



Sustainable Farms and Fields Program (SFF)



Compost spreader, King County

Report to the Washington State Legislature Fiscal Year 2022-23

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Program Overview

Legislative Background

The Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) grant program was established in statute during the 2020 legislative session with strong bipartisan support, and support from a wide range of stakeholders. For fiscal year 2022-23 (FY23), the legislature awarded \$2 million, with ongoing funding of \$1.5 million per fiscal year.

The goal of the program is to increase the voluntary implementation of climate-smart practices to increase carbon sequestration and reduce carbon dioxide equivalent (greenhouse gases or GHG) emissions on farmland, rangeland, and aquaculture tidelands in Washington by providing technical and financial assistance to producers.

Not only do these practices help mitigate the global impacts of climate change, they also increase resiliency to drought, flooding, and other environmental stressors related to climate change. The numerous co-benefits of these practices include improved air and water quality, improved soil health, and increased habitat for wildlife, pollinators, and fish. Implementation of precision agriculture can reduce fossil fuel consumption, further reducing GHG emissions. Moreover, these climate-smart practices help producers save money in their farming operations.

Program Description

Sustainable Farms and Fields (SFF) is a grant program that makes it easier and more affordable for farmers, ranchers, and shellfish growers to implement more climate-smart practices and projects that increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Conservation districts (CDs) and other public entities can apply for SFF grants to provide technical and financial assistance to interested farmers, ranchers, and shellfish growers in their communities.

SFF supports the work of the [Washington Soil Health Initiative](#) (WaSHI). WaSHI is a collaboration between Washington State University, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and the Washington State Conservation Commission.



Funding Leverage

In FY23, the SFF program funded 17 cost-share projects for a total of \$439,496 in state funding, leveraging over \$259,000 in landowner cash and in-kind match. SCC has been working to secure federal funding by requesting, with assistance from Rep. Schrier and other members of the WA delegation, that USDA Sec. Vilsack fund SFF as a national pilot project and by applying for a \$12M USDA climate-smart commodity partnership grant (not funded). SFF is also exploring partnership opportunities with NRCS to utilize some of its climate-smart funding for SFF technical assistance and training. SCC has also worked with Carbon WA to secure private funding and explore public-private partnership opportunities. SCC continues to look for opportunities to leverage state funding.

Program Accomplishments

In FY23, the SCC received 83 applications totaling \$3.4 million in funding requests through the Sustainable Farms and Fields program. A total of 50 projects managed by 24 conservation districts and 1 county government were completed with \$1,835,375 of SFF funding.

Activities supported by SFF grants include technical assistance to work with producers, cost-share projects, demonstration of innovative climate-smart technologies, materials, and supplies to support climate-smart practices, and equipment purchase for use in equipment-sharing programs.

SFF assigns extra points in the prioritization of projects that create riparian buffers or other fish habitat enhancements or that create pollinator habitat. Projects that serve historically underserved farmers also receive higher prioritization in the ranking process.

