

WASHINGTON STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

SUSTAINABLE FARMS & FIELDS

REPORT TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE FISCAL YEARS 2024 AND 2025

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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 ongoing funding level was reduced to \$1.41 million per fiscal year during the 2025 legislative session.

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 agriculture¹ can reduce fossil fuel consumption, further reducing GHG emissions. Moreover, these climate-smart practices can help producers save money in their farming operations.

A previous legislative report provided outcomes of the first year of funding (fiscal year 2023). This report is focused on the outcomes of the ongoing funding for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

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 climate-smart practices and projects that increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These practices often result in co-benefits for the operation, including improved soil health, climate resiliency, improved operational efficiencies, and/or beneficial habitat for pollinators. 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 is the funding mechanism that provides technical and financial assistance to producers, facilitating adoption of practices that improve soil health (through increased carbon sequestration). In this way, SFF is a key part of the Washington Soil Health <u>Initiative (WaSHI).</u> WaSHI is a collaboration between Washington State University, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and the Washington State Conservation Commission that supports a coordinated approach to healthy soil.



Precision agriculture is "a management strategy that gathers, processes and analyzes temporal, spatial and individual data and combines it with other information to support management decisions according to estimated variability for improved resource use efficiency, productivity, quality, profitability and sustainability of agricultural production" (International Society of Precision Agriculture).

Fiscal year	Applications	Funding Requests	Appropriation	Spent*
2024	67	\$3,598,324	\$1,500,000	\$1,373,628
2025	73	\$4,138,384	\$1,500,000	\$1,403,664

^{*}The total available funding was allocated to conservation districts across Washington. Total project spending may vary from anticipated budgets, resulting in less than 7.5% of funds returned over the biennium.

Climate Commitment Act One Time Funding

With one-time proviso funding from the Climate Commitment Act, focused on climatesmart livestock management including alternative manure management. \$2,726,446 was spent to fund 46 projects completed by 20 districts.

In addition, SCC spent \$1,279,292 in total to fund seven research and demonstration projects led by Washington State University with the goal of allowing livestock production systems to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve the return on investment for anaerobic digestion systems, or provide dairy producers with decision-making tools. Final reports from these projects are available on the **Sustainable Farms and Fields** webpage.

The details of projects funded through those proviso funds are not included in this report but are outlined in a previous **report to the legislature**.



Program Accomplishments

Across fiscal years 2024 and 2025, projects funded through both ongoing operating funds and onetime Climate Commitment Act funds resulted in 111 projects led by 30 CDs leading to climate-smart best management practices being implemented by 184 producers impacting over 37,000 acres. In addition, this funding allowed conservation districts to provide technical assistance to 2,392 land managers collectively responsible for over 469,000 acres.

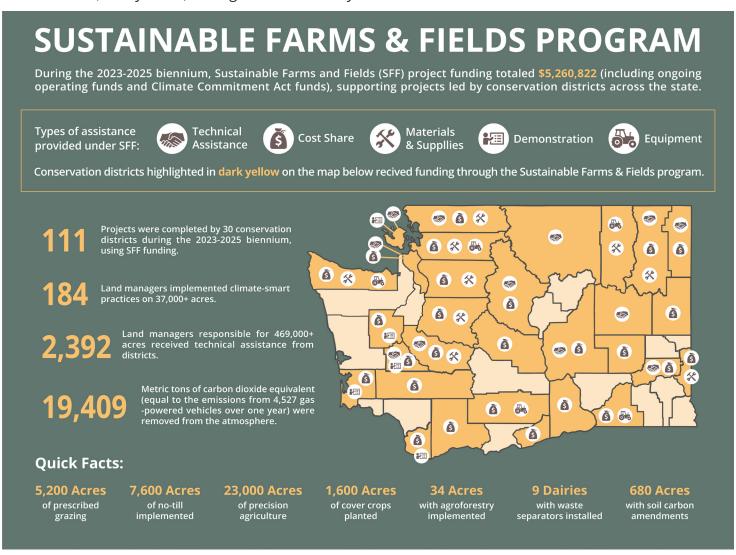
Activities supported by SFF grants include technical assistance to work with producers, cost-share projects, demonstration of innovative climate-smart technologies, materials, and supplies to support climate-smart practices, and equipment purchase for use in equipment-sharing programs.

