-CISMA (Barry, Calhoun, Kalamazoo—Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area), and Produce Safety Programs. Our annual reforestation seedling sale was a popular event and kept us busy in the spring. We were also excited to provide several Conservorama education programs in May and June for area 5th grade students. Habitat improvement continued throughout the year at the Gourdneck State Game Area. Although we were unable to host an annual meeting, Tricia Keala was appointed as director on the KCD Board for an additional year and David Benac joined the Board of Directors in May.

We hope you enjoy reading about our programs and accomplishments from 2021 and know these are possible with the support of Kalamazoo County residents. Whether you work with our technicians, purchase trees at our sale, brought in well water for testing or participate in any of our other programs, thank you for joining us in conservation efforts.

Elizabeth Rochow
District Manager

MAEAP: Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program



Water pollution comes from many sources, and some of it comes from farms. That's why Kalamazoo Conservation District is helping farmers to enroll in MAEAP. MAEAP, a voluntary program, helps farmers adopt cost-effective practices that reduce erosion and water runoff into ponds, streams, and rivers. This, in turn, helps farmers comply with state and federal laws. Through this program, the Conservation districts are able to recognize and reward top stewards of the land. This is a state program delivered by conservation districts and is open to any Michigan farmer. There are

four categories of recognition: 1) Cropping, 2) Livestock, 3) Farmstead, and 4) Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat.

In 2021, the Kalamazoo MAEAP program conducted 200 Risk reductions, 10 new MAEAP verifications, 16 MAEAP reverifications, and 31 risk assessments. Any farm that works towards MAEAP verification may qualify for Cost Share funds. In 2021, \$3,000 in cost share was distributed which included the following items/practices: spill kits, analyses of drinking water for nitrates and coliform bacteria, soil nutrient testing kits, fire extinguishers, backflow valves, rain gauges, soil composting thermometers, roof gutters and a manure composting pad.

During August of 2021, forty-four water samples were tested for nitrates during our well water screening event. Of the 44 samples screened, there were 21 detections of nitrate, with four exceeding the safe drinking water limit of 10 mg/L. High concentrations of nitrates can be harmful, especially to those that may have compromised immune systems or babies. Nitrates can be removed from your water making it safe to drink.

The following is a summary of environmental outcomes that were calculated from MAEAP verified farms in Kalamazoo County during 2021 fiscal year:

- 191 acres included in a nutrient plan or comprehensive nutrient management plan(CNMP)
- 3,650 linear feet of buffer/filter strips
- 8 acres of cover crops
- 26 acres of conservation tillage
- 126 acres of no-till, zone till, or grass cover
- 100 feet of livestock exclusion
- 140 acres of pest management plans
- 290.9 tons of sediment reduced
- 466.8 pounds of phosphorus reduced
- 933.1 pounds of nitrogen reduced

If you are interested in working towards MAEAP verification, please contact the office and we will start the process!



BCK-Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area

The Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program funds the operation of the Barry-Calhoun-Kalamazoo Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (BCK CISMA). The CISMA's goal is to combat the threat of invasive species in these three counties while also educating residents about invasive species and the best ways to manage them. The CISMA primarily focuses on managing invasive species that are on Michigan's watch list and/or prohibited by the state. Each spring the CISMA puts together a strike team whose mission is to manage invasive species on resident's properties, roadside right of ways, and military installations. In 2021 they surveyed more than 1,300 acres for invasive species and treated over 55 of those acres! The CISMA also held 3 landing blitzes at area lakes, 3 invasive species presentations, 10 new site visits, and removed 348 invasive Red Swamp Crayfish from Clark Park in Vicksburg, MI. Mile-a-Minute weed (pictured below), an invasive species on Michigan's Watch list, was first detected in Michigan in 2020 at Albion College in Calhoun County. If this plant becomes widely established in Michigan it could have a detrimental impact on both native ecosystems and Michigan's tree farms as it can grow up to 6 inches a day and can quickly climb and smother surrounding trees. The CISMA surveyed more than 3,000 acres of public and private property and found 3 new locations of this plant in Calhoun County. The CISMA was able to treat 3 acres where Mile-a-Minute weed occurred but since their seeds can remain viable in the seed bank for 6 years or more, follow up treatment will be necessary in the upcoming years.



Mile-a-Minute weed occurred but since their seeds can remain viable in the seed bank for 6 years or more, follow up treatment will be necessary in the upcoming years.

Fallon Chabala stepped down from the CISMA program and has taken another employment position. We would like to thank her for her dedication and work to educate us about invasives and provide management in controlling invasive species. We wish her the best in her future endeavors.

Zach Whittacre was hired as CISMA coordinator in November 2021.

Produce Safety Program

Patrick Gordon, Produce Safety Technician, provides many tools to help growers of Southwest Michigan assess risks involved with the growing, handling, harvesting, storing, and transportation of fresh produce covered by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR). All services offered are free, voluntary, and confidential with a primary goal of assisting area growers to reach or maintain compliance with tricky regulations and educating on best practices for preventing contamination of fresh produce. Growers can access services by contacting our technician directly, reaching out to their respective Conservation District, or through the Produce Safety Team website.

