

Southwest Ohio Agriculture Conservation Menu

Project Summary

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Brown, Clermont, Clinton and Highland counties are working together to develop a new website, the **Southwest Ohio Agricultural Conservation Menu (SOACM)**, to share information on conservation programs and technical services that are available locally to advance farming practices. The SOACM website will be a one-stop clearinghouse for all conservation programs. The site will also include information and regular updates on watershed health and local water quality monitoring efforts. The intent of the SOACM website is to provide local farmers with the services and information they need to choose the right agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) that can advance their farming operations and provide protection for local rivers and lakes

Project Background

Nutrient Runoff and Watershed Health

Similar to other watersheds and inland lakes across Ohio, the water quality in the East Fork Little Miami River watershed and neighboring watersheds have declined over the years because of excess sediment and fertilizer runoff. During rain events, fertilizer runs off farm fields and chemically treated lawns, spilling excess phosphorus and nitrogen (or, nutrients) into local streams. The excess nutrients cause algae to grow, which over time can choke out animals and plants in streams and lakes. Many segments of our local rivers and streams are not meeting water quality standards because there have been declines in the fish and bug communities that typically thrive in healthy streams.

Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

Excess nutrients produce algal blooms. Although most blooms are not harmful, there are some that are a type of **cyanobacteria**, commonly known as blue-green algae, that have the ability to produce toxins. These blooms are commonly known as harmful algal blooms (HABs). HABs can cause illness or irritation – sometimes even death – in pets, livestock, and humans. Cyanobacteria often float to form scums on or near the surface, forming colonies that often look like bright green paint. Since 2011, there has been a steady increase in the occurrence of HABs in the William H. Harsha Reservoir (or, East Fork Lake), which has led to beach closures, public health advisories and the cancellation of public events. In 2015, HABs stretched over 650 miles along the Ohio River and some of its major tributaries from August through October. The HABs produced toxins that required additional treatment at drinking water plants and many communities were strained by the additional expense.

Project Goal

It is critical to reduce the heavy load of nutrients flowing into local streams and rivers. To reduce nutrient pollution in our watersheds, area SWCDs are focusing their efforts to streamline relevant information to help landowners implement effective conservation practices. Local SWCDs are looking to engage farmers and landowners in focus group meetings and workshops to brainstorm ideas for new and existing programs and to consider types of additional local resources that would be helpful for conservation. Participation in this initiative would only involve 2-3 focus group meetings throughout 2019, with some email or phone correspondence between meetings. If you're interested in learning more about this project and participating, please call Clermont SWCD: 513-732-7075 ext. 6.