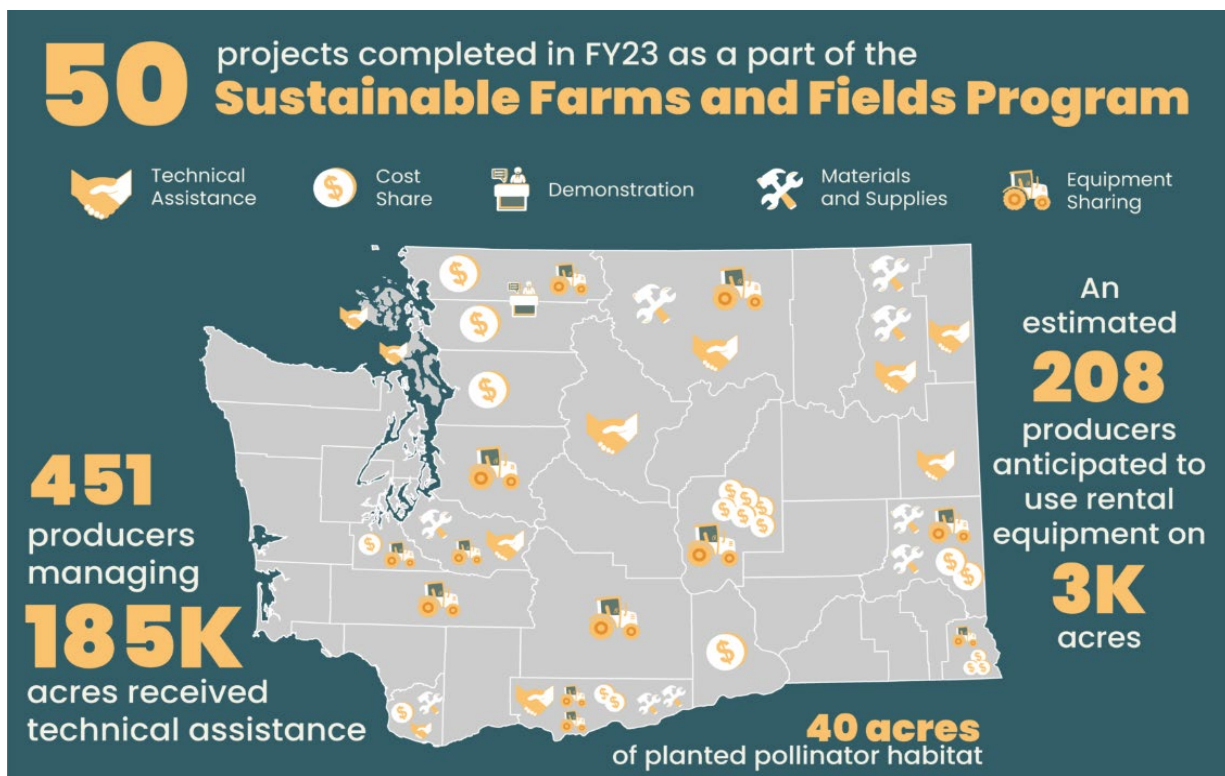


Image courtesy of Molly McIlquham, Washington State University

The Washington Climate Smart Estimator Tool (based on COMET Planner) was used to model reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration. When the practice of interest was unavailable in this tool, a methodology approved by SFF staff was used. Collectively, these projects were estimated to have an impact of 5,873 metric tons carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e)¹ in the year following project implementation. Estimation of carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions on working landscapes is an evolving science that is currently the focus of continued research and development worldwide. Moreover, these values are only estimates since carbon sequestered in soil and vegetation is not permanently captured and, in some cases, the project may continue to sequester carbon or reduce greenhouse gas emissions beyond the first year of implementation.

¹ 5,873 metric tons CO₂e is equivalent to removing 1,307 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles off the road for one year.

Program Areas

Technical Assistance

10 projects totaling \$396,051

Through technical assistance grants, conservation districts were able to work with individual producers to identify opportunities to store carbon or reduce greenhouse gas emissions on their operations. Technical assistance included site visits with landowners and targeted outreach events such as workshops. During fiscal year 2023, 451 producers managing approximately 185,000 acres received technical assistance through SFF funding.

Technical Assistance

Doug Collins of Washington State University discusses cover crops during a workshop held by Pierce Conservation District funded through Sustainable Farms and Fields.



Photo by Ali Nichols, Pierce Conservation District

Cost-Share

17 projects totaling \$439,496 in state funding, leveraging over \$259,000 in landowner cost-share match for projects impacting 11,534 acres

Cost-share projects involve the producer paying for a percentage of the cost of implementing a climate-smart practice as determined by each conservation district. Some examples of SFF cost-share projects include the purchase of no-till seed drills, compost spreaders, and GPS units for precision agriculture. Other cost-share projects involved plantings of trees or shrubs on farms, planting of cover crops, application of biochar to agricultural land, and installation of manure separators, reducing methane emissions to the atmosphere and aiding in lagoon storage capacity.