SFF assigns extra points in the prioritization of projects that restore 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.

The Washington Climate Smart Estimator Tool (based on COMET Planner) was used to model reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration from practices implemented.

When the practice of interest was unavailable in this tool, a methodology approved by SFF staff was used. These projects were estimated to have a collective impact of 19,409 metric tons carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e)² in the year following project implementation. The use of climate-smart equipment for district rental programs funded through SFF for in previous years resulted in an additional 288 metric tons of CO2e in fiscal years 2024 and 2025. 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. Beyond the sequestration of carbon, there are more difficult to quantify co-benefits that include positive outcomes for climate resilience, ecosystems, and agricultural viability.



²19,409 metric tons CO2e is equivalent to emissions from 4,527 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles for one year.

Technical Assistance

Cascadia Conservation District staff attended the Northwest Horticulture Show, Yakima, November 9-11, 2024, to promote participation in an orchardist survey aimed at identifying interest in climate-smart practices. Photo courtesy of Cascadia Conservation District.



PROGRAM AREAS

Below, details are given on numbers of projects and total expenditures for different types of projects funded through SFF. This information describes projects funded from the ongoing funding for SFF in the operating budget, not the one-time proviso funding from the Climate Commitment Act.

Technical Assistance

Total of \$392,968 to support technical assistance led by eight conservation districts

Through technical assistance grants, conservation districts were able to work with individual producers to identify opportunities to store carbon or reduce greenhouse gas emissions through their operations.

Technical assistance funding supported a variety of activities led by conservation districts including site visits with landowners, updates to dairy nutrient management plans, staff time to expand use of a no-till drill that's part of a district rental program, targeted outreach focused on tree fruit, berry, and forage crop producers, workshops and webinars showcasing hedgerows and agroforestry projects.

During fiscal years 2024 and 2025, 1,437 producers managing approximately 16,000 acres received technical assistance through SFF funding.

Cost-Share

30 projects totaling \$1,258,619

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 costshare 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.

The funding for cost-share projects over the biennium leveraged over \$828,000 in landowner costshare match and over \$22,000 in other funding sources for projects impacting 67,158 acres.

Cost-Share Testimonial

We're excited to have the no-till seed drill at Sacred Land Collective. Having it on-site will save us time and rental costs, give us flexibility to plant when conditions are right, and support both hemp and rotational crops. This will help us build healthier soils, improve resiliency, and boost overall yields.

- Nahele Bailey

Photo: Babba and Nahele Bailev show the no-till drill that was purchased as a cost share project through SFF by Bio Fiber Industries in collaboration with Sacred Land Collective. Photo courtesy of Pierce Conservation District.



Cost-share Testimonials

"We are so grateful for the support we received on our small farm through the purchase of a compost spreader. We are a livestock and flower farm that relies heavily on soil fertility, both in our growing spaces and in our pasture management. We are a small farm but still manage enough land that makes it very physically demanding to layenough compost to maintain this fertility.

