

# WHAT IS A CONSERVATION DISTRICT?



Conservation Districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs. County conservation districts work to help people and communities nurture the natural resources in their area including soil, water, wildlife, trees and other plants. Conservation Districts work with landowners and local governments to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands.

While initially established to encourage farmers to conserve soil and water, today's districts have evolved; their areas of expertise involve almost every area of natural resource conservation. Each Conservation District is led by a Board of Directors made up of local people from all walks of life. These volunteers study natural resource issues relevant to their county and make decisions that enhance and protect the local community.

## WHAT DO CONSERVATION DISTRICTS DO?

- Offer technical assistance and educational guidance to growers, landowners and managers, local governments, teachers, students and residents.
- Provide information and help on matters such as healthy soils, protecting water quality, and environmental education.
- Make federal and state programs offered by the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and state Departments of Agriculture available to growers and nonprofit organizations.
- Promote workforce development in the environmental and agricultural sectors.
- Carry out regulatory responsibilities delegated to them by state agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection to conduct inspections and grant permits related to soil and water pollution and sediment control programs.
- Work with school districts, educators, Career and Technical Education teachers, and other entities engaged in natural resource management/environmental education to provide additional support/structure for the formal agricultural education currently occurring.

Philadelphia is  
the only county  
in Pennsylvania  
without a  
Conservation  
District •

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Resources:

[Pennsylvania Association of  
Conservation Districts](#)

[National Association of  
Conservation Districts](#)

[New York City Soil & Water  
Conservation District](#)

## HOW ARE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS FUNDED?

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Conservation Districts have access to a diverse array of funding streams, including state and county budget allocations, federal and state program funds, and permit fees from delegated state environmental programs. Funding can also come from public and corporate grants and donations, foundation grants, fees for services, and fundraising activities.

## WHY DOES PHILADELPHIA NEED A CONSERVATION DISTRICT?

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Conservation districts can implement a variety of programs relevant to the needs of Philadelphia's growers, and provide assistance for a range of issues unique to the county. For example, New York City Soil & Water Conservation District focuses on Green Infrastructure, Soil (testing, research, data collection and education) and Environmental Education.

*Philadelphia loses out on state and federal funding to support and bolster urban agriculture and environmental initiatives available to every other county because we have not established a Conservation District.*

Philadelphia's growers have difficulty with soil testing and remediation, often reaching out to land grant universities and agencies in other states for assistance. Growers also have difficulty navigating the office of Licenses and Inspection. A Conservation District could provide a single source of direction for growers trying to create and manage their growing spaces.

A Conservation District can provide the much needed link between the informal and formal educational frameworks that are currently being provided to students and their communities. As an organizing entity, the Conservation District would have the opportunity to transfer school based skill sets to the community receiving informal agricultural and growing education.

A Conservation District would also provide the unique opportunity to work within Pennsylvania's common core educational standards at a public school based level while utilizing specific competencies and trade related hands-on opportunities.

## HOW DO WE ESTABLISH A CONSERVATION DISTRICT IN PHILADELPHIA?

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Conservation Districts are created by a resolution from the county's governing body after determining that soil and water conservation and erosion prevention are matters of public concern and a substantial segment of the community want these services. Here is where we need your help! The first step to establishing a Conservation District is to conduct a needs assessment to determine existing conditions in the county that could benefit from the services a district could provide. It is crucial that as many community members as possible tell us about the work they are doing, as well as the areas where they would like the technical support, assistance, or education that conservation districts typically offer. All of this information would establish the basis for a Conservation District.