



# AGRICULTURAL NUTRIENT REDUCTION COST-SHARE PROGRAM

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



**Wood County Soil and Water Conservation District**  
 Contact: Beth Landers (bethlanders@woodswcd.com)  
 Phone: (419) 354-5517  
 Website: www.woodswcd.com  
 Address: Greenwood Centre, 1616 E Wooster St # 32  
 Bowling Green, OH 43402

**Ottawa County Soil and Water Conservation District**  
 Contact: Mike Libben (mike.libben@ottawaswcd.com)  
 Phone: 419-898-1595  
 Website: www.ottawaswcd.com  
 Address: 240 West Lake Street  
 Oak Harbor, OH 43449

**Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments**  
 300 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Suite 300  
 Toledo, Ohio 43604  
[www.tmacog.org](http://www.tmacog.org)

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**A Great Lakes Restoration Initiative  
in the Portage and  
Toussaint Watersheds**



## 4Rs

Farmers and scientists have been working in partnership to grow row crops and vegetables with the right fertilizer, in the right amount, at the right time, and in the right places. The goal is to have all nutrients taken up by the growing plants and have less washed into area waterways where we know nutrients contribute to harmful algae growth in Lake Erie. This is easier said than done. Technology is expensive and sometimes hard to justify as a cost of farming. A new grant is helping farmers with this partnership.



## Funding is Available

A \$500k grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is helping farmers with the expense of improving fertilizer management. Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Ottawa and Wood counties are managing the program in the Portage and Toussaint watersheds which also includes parts of Sandusky and Hancock counties. See the map for the watersheds area. Farmers in the area who grow row crops and vegetables are eligible for funding to improve fertilizer management on their land.

The project will continue through spring of 2019. This program will assist farmers with the cost of:

- variable rate fertilizer application
- cover crops
- water control structures
- blind inlets



## Variable Rate Technology

Variable Rate Technology (VRT) is utilized for precision nutrient management using the 4Rs principles. VRT allows farmers to make site specific nutrient applications based on needs of the soil, rather than applying at a flat rate across a field. To determine a field's nutrient needs, soils are tested and the data tied to location by GPS. With VRT, fertilizer can be administered just as needed by specialized equipment, saving farmers money and reducing nutrient loss into our waterways.

## Cover Crops

Cover crops planted after harvest protect land and reduce nutrient loss by preventing erosion from wind and water and by taking up excess nutrients into plant biomass. Cover crops have also been shown to reduce pests, diseases, and weeds. Common cover crops include cereal rye, oats, tillage radishes, and Austrian winter peas.



## Water Control Structures

In flat and swampy northwest Ohio, most farm fields control water through drainage tools. While this makes rich soil available for farming, drain tiles can be a highway for excess nutrients, pushing them directly into the ditches and streams. In times of heavy rains, water control structures can keep water in the fields where it will gradually percolate into the ground. Studies show that excess nutrients in the water remain available for plants.

## FAQ

### What is the Agricultural Nutrient Reduction Cost-Share Program?

In 2016, TMACOG launched a \$1M project with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to help farmers with the expense of improving fertilizer management. This is a cost-share program with a roughly 50:50 match between grant funds and farmers. Under this program, farmers are reimbursed after they have implemented qualifying best management practices.



### What areas qualify for the program?

The funding available under this project applies only to farms in the Portage and Toussaint watersheds. Call Ottawa or Wood Soil and Water Conservation Districts to find out what watershed you are in. If you are outside of these watersheds, you may qualify for funding under other federal, state and local programs.

### How Does the Cost-Share Work?

**Variable Rate Technology (VRT)** – TMACOG will reimburse farmers up to \$10/acre for VRT application through this program. The terms of this grant will reimburse farmers for the cost of VRT fertilizer application, but will not reimburse the initial cost of the soil testing. Farmers are asked to document fertilizer and nutrient rates for the growing season before and after the VRT practice. That data will enable researchers to calculate the phosphorus load reduction achieved by the practice.

**Cover Crops** –TMACOG will reimburse farmers at the rate of up to \$25/acre/year for planting cover crops for two years. Common cover crops include blends of cereal rye, oats, tillage radishes, and Austrian winter peas. Cover crops are not cash crops and the residue must be left on the field. Farmers are strongly encouraged to participate in two years of the cover crop reimbursement and to also take advantage of the VRT reimbursement.

**Water Control Structures** – TMACOG will reimburse farmers up to \$1,200 per structure to assist with the cost of installing water control structures. Participants will be required to document the cost of the structures, the location, quantity, and type of structure.

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts will collect documentation of each practice and approve each cost-share payment. **The following documentation is required for reimbursement -**

### Variable Rate Technology

- GPS soil test
- Fertilizer application map
- VRT application receipt

### Cover Crops

- Field map
- Seed receipts for each year

### Water Control Structures

- Field map with location of structure(s)
- Pre-construction plans
- Receipts for construction materials and installation

### How do I find out if I qualify for this program?

Talk with Ottawa or Wood Soil and Water Conservation District to find out if you qualify for this program. See the contact information on this flyer.



## Healthy Plants, Healthy Soil, Healthy Water

Preventing erosion keeps productive and healthy soil where it's needed – in the field. Erosion by water causes sediment to flow into waterways. We know that nutrients and other pollutants travel on sediment. It's well documented that nutrient rates rise in rivers after heavy rains and algae growth in Lake Erie is also linked to the amount of sediment that flows into the western basin.

Increasing the soil health of our agricultural land through cover crops and drainage water management are two of the best tools farmers can use to help the health of Lake Erie. Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes. Farmers managing the soil health of their farm fields bring beneficial changes that will help solve the nutrient issues affecting the Western Lake Erie Basin.