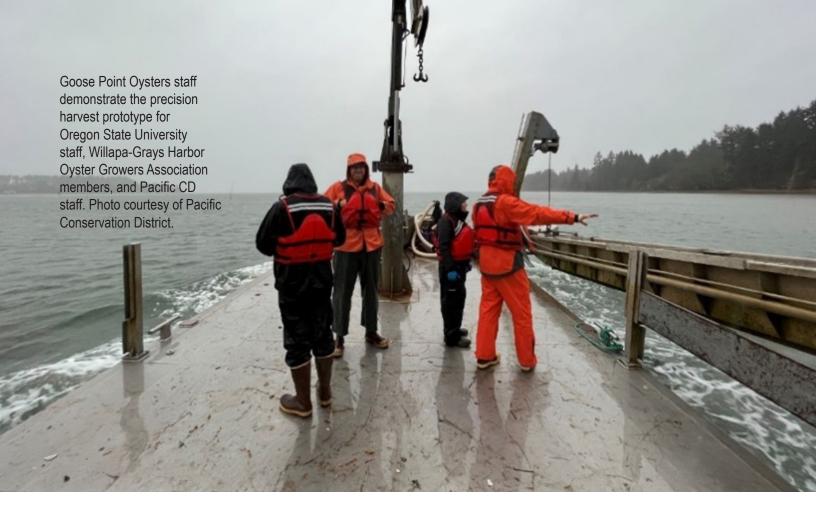
This year, for the first time, we were able to use this spreader to lay compost on our entire field so that it was prepped for the season. This helped to reduce any hold-up in planting, making it more possible to plant healthy transplants at the right time. This timing is critical as it ultimately leads to a healthier crop, without missing any windows of availability for our buyers.

This program is an incredible asset to small growers like us, as it opens up opportunities to improve productivity on farms that would otherwise be unavailable. We are grateful for this chance to streamline our production, save our backs, and improve our bottom line!"

-Producer in Pierce County

"These types of programs help us do projects tomorrow that would normally take us a few years to cash flow. Our conservation district has been so helpful in not only informing us about them but also holding our hand throughout the application process. We were able to install a pipeline in a couple of months with this funding."

-Producer in Grant County



PROJECT TYPES

Demonstration of Innovative Climate-Smart Technologies

Three projects totaling \$296,675

Funds from Sustainable Farms and Fields can be used to demonstrate the use of new or innovative climate-smart technologies or practices to local producers. In fiscal years 2024 and 2025, this funding was used to support:

- Mason CD held agroforestry workshops and development of an indigenous agroforestry demonstration forest on community land managed for the benefit of the Squaxin Island Tribe.
- Thurston CD completed installation of two hedgerows with community partners, including outreach in the form of webinars, workshops and podcasts.
- A demonstration project by Pacific CD (pictured above) which assessed the carbon sequestered in the intertidal zone and resulted in engineering of a prototype precision oyster harvest/ transplant arm to minimize disturbance during aquaculture activities.

Materials and Supplies

12 projects totaling \$373,540

Through materials and supplies funding, SFF grant recipients purchased cover crop seeds, seedlings, and soil amendments for use by 122 producers in implementing climate-smart practices on a total of 1,984 acres during fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

Photo on right: A crew member with the National Civilian Community Corps applies mulch to newly planted trees on a farm in Pierce County. Photo courtesy of Pierce Conservation District.



Equipment Sharing

Five projects totaling \$93,159

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 climatesmart practice or allow access to equipment that may not be affordable or practical for smaller farms. SFF equipment-sharing grant recipients for fiscal year 2024 estimate annual use by over 47 producers will use the various pieces of rental equipment purchased through SFF to implement climate-smart practices on over 520 acres. This shared equipment will have a long-term impact on producers' ability to implement climate-smart practices.

Equipment sharing awards from previous fiscal years of funding resulted in use by 119 producers on 1,496 acres during fiscal years 2024 and 2025.



Equipment Share Project Highlight

Ferry Conservation District was awarded an SFF grant in 2024, which allowed the district to purchase a Land Pride's 606NT 6' Pull-type No-Till Drill to rent to producers through the district rental program. The new no-till drill has been well-received by Ferry County producers, enabling them to adopt sustainable farming practices that conserve moisture and reduce soil erosion. By providing access to this valuable resource, the conservation district could potentially enhance crop yields and improve land health for local agricultural efforts, especially for landowners who may not have the means to purchase such equipment. Photo courtesy of Ferry Conservation District.



Program Development Project Highlight: Carbon Farm Plan Template

the 2023-25 biennium, Snohomish During Conservation District led the development of a template for Carbon Farm Planning with support from San Juan Islands Conservation District, Cascadia Conservation District, King Conservation District, and Whatcom Conservation District. Carbon Farm Planning is a great way to start a conversation with producers about the climate implications of their agricultural (or other land management) practices and to give them practical steps to manage carbon sequestration and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions on their farm. The Carbon Farm Planning Template has been tested by districts and is available along with following videos and instructional materials in the **Center for**

Technical Development training library.