Due to constraints associated with Covid-19, the Produce Safety team developed alternative methods to serve produce growers of Michigan. Many of these methods use a virtual platform as an alternative to face-to-face interactions. The Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety Team has worked to continue developing and administering Produce Safety Alliance Online Grower Trainings throughout the year. This virtual platform has allowed for the continuation of on-farm produce safety training, the first step in developing proper produce safety programs. The Produce Safety Technician website (www.miofps.org) continues to be a useful tool, serving as a database of resources for Michigan Growers and providing a direct link to the Produce Safety Technicians.

Proposed rule changes to the PSR water rule were announced by the FDA in December 2021. The Produce Safety Team has since been hosting meetings to inform farmers of these changes and compiling input from Michigan's growers for submission to the FDA during the comment period ending in April 2022. Our technician has been working with growers individually to create constructive comments for submission to the FDA as well. It is important during this comment period that produce growers of Michigan have their unique circumstances taken into consideration.



Each year the Conservation District works directly with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service to recruit agricultural producers for the Federal Farm Bill Programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). These programs not only offer valuable technical assistance to Kalamazoo County farmers and landowners, helping them become better stewards of the land, but also contribute to the local economy by bringing in thousands of federal dollars to fund conservation practices. This money has a direct impact on the success of local farms, businesses, and contractors.

This year has been phase two of a joint outreach effort between KCD and NRCS. In 2021 we worked together to identify forestland owners and inform them of opportunities and benefits of the EQIP program. Through that outreach we built relationships with local foresters and land owners, received seven contracts, and met many interested individuals. In 2022 we have certified all the forest management plans that went to contract and we are actively working with them to implement the conservation practices in the forest management plans through EQIP and CSP. These practices will address forest health, wildlife habitat, and invasive plant species. In 2023 we are planning additional outreach to cropland agricultural producers to address soil and water quality.

Contact Di'Shun Melbert for more information.

Annual Reforestation Seedling Sale

KCD had another busy tree sale, supplying over 7,500 seedlings to local customers. It's amazing that Kalamazoo County residents planted so many seedlings!

Thank you to our dedicated tree crew volunteers who put in over 100 hours wrapping, sorting, and bundling the seedlings making our tree sale possible.



Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

At Gourdneck State Game Area



During 2021, there was a lot happening at the Gourdneck State Game Area in Portage. Black River Habitats, LLC was contracted to provide brush management on the 65 acres as part of the restoration work. Beginning in January and working through mid-March, Keith Kluting and his team thinned and provided cut stump treatments of red maple and other unwanted saplings. In May, they were treating invasive spotted knapweed. Then during the active growing season of summer, they were spending considerable time battling autumn olive, honeysuckle, and other invasive and undesirable shrub and bush species.

This project is part of the long term restoration plan of 65 acres to a high quality oak savanna community. This process includes developing and maintaining wildlife openings by opening the canopy through selective and targeted timber cutting and removing the undesirable barrens tree and shrub species. Our project has been extended for an additional year due to working restrictions in 2020 and will be completed in the fall of 2022.



Our project work is being done with the assistance of the Michigan DNR Wildlife Habitat Grant to enhance wildlife habitat. These grants are funded through a portion of hunting and fishing licenses that are sold each year with the purpose of providing funding to conservation partners to assist the Wildlife Division with developing or improving wildlife habitat for game species.



Conservorama Programs

Due to the uncertainty of in-person schooling in the 2020-2021 school year, we reworked our program model and the Conservorama event became virtual programs. Although the event looked very different this year, it was still successful. We worked with 8 Kalamazoo Public School classes at Prairie Ridge Elementary and Edison Environmental Science Academy. During May and June each class received 4 lessons. These included lessons on Conservation Science & Careers, Storm Water, Water Quality and Native Bees. All of these lessons were designed for virtual teaching and strived for student participation and engagement. The Storm Water lesson included a demonstration of an elaborate storm water model (borrowed from the Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner). The Water Quality lesson focused on the use



of aquatic plants and critters as biological indicators of water quality. Using a microscope attached to the computer, the students could see a variety of live aquatic plants and macroinvertebrates which had been collected from a local stream. This was made possible through the use of portable LCD microscopes which were given to all of the participating teachers for their future class use. The final lesson explored Native

Bees. Students learned about native bees while comparing characteristics and traits of social and solitary bees. During the final part of the lesson, the students assembled a native bee home structure which they could use to attract native bees to an outdoor space near their home or neighborhood.

In July, a teacher from Edison Elementary whose classes participated in the program in June, requested additional programming for her rising 6th grade summer school class. This program, titled "It's an Invasion," was presented to the class in-person. This lesson included a presentation representing some of Michigan's invasive species with photos and live plants. After a discussion, students were engaged in an active game in order to simulate the growth and spreading habits of some Michigan native and invasive species.



All student participants and their families received informational packets and each teacher was given a portable and computer-ready microscope, local conservation information and several STEM activity guide books.

