

Agronomy and Conservation Assistance Program

Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District (PMNRCD)

The Agronomy and Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) is the Poultney Mettowee Conservation District’s cornerstone agricultural water quality program. This long-standing program, run in collaboration with UVM Extension, provides the foundation for district agricultural programming and is largely responsible for our ability to provide high-quality, consistent educational outreach and technical support for water-quality-related improvement projects on farms.

The ACAP program is designed to improve water quality and addresses the need for direct outreach to smaller producers with limited on-farm labor who are unlikely to attend off-farm workshops or meetings. The District provides technical assistance for nutrient management planning, conservation practice implementation, and helps farmers access resources to address a variety of water quality concerns. The District helps farmers comply with the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) and provides case management assistance when farms are found in violation of the state’s water quality laws.

During July 2018 – Mar 2020, the PMNRCD ACAP program achieved the following improvements in water quality:	730 Acres	568 Acres	398 Acres	10 Farms	4 NMPs	3 Silage Bunkers Decommissioned	1950 Feet
	No-till Seeding	Soil Health Practices	Cover Crops Planted	Assisted with Nutrient Management Planning Services	Written to the NRCS 590 Standard	As a result of grants received by farmers with assistance of ACAP	Stream excluded from livestock

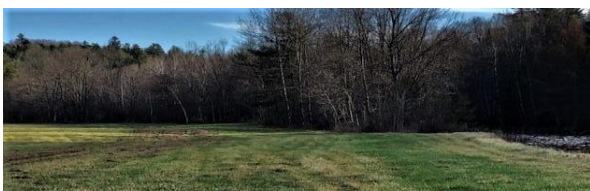


A farm in Poultney uses the District no-till drill to experiment with Teff inter-seeded into an old hay field.

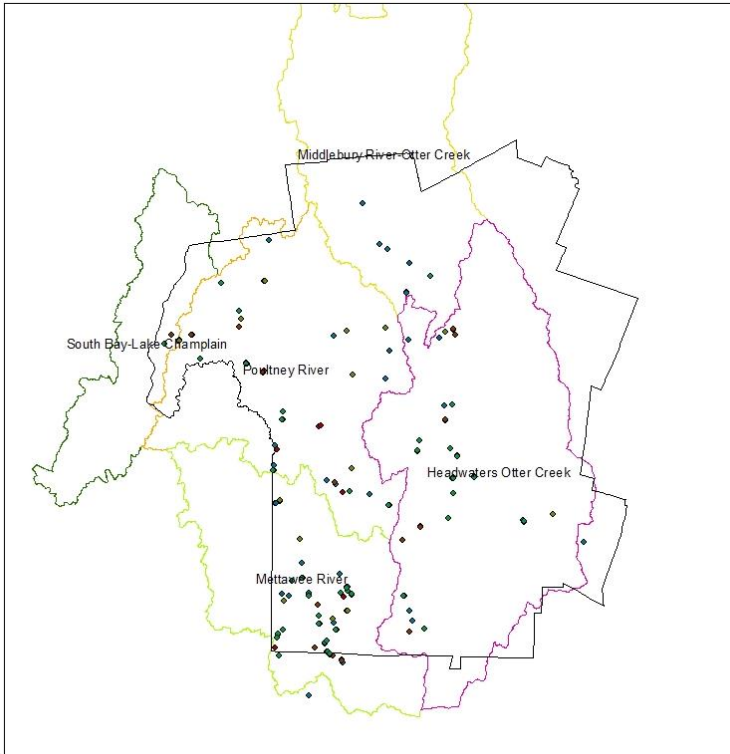
Under the most recently completed grant contract, PMNRCD ACAP staff carried out 170 on-site, technical assistance visits at 46 farms. With consistent assistance, farmers maintain progress achieved in past years and continue expanding acres in conservation practices. ACAP provides support for nutrient management planning and promotes widespread implementation of nutrient management and soil health field practices such as no-till and conservation tillage, manure incorporation or injection, and establishing winter cover crops. Consistent funding is paramount for continued improvements in agricultural water quality. Agricultural producers need stable assistance including established staff that understand each farm’s operations.

“ACAP allows us to work consistently with farms over time, which builds strong relationships with mutual trust and respect. Because of this, we continue to expand conservation practices to improve water quality and build soil health.”

– Jennifer Alexander, PMNRCD Agronomist



Nutrient Management Planning Leads to Better Farming



PMNRCD works with roughly 25 farms on ongoing nutrient management planning and plan implementation. In addition to soil sampling; manure sampling; and participation in the Statewide NMP classes with VACD, NRCS, and UVM Extension, staff also assist farmers with the annual NMP updates required by Vermont law. The District offers multiple, small classes in the fall and farm visits throughout the winter to ensure that plans are updated.

Farms with high soil phosphorus levels, receive one-on-one agronomy assistance to grow crops with lower nutrient inputs and to draw down nutrient levels in their fields.

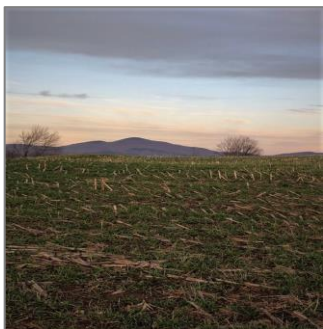
The District provides farmers with maps and spreading recommendations that use soil test results to determine approximately how many loads of manure can be applied to each field.

In addition, the District verifies field practices for the Agency of Agriculture (VAAF) and reports on practices implemented by farmers that are not counted through other programs.

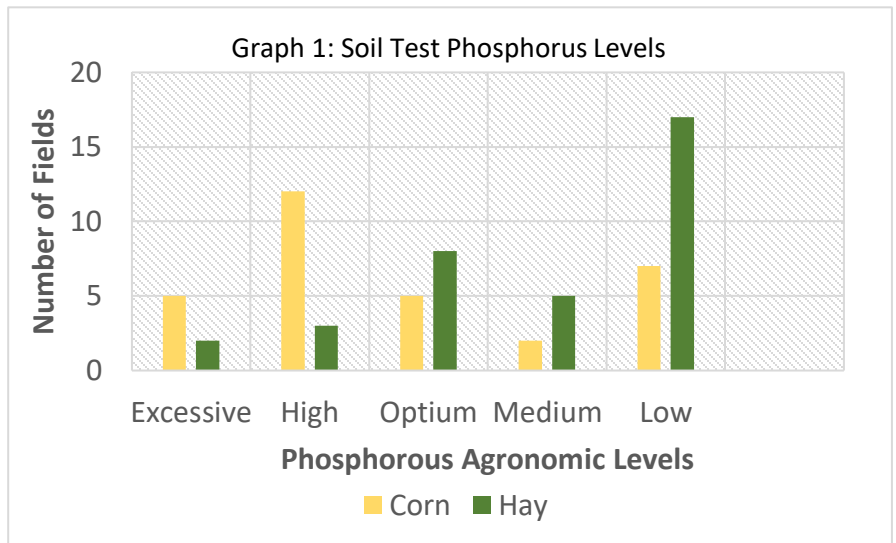
Map 1: Farms in Rutland County assisted through the 2018-2020 ACAP program.



ACAP staff sampling a new field for a nutrient management plan.



Winter cover crop established at 1600 feet elevation



Soil test data (shown above) informs on-farm decisions about crop fertilization and manure spreading and assists in greater understanding of relationships between farming practices, soil nutrient levels, and adjacent water quality.