Additional Program Accomplishments

Conservation districts led two distinct program development projects over fiscal years 2024 and 2025. Snohomish Conservation District led development of a carbon farm planning template, providing a tool for conservation planners providing technical assistance to land managers. SFF funding supported a project led by Pacific Conservation District to identify best management practices relevant to shellfish producers that would also sequester carbon or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Additional detail on these efforts is provided below.

Supporting Activities

In addition to funding described above, SCC also receives \$110,000 per biennium from the Model Toxics Control Act to support soil health-related activities at conservation districts. Soil testing funds went to 22 conservation districts which allowed 623 standard soil tests and 163 soil health tests to be conducted, giving producers important insight into their soil and serving as a starting point for important conversations about practice implementation.

\$30,000 of funding was awarded to 10 districts to support participation in WSDA's Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources program.

\$2,000 of funding was awarded to four conservation districts to support staff participation in SoilCon, educational events held by Washington State University as part of the Washington Soil Health Initiative.

SCC was also appropriated one time proviso funding by the legislature to develop a report that evaluates the current and potential contributions of organic and climate-smart agriculture to Washington's climate response goals. This report will help guide the implementation of SFF and other climate mitigation efforts involving agriculture. SFF staff coordinated the report, which can be viewed here: Organic and Climate-Smart Agriculture: Contribution towards Washington State climate response goals

Testimonial: Clallam CD has maintained a community soil testing program for over 20 years. In recent years funding shortfalls have led to concerns over our District's ability to maintain this valued program, so the specialized soil health Implementation grant funding this year came at a crucial time. It allowed us to provide customized soil test interpretations for 76 tests, and also fully cover the costs of 16 tests for school gardens and farms. In addition, we delivered presentations to 87 students and farm operators highlighting the benefits of soil testing while assisting them with taking soil samples. If future funding was available, it would help sustain and strengthen the long-standing soil testing program that our community has come to depend on for healthy soils and informed land stewardship. - Clallam CD Staff



Staff from Whatcom and Mason CDs presented to the 2025 Washington Sea Grant Conference for Shellfish Growers in Union, WA as part of an effort to understand the potential for climate-smart practices relevant to aquaculture production. Photo courtesy of Pacific Conservation District.

Program Development Project Highlight: Exploring Climate-Smart Practices for Shellfish Aquaculture

A partnership between Pacific , Mason , San Juan Islands and Whatcom conservation districts and the Willapa-Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association conducted outreach with shellfish producers, leading to a report titled: Recommendations for Supporting Shellfish Aquaculture which provides recommendations on Sustainable Farms and Fields program's support for climate-smart carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas reduction practices and identify broader ways to support conservation practices in shellfish aquaculture. View the full report **here**.

LISTS OF FUNDED PROJECTS

Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025

Technical Assistance

Recipient	Funds Spent
Cascadia CD	\$50,666
Columbia Basin CD	\$28,969
Lincoln County CD	\$25,000
Pierce CD	\$5,467
San Juan Islands CD	\$31,250
Thurston CD	\$52,798
Whatcom CD	\$95,812
Whidbey Island CD	\$103,006
Total	\$392,969