Funding for the Conservorama programs was generously provided by the Kalamazoo Community Foundation.

Kalamazoo Conservation District Award

AACORN

Conservation Farm of the Year



In 2011, parents of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Southwest Michigan formed AACORN (*Adult Agricultural Community Options for Residential Needs*) Farm. The group dreamed of appropriate housing, meaningful work and therapeutic activities for adults with ASD. Driven by the need to serve adults no longer in the school system, a program to provide enrichment opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities was the first focus. AACORN incorporated in 2011, and was awarded 501(c)3 non-profit status in 2013 opening at Tillers International in Scotts, Michigan. It began with five young adults learning animal care, gardening, making arts and crafts, and participating in outdoor activities that emphasized fitness, teamwork, and positive responses to others. Needing more indoor space,

AACORN moved to leased property in 2014. The program expanded to four days per week and grew to serve 15-20 adults and was opened to adults with any developmental disability. Also, classes from the KRESA young adult program began participating. Culinary activities, sewing, and making goat milk soap and other goat milk products were added to the curriculum. Participants began to connect to the community, by making regular deliveries of fresh eggs and hand-tied fleece blankets to Kalamazoo's YWCA. Over the years, AACORN has added additional full and part time staff, college interns and volunteers. In the summer of 2018, AACORN purchased a 40 acre farm from Tillers International and moved to the new property in 2018. Soon after the move, Linda Zabik, MAEAP Specialist, began working with AACORN. The staff and board at AACORN knew that MAEAP was the perfect fit for their farm but meeting all the MAEAP requirements was going to take some focused efforts and commitment. Eric Birko, the new Executive Director, was eager to learn how to better manage the farm and responded with enthusiasm, energy, and a commitment to move forward with MAEAP. With all that Eric and the rest of the staff had going on, it's impressive to see how quickly the practice changes were made to protect the environment and to comply with legal and MAEAP requirements. AACORN achieved MAEAP verification in 2021 and in order to achieve verification, they completed several things including: taking soil samples from the garden and pasture for nutrients, collecting a water sample from the on-site well, installing backflow protection on the hoses to protect the well, completing an emergency plan and added a spill kit, completing a manure management plan – which includes proper composting, odor management, proper handling of bodies of dead animals, and recordkeeping, as well as installing gutters on the barn to prevent the clean water from coming in contact with the livestock area. The farm currently has small livestock including goats, chickens, pigs and boars.

AACORN strives to be a steward of the land. This desire is transferred to the participants in the program. We've enjoyed working with AACORN and look forward to seeing all the great things that are yet to happen at the farm.



Linda Zabik, John Best, Eric Birko, Cindy Semark, and Mike Klooster

Kalamazoo Conservation District

Fiscal year 2021 Financial Statements

Kalamazoo Conservation District Balance Sheet As of September 30, 2021 Sep 30, 21

ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
001 · General Checking	18,586.30
004 · Petty Cash	<u>153.27</u>
Total Checking/Savings	18,739.57
Accounts Receivable	
018 · Accounts Receivable	<u>9,710.89</u>
Total Accounts Receivable	9,710.89
Other Current Assets	
108 · Tree Inventory	-30.54
109 · Platbook Inventory	3,503.70
110 · Resale Materials Inventory	<u>641.96</u>
Total Other Current Assets	<u>4,115.12</u>
Total Current Assets	<u>32,565.58</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>32,565.58</u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Other Current Liabilities	
227 · Sales Tax Payable	15.95
228 · Due to State of Michigan	834.63
257 · Accrued Wages Payable	843.18
261 · Accrued Sick Leave Payable	<u>4,698.60</u>
Total Other Current Liabilities	<u>6,392.36</u>
Total Current Liabilities	<u>6,392.36</u>
Total Liabilities	6,392.36
Equity	
390 · Fund Balance	24,438.96
Net Income	<u>1,734.26</u>
Total Equity	<u>26,173.22</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u>32,565.58</u>

Kalamazoo Conservation District Profit Loss FY 2022 Oct '20 - Sep 21

Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
530 · Items for Purchase	16,715.85
539 · State Grants	161,728.04
600 · Charges for Services	15,000.00
671 · Other Revenues Control	<u>5,040.87</u>
Total Income	198,484.76
Cost of Goods Sold	
789 · Cost of Goods Sold	<u>1,366.06</u>
Total COGS	<u>1,366.06</u>
Gross Profit	197,118.70
Expense	
701 · Personal Services	85,694.74
726 · Supplies Control	10,433.83
800 · Other Services & Charges	83,471.74
900 · Printing & Publishing	43.96
901 · Shipping & Handling	31.24
955 · Donations	50.00
956 · Nutrient Tests	273.93
957 · Dues & Fees	250.00
960 · Meeting Expenses	135.00
967 · District Overhead for Grant	<u>15,000.00</u>
Total Expense	<u>195,384.44</u>
Net Ordinary Income	<u>1,734.26</u>
Net Income	<u>1,734.26</u>