



# Sustainable Farms and Fields Program (SFF)



## 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.





# 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.

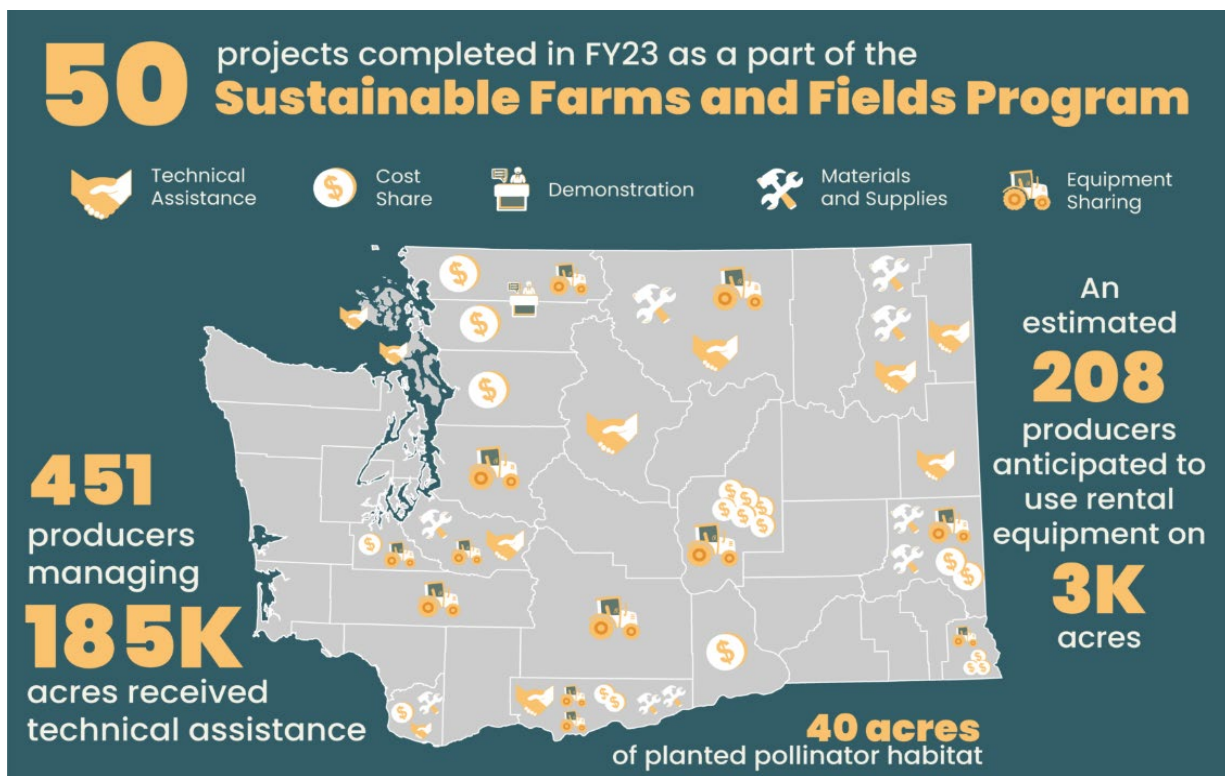


Image courtesy of Molly McIlquham, Washington State University

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 (CO<sub>2</sub>e)<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 5,873 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e 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

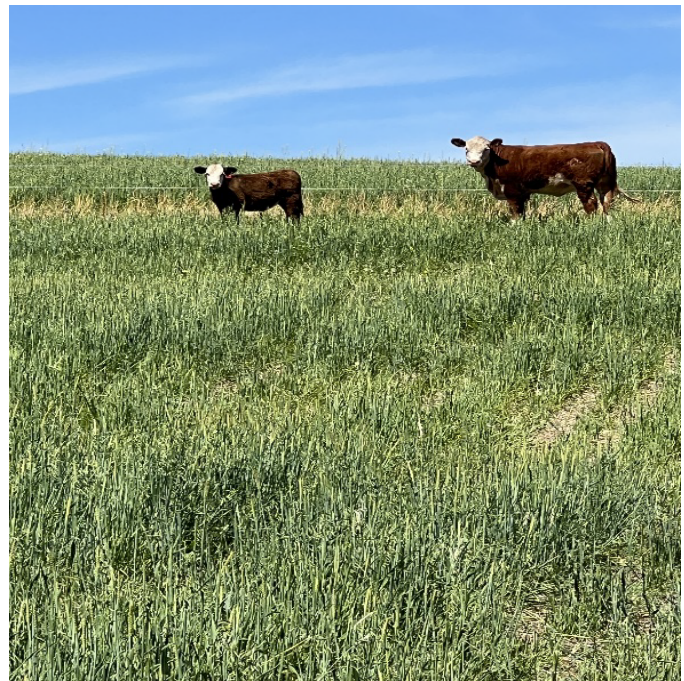
### 8 projects totaling \$405,426

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         |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>\$396,051</b> |

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

| 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<br>-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   |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>\$528,374</b> |   |  |

## 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                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>\$439,496</b> |  |  |

## 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  |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>\$405,426</b> |   |  |

## 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      |