Cost-share Projects

Recipient	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Adams County CD	\$100,817	Supported purchase of a no-till drill for a producer with 3,000 acres.	Residue and Tillage Management - No-till
Benton CD	\$5,703	Supported prescribed grazing.	Prescribed Grazing, Temporary Fence
Benton CD	\$7,930	Supported prescribed grazing.	Pasture and Hay Planting; Prescribed Grazing; Temporary Fence
Benton CD	\$1,257	Supported prescribed grazing.	Pasture and Hay Planting; Prescribed Grazing; Temporary Fence
Benton CD	\$875	Supported pasture renovation.	Technical assistance provided, but cost share project was not completed.
Clallam CD	\$57,433	Supported purchase of a no-till drill for a producer with 885 acres.	Residue and Tillage Management - No-till
Clark CD	\$41,129	Supported implementation of climate- smart practices by Clark County Foodbank at the Heritage Farm.	Cover Crop; Residue and Tillage Management - Reduced Till; Soil Carbon Amendment
Columbia Basin CD	\$60,199	Supported purchase of a no-till drill for a producer for use on 700 acres	Residue and Tillage Management - No-till
Columbia Basin CD	\$111,019	Supported installation of a solids separator on a dairy	Waste Separation Facility
Columbia Basin CD	\$7,560	Supported pasture improvement and prescribed grazing	Prescribed Grazing; Pasture and Hay Planting; Conservation Cover
Columbia Basin CD	\$6,049	Supported purchase of movable fencing to support prescribed grazing	Prescribed Grazing
Columbia Basin CD	\$1,833	Supported purchase of moveable fencing to support prescribed grazing and cover crop and conservation cover seed.	Prescribed Grazing; Cover Crop; Conservation Cover
Columbia Basin CD	\$1,607	Supported planting of native dryland grass/pollinator habitat in 11 acres of circle corners.	Conservation Cover
Eastern Klickitat CD	\$5,904	Supported cover cropping on 190 acres.	Cover Crop
King CD	\$104,997	Supported installation of a solids separator on a dairy	Waste Separation Facility
Lewis CD	\$94,161	Supported the purchase and installation of a solids separator for a dairy.	Waste Separation Facility
Mason CD	\$59,110	Supported purchase of a no till drill for rental program operated by Mason County Tractor Club.	Residue and Tillage Management - No-Till/ Reduced Till; Cover Crop; Forage and Biomass Planting; Conservation Crop Rotation

Recipient	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Palouse CD	\$143,276	Supported implementation of precision nutrient application on 35,000 acres and supported a precision ag demonstration day	Nutrient Management
Pierce CD	\$5,830	Supported purchase of small-scale biochar kiln and workshop	Soil Carbon Amendment
Pierce CD	\$62,774	Supported two separate cost share projects for no-till drills.	Residue and Tillage Management – No-till; Conservation Cover; Cover Crop; Forage and Biomass Planting
Pierce CD	\$9,340	Supported purchase of temporary fencing to support prescribed grazing for 3 producers.	Prescribed Grazing; Temporary Fence (SCC64)
Pierce CD	\$6,258	Supported tree and shrub habitat planting on marginal area of pasture.	Tree/Shrub Establishment; Mulching
Pierce CD	\$7,184	Supported purchase of a manure spreader.	Soil Carbon Amendment; Nutrient Management
South Yakima CD	\$100,000	Supported conversion to strip tillage on 1700 acres managed by two producers.	Residue and Tillage Management - No-till
Spokane CD	\$92,716	Supported the purchase and installation of a solids separator for a dairy.	Waste Separation Facility
Stevens County CD	\$2,588	Supported on-farm hedgerow establishment.	Conservation Cover; Hedgerow Planting; Tree/Shrub Establishment; Mulching
Walla Walla County CD	\$24,147	Supported renovation of a farm windbreak.	Windbreak – Shelterbelt Renovation
Whatcom CD	\$80,996	Supported a silvopasture, pollinator hedgerow, and pasture planting project.	Pasture and Hay Planting; Silvopasture Establishment; Hedgerow Planting
Whidbey Island CD	\$7,860	Supported planting of trees/shrubs.	Tree/Shrub Establishment
Whitman CD	\$48,070	Supported 9 landowners to make equipment upgrades focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.	Nutrient Management; GPS Precision Guidance System (SCC52)
Total	\$1,258,619		

