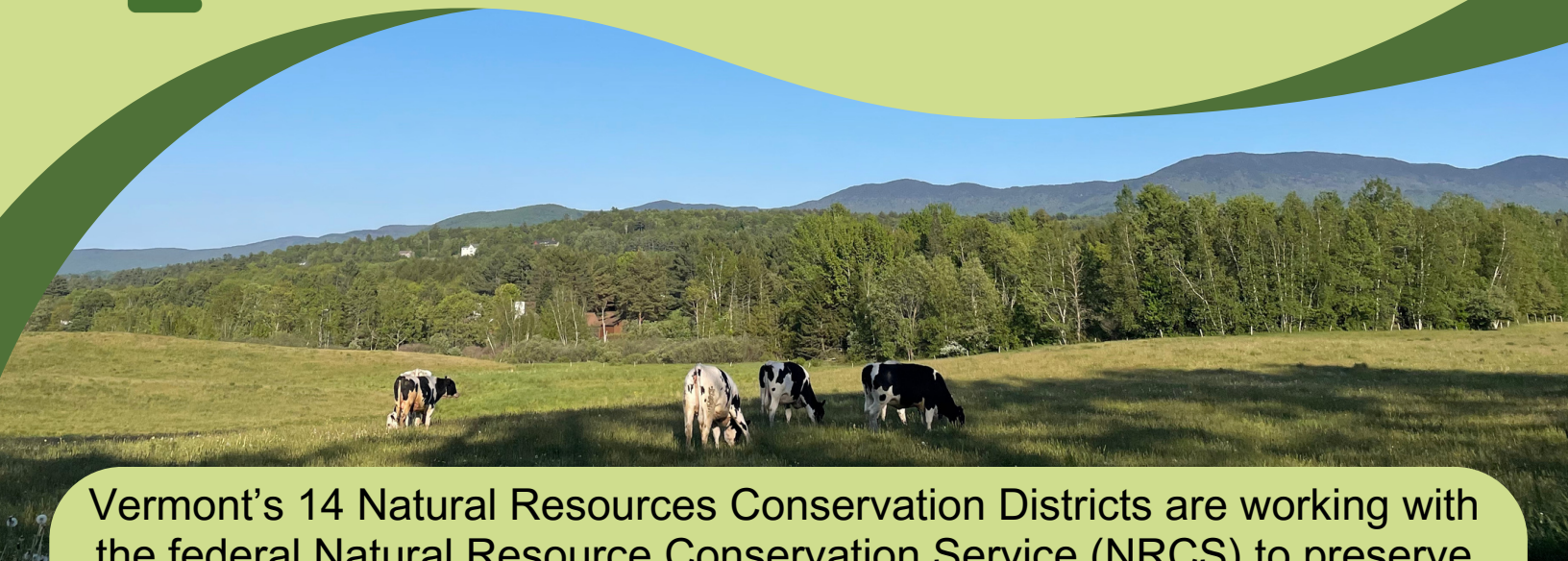




Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Districts



Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts are working with the federal Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to preserve critical services as federal actions reduce NRCS capacity in Vermont.

NRCS staff in Vermont is being reduced by nearly 50%. In response, the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) is working directly with NRCS to preserve critical services and resources at the local level:

- **Engineering** has been the hardest hit portion of NRCS services nationwide. VACD has hired an engineer to work out of the Rutland NRCS office with a focus on smaller-scale projects on farms. **This position will address a backlog of projects particularly those addressing drought**, such as water-catchment and irrigation systems.
- VACD has a **GIS/UAV pilot team** which provides support to NRCS planners, engineers and wetlands staff. This team now includes a **new GIS Specialist position, which was identified as a critical vacancy by Vermont's NRCS State Conservationist**.
- **Program Management Assistants (PAs)** do all of the administrative work that takes an NRCS contract from application to payment. **NRCS lost 60% of its PAs in the cuts, a loss that would have been devastating if VACD did not have four PAs currently working with NRCS in Vermont.**
- **Conservation Planners** visit farms, create conservation plans, help farmers apply for practices, and certify implementation of those practices. **Conservation Districts and VACD employ 17 Conservation Planners across the State. Two of these positions were increased from part-time to full-time to help fill gaps in service caused by actions at the federal level.**
 - In Addison County, VACD was able to shift 25% of the work of an agricultural technical assistance staff person to assisting NRCS with certifying cover crop and fencing projects so farmers can receive payment.

Future Funding

VACD is working with NRCS on ways to continue to fill critical vacancies around the state including additional engineering support and Conservation Planners in the most heavily impacted areas of the state. This includes how best to use our existing funding and applications for new sources of funding.

USDA - NRCS will not be able to obligate funding to farmers without the assistance of Conservation Districts and VACD staff.