Cost-Share Testimonial

“The Columbia Basin is rich in both crops and dairy industry. This funding allowed for much larger projects and equipment purchases to further the development on these farms that were not possible in the past with limited cost share funds. Livestock funding has declined and Columbia Basin Conservation District was only able to fund 1 dairy project per year on average in the past. Last fiscal year thanks to SFF we were able to help fund 2 separator projects on livestock operations, and 3 reduced tillage drills to help reduce erosion and retain soil carbon. Similarly, the district has a drill for rent to help our smaller producers, made available through the SFF program.”

- Dinah Rouleau, Columbia Basin Conservation District Staff



Klingamen manure separator, photo courtesy of Columbia Basin Conservation District

Demonstration of Innovative Climate-Smart Technologies

1 project totaling \$29,155

Funds from Sustainable Farms and Fields can be used to demonstrate the use of new or innovative climate-smart technologies and/or practices to local producers. In FY23, a collaborative demonstration project led by Skagit Conservation District focused on small-scale biochar production and use.



Biochar kiln demonstration at WaSHI SoilCon 2023

Materials and Supplies

8 projects totaling \$405,426

Through materials and supplies funding, SFF grant recipients purchased cover crop seeds, seedlings, and soil amendments for use in implementing climate-smart practices on a total of 5,472 acres.

Materials and Supplies Testimonial

“Our farm is working to integrate pollinator/cover crops into our rotation and on our farm. Our aim is to enhance our soil health, reduce the amount of time our soils are without plants, and increase the habitat for beneficial insects, especially pollinators. Choosing and getting pollinator/cover crop seed can be very expensive and confusing. I am grateful for the opportunity, through the Palouse Conservation District, to participate in the Sustainable Farms & Fields program because it provided us with seed and advice on appropriate pollinator and cover crop seed. I think the program will be key to encouraging farmers to grow cover crops and have much-needed pollinator habitat in our area.”

- A Pullman, WA Producer



Cover crops being grazed, photo courtesy of Palouse Conservation District

Equipment Sharing

12 projects totaling \$528,374

Programs that rent equipment to producers are relatively common among conservation districts and allow a “try before you buy” approach to be taken by those interested in adopting a new climate-smart practice or allow access to equipment that may not be affordable or practical for smaller farms. Fiscal year 2023 SFF equipment-sharing grant recipients estimate that over 200 producers per year will use the various pieces of rental equipment purchased through SFF to implement climate-smart practices on over 3,000 acres. This shared equipment will have a long-term impact on producers’ ability to implement climate-smart practices.

Equipment Share Testimonial

“Lewis Conservation District used the SFF grant to purchase a six foot Great Plains 1590 no-till seed drill. From left, Veterans Conservation Corps Intern Chris Volmert, fourth-generation dairy farmer Jack Mallonee and his father Maynard Mallonee, English shepherd Turbo, Lewis Conservation District Special Projects Coordinator Kelly Verd, and Outreach Coordinator Kenna Fosnacht pose for a photo in front of the district’s no-till seed drill.”

- Lewis Conservation District



Photo by Jared Wenzelburger, used by permission by The Chronicle

Additional Program Accomplishments

Snohomish Conservation District and San Juan Islands Conservation District took the lead at development of a carbon farm planning template, which will be shared with other districts for comment in the fall so that it can be further refined and deployed for use in future technical assistance. SCC also provided soil health testing equipment to 27 interested conservation districts. Additionally, the SCC had SFF materials translated into Spanish to increase communication about this new program with some underserved farming communities.