Materials and Supplies Projects

Recipient	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Clallam CD	\$13,094	Supported cover cropping	Cover Crop
Clallam CD	\$24,597	Supported cover cropping	Cover Crop
Ferry CD	\$6,384	Supported purchase and seeding of hay and grass varieties, which Ferry CD will manage on their property as a research and demonstration project.	Range Planting
Ferry CD	\$8,461	Supported planting of pollinator habitat on the district's property to use as a showcase for pollinator habitat projects	Cover Crop; Field Border; Conservation Cover; Vegetative Barriers
King CD	\$4,505	Supported cover cropping.	Cover Crop
Palouse CD	\$45,737	Funded pollinator seeds, bulbs and native grasses to convert 25 acres of non-irrigated cropland and marginal rangeland to permanent unfertilized grass/legume cover and cover crop.	Conservation Cover; Cover Crop
Palouse CD	\$54,855	Supported the purchase of native pollinator seeds and native grasses to convert former cropland to permanent conservation cover and the purchase of seed for implementation of cover cropping.	Conservation Cover; Cover Crop
Pierce CD	\$120,028	Funding to expand cover crop project, cost share for no-till drill, pasture planting using no-till drill, pollinator hedgerow planting, trees for silvopasture planting, application of separated dairy solids.	Cover Crop; Soil Carbon Amendment; Residue and Tillage Management – No- till; Hedgerow Planting; Silvopasture Establishment
Pierce CD	\$23,226	Supported workshops and technical assistance around climate-smart practices and purchase of seed and materials for producers.	Cover Crop; Conservation Crop Rotation; Nutrient Management
Skagit CD	\$24,421	Allowed Skagit CD to implement its cover crop program.	Cover Crop
Snohomish CD	\$49,718	Supported agroforestry plantings on 2 farms.	Alley Cropping; Silvopasture
Whatcom CD	\$10,325	Supported expansion of the district's cover crop program.	Cover Crop
Total	\$385,351		

Equipment Sharing Projects

Recipient	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Clallam CD	\$17,496	Supported purchase of a manure spreader for the district rental program.	Nutrient Management; Soil Carbon Amendment
Ferry CD	\$44,992	Supported purchase of a no-till drill for the district rental program.	Residue and Tillage Management, No-till
Skagit CD	\$5,703	Funded refabrication of subsurface manure spreader for district rental program.	Nutrient Management
South Yakima CD	\$5,000	Supported purchase of a small no-till drill to be added to the district rental program	Residue and Tillage Management, No-till
Walla Walla CD	\$19,968	Supported purchase of a trailer for the district's rental no-till drill.	Residue and Tillage Management, No-till
Total	\$93,159		

Demonstration Projects

Recipient	Funds Spent	Description	NRCS Practice(s) Supported
Mason CD	\$99,904	Supported development of an indigenous agroforestry demonstration forest and workshops on community land managed for the benefit of the Squaxin Island Tribe.	Multi-Story Cropping, Riparian Forest Buffer, Windbreak Shelterbelt Establishment, Hedgerow Planting, Conservation Cover, Tree/Shrub Establishment
Thurston CD	\$69,125	Supported establishment of two hedgerows through a partnership with the Native Plant Salvage Foundation, including demonstration workshops, tours, webinars focused on site prep and creating a planting plan and a podcast episode.	Hedgerow Planting, Tree/ Shrub Establishment, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation, Conservation Cover, Residue and Tillage Management - No-Till/Strip- Till/Direct Seed, Field Border, Mulching.
Pacific CD	\$127,646	Supported a project assessing carbon sequestered in the intertidal benthos where oysters and other shellfish are farmed and engineering of a prototype precision oyster harvest/transplant arm.	N/A
Total	\$296,675		

SFF Program Development Projects

Recipient	Funds Spent	Description	
Pacific CD	\$47,390	SFF Aquaculture BMP Development – supported collaborative work by conservation districts to identify climate-smart best management practices relevant to aquaculture.	
Snohomish CD	\$34,513	SFF Carbon Farm Plan Development: Phase 1 – supported development of a carbon farm plan template for use by conservation district planners.	
Snohomish CD	\$24,975	SFF Carbon Farm Plan Development: Phase 2 - supported development and testing of a carbon farm plan template for use by conservation district planners.	
Total	\$106,879		



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