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Keeping it local



Following national recognition that wise soil and water conservation use serve as national policy, Hugh Hammond Bennett, known as the father of soil & water conservation districts, understood the need for assistance at the local level. Bennett advised Franklin Roosevelt on soil health and the fact “Americans in the nation’s midsection had farmed too much, too fast.” Bennett steadfastly educated leaders that the land could not withstand this type of assault, that the grasslands had been “hammered and left without cover” and that “dusters” were not an act of God but man and would continue to get worse.

As a result of Bennett’s steadfast effort and Roosevelt’s leadership, in 1936 a Standard State District Act, also referred to as “District Law,” was developed at the federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which encouraged the citizens of local governments to organize conservation districts as political subdivisions of state government. President Roosevelt wrote to each state governor, urging each to approve legislation that would create Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Today, Ohio’s Soil and Water Districts, provide the “boots on the ground” who work with developers, farmers, businesses, citizens, and local governments on natural resource and water quality needs. Ohio’s SWCDs operate diverse natural resources-based programs focused on working with agricultural, rural, suburban, and urban lands that rely on non-mandated funding allocated at the local and state level. The state’s increased focus to tackle natural resource issues, particularly in meeting the demands of new water quality programming, gives Ohio’s SWCDs more responsibilities and greater demands than ever before.