Program Testimonial

“We are extremely grateful for the financial support received in FY2023 and FY2024 from the Sustainable Farms & Fields program. This funding has helped to fill gaps in our programming and allowed us to extend assistance to landowners that we would not have been able to offer otherwise. The Sustainable Farms & Fields program provides the opportunity to rapidly and efficiently implement innovative, climate-smart conservation.”

- Tami Stubbs, Palouse Conservation District Staff



Roll crimper, photo courtesy of Palouse Conservation District



Manure screener at Asotin Conservation District, photo courtesy of Alison Halpern, SCC

Cost-Share Project Highlight

With the purchase of a Trommel screen and manure spreader by the Asotin Conservation District, manure from livestock feeding areas can have rocks and debris removed so that it can be applied to cropland. Not only does this increase carbon sequestration and soil health, but it will also reduce nutrient input into salmon-bearing streams.

List of Funded Projects in FY2023

Technical Assistance Projects	
Recipient Name	Funds Spent
Cascadia Conservation District	\$4,331
Clark Conservation District	\$37,428
Okanogan Conservation District	\$50,000
Pend Oreille Conservation District	\$79,350
Pierce Conservation District	\$16,497
San Juan Islands Conservation District	\$26,260
Spokane Conservation District	\$86,399
Stevens County Conservation District	\$54,915
Underwood Conservation District	\$18,026
Whidbey Island Conservation District	\$22,845
Total	\$396,051

Carbon Farm Plan Template Development	
Recipient Name	Funds Spent
Snohomish Conservation District	\$19,984
San Juan Islands Conservation District	\$16,889
Total	\$36,873

Equipment Sharing Projects			
Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Asotin County Conservation District	\$187,287	Purchased equipment for the screening and spreading of manure from beef operations, to aid use of the manure in cropping systems.	Nutrient Management
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$21,109	Purchased a no-till drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Residue and Tillage Management -No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed

Equipment Sharing Projects (continued)

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
King County, Department of Natural Resources and Parks	\$35,000	Purchased a compost spreader for use by small-scale producers farming on King County land.	Cover Crop; Mulching; Cover Crop; Nutrient Management
Lewis Conservation District	\$34,583	Purchased a no-till drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Residue and Tillage Management-No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed; Cover Crop Residue and Tillage Management-Reduced Till; Forage and Biomass Management
Okanogan Conservation District	\$26,860	Purchased a no-till drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Range Planting
Palouse Conservation District	\$39,140	Purchased a roller crimper to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Cover Crop
Pierce Conservation District	\$12,352	Purchased a no-till drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Cover Crop, Pollinator Hedgerow, Pasture and Rangeland Planting
South Yakima Conservation District	\$26,465	Purchased a no-till drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Residue and Tillage Management, No-till, Conservation Cover, Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crop, Field Border, Filter Strip, Forage and Biomass Planting, Pasture and Hay Planting, Prescribed Grazing, Range Planting, Alley Cropping, Riparian Herbaceous Cover, Firebreak, Wildlife Habitat Planting
Thurston Conservation District	\$62,294	Purchased a no-till drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till; Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till; Nutrient Management

Equipment Sharing Projects (continued)

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Underwood Conservation District	\$17,327	Purchased multiple climate-smart tools for addition to the district's tool library.	Conservation Cover; Residual and Tillage Management - No-Till/Direct Seed; Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment; Forage and Biomass Planting; Nutrient Management; Tree/Shrub Establishment; Contour Buffer Strips; Riparian Forest Buffer; Vegetative Barriers; Riparian Herbaceous Cover; Range Planting; Herbaceous Wind Barriers; Filter Strips; Field Border; Grassed Waterways; Hedgerow Planting
Whatcom Conservation District	\$22,298	Purchased a seed drill to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Forage & biomass planting; Filter strips; Conservation Cover; Residual and Tillage Management - No-Till/Direct Seed
Central Klickitat Conservation District	\$43,659	Purchased a roller crimper to add to the district's equipment rental program.	Cover Crop
Total	\$528,374		

Cost-Share Projects

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Asotin County Conservation District	\$3,647	Supported cover cropping by producers.	Cover Crop
Asotin County Conservation District	\$650	Supported cover cropping by producers.	Cover Crop
Asotin County Conservation District	\$680	Supported cover cropping by producers.	Cover Crop
Benton Conservation District	\$35,000	Supported the purchase of a no-till drill, allowing expansion of no-till practices by a producer.	No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed

Cost-Share Projects (continued)

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Clark Conservation District	\$28,298	Allowed the purchase of a no-till drill for a producer.	No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$5,755	Supported purchase of a manure solids separator for a pig farm.	Waste Separation Facility
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$50,629	Enabled the purchase of a manure solids separator for a dairy farm.	Waste Separation Facility
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$24,573	Supported the purchase of a no-till drill by a producer.	No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$20,301	Allowed an orchardist to purchase a compost spreader to incorporate the use of compost in his operation.	Soil Carbon Amendment
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$36,688	Allowed an underserved producer to purchase a no-till drill for an underserved producer.	No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed
Columbia Basin Conservation District	\$96,169	Allowed an underserved producer to purchase a no-till drill with GPS technology.	No-Till/Strip-Till/Direct Seed
Eastern Klickitat Conservation District	\$11,011	Supported purchase of precision guidance systems for two different producers.	GPS Precision Guidance System
Pine Creek Conservation District	\$6,250	Helped a producer in Whitman County purchase a precision guidance GPS unit to reduce fuel use.	GPS Precision Guidance System

Cost-Share Projects (continued)

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Snohomish Conservation District	\$65,743	Supported 10 acres of agroforestry plantings on three different farms.	Tree/Shrub Establishment, Multi-Story Cropping, Alley Cropping
Thurston Conservation District	\$26,231	Allowed a producer to purchase manure spreader	Nutrient Management
Whatcom Conservation District	\$13,131	Allowed for fencing to improve prescribed grazing on a goat dairy.	Prescribed Grazing, Cover Crop
Whitman Conservation District	\$14,740	Supported purchase of precision guidance system to reduce fuel use	GPS Precision Guidance System
Total	\$439,496		

Materials & Supplies Projects

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Central Klickitat Conservation District	\$23,320	Supported cover cropping by a beginning farmer.	Cover Crop
Clark Conservation District	\$3,915	Supported the purchase of cover crop seeds for distribution to producers.	Cover Crop
Eastern Klickitat Conservation District	\$28,241	Supported cover cropping in a dryland grain operation.	Cover Crop
Okanogan Conservation District	\$4,694	This funding purchased enough seed to plant 14 acres of rangeland (using no-till drill funded through SFF).	Range Planting

Materials & Supplies Projects (continued)

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Palouse Conservation District	\$72,524	Allowed for purchase of 300 acres of cover crop seed and 40 acres of pollinator seed and staff time to support implementation of project.	Cover Crop; Conservation Cover
Pierce Conservation District	\$65,687	This funding allowed multiple underserved farmers to try compost amendment and provided seed for no-till planting of barley fodder.	Pasture/Range Planting; Cover Crop; Nutrient Management
Pine Creek Conservation District	\$5,402	This funding purchased seed for multiple producers.	Cover Crop; Conservation Cover
Stevens County Conservation District	\$10,596	This funding purchased cover crop seed and tree seedlings for distribution to producers at workshops.	Cover Crop; Tree/Shrub Establishment; Mulching; Conservation Cover
Stevens County Conservation District	\$191,047	This funding allowed 8 producers to test application of biochar on a field-level scale.	Soil Carbon Amendment
Total	\$405,426		

Demonstration Project

Recipient Name	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Skagit Conservation District	\$29,155	Funded a demonstration project led by Skagit CD in collaboration with Whatcom CD and Kulshan Carbon Trust to work with landowners on small-scale biochar production and application.	Soil Carbon Amendment