



ACAP

Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program Initial Report



What's Inside?

What is ACAP and
how does it help PA
farmers?

Highlights from
County Conservation
Districts

Center for Agricultural
Conservation Assistance
Training



Pennsylvania
Department of Agriculture



Pennsylvania
State Conservation Commission



PennState Extension

The Center for Agricultural
Conservation Assistance Training

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**“THE BIGGEST HURDLE IN
CONSERVATION IS JUST
GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE
DOOR. ACAP LETS FARMERS
START SMALL AND BUILD
FROM THERE.”**

Chris Faux, Wyoming County Conservation District

About ACAP

The Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) supports Pennsylvania farmers and agricultural landowners with financial and technical assistance for the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural operations within the Commonwealth.

ACAP is administered by the State Conservation Commission, a state agency with a 14-member board co-chaired by the Secretaries of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The SCC provides leadership and oversight for conservation programs across the Commonwealth. The SCC delegates local implementation of ACAP to county conservation districts, which work directly with farmers and landowners to deliver the program and protect soil and water resources on agricultural operations within the Commonwealth.

ACAP was created through the Clean Streams Fund, established by the FY 2022-2023 Pennsylvania State Budget. ACAP was originally funded with \$154 million of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that were allocated to the Clean Streams Fund. In FY 24-25, the State Budget included an annual dedicated \$50 million to the Clean Streams Fund, of which ACAP receives \$35.75 million to reduce non-point source (NPS) pollution in Commonwealth streams, rivers and waterbodies.

County ACAP Project Funding
Contracted: \$150,103,446
(Through June 2025)

**“ACAP IS THE FUNDING
PUZZLE PIECE WE WERE
ALWAYS MISSING. NOW, WE
CAN PLAN AND IMPLEMENT
REAL SOLUTIONS.”**

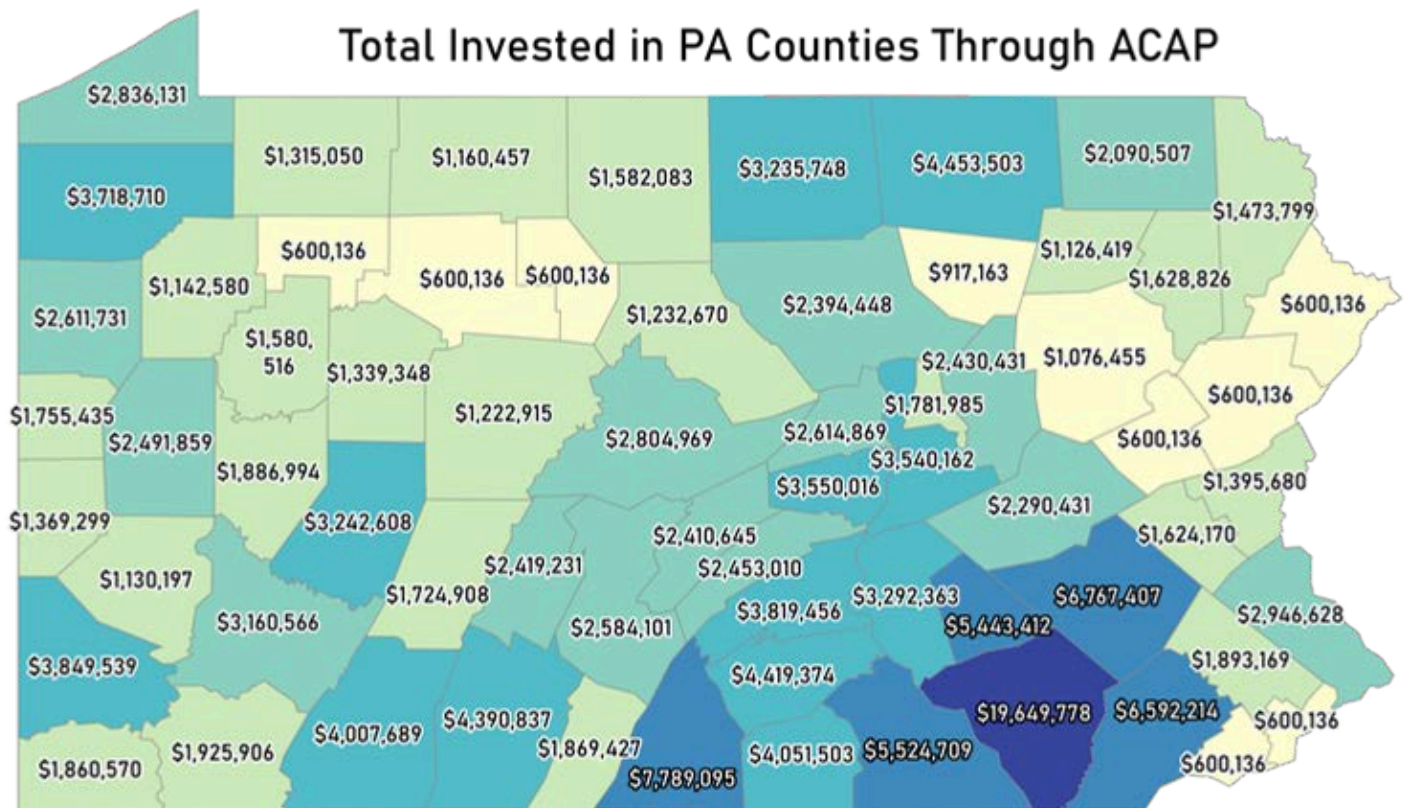
Jamie Knecht , Wayne Conservation District

ACAP Investment

ACAP funding is distributed to conservation districts based on criteria developed by the SCC to prioritize reducing nutrient and sediment pollution. These criteria include:

- Agriculturally impaired* stream miles
- The number of cropland acres, farms, and livestock or poultry operations
- Other considerations as identified by the SCC

*designated impaired due to the identified source being agriculture as defined by the most recent Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report by DEP



“ACAP FUNDING HAS HELPED EVERY FARMER WE’VE WORKED WITH. SOME PROJECTS SIMPLY WOULDN’T MOVE FORWARD WITHOUT IT.”

Allie Shreffler, Westmoreland Conservation District

ACAP BMPs

Funded ACAP projects include a diverse set of best management practices (BMPs) which could include engineered structures to move water differently on the farm, agronomic methods that reduce soil disturbance and runoff, or planning activities to better manage nutrients on the farm.



Watering Facility



Riparian Forest Buffer



Cover Crop



Animal Waste Storage



Heavy Use Area Protection



Streambank Fencing

BMPs by the Numbers

“WE’VE RUN THE
GAMUT OF
CONSERVATION
PRACTICES —
RIPARIAN
BUFFERS,
STREAMBANK
FENCING,
POLLINATOR
PLANTINGS,
PASTURE
WATERING —
ACAP HELPED US
TIE IT ALL
TOGETHER.”

*Cassie, Twin Brook Farms,
Wayne County*

Statewide
3,394 Contracted BMPs
(Through June 20, 2025)

BMP Highlights Statewide
contracted through June 2025

Access Road
145,455 ft

Cover Crop
106,486.53 ac

Fence
856,901.4 ft

Heavy Use Area Protection
1,162,583.5 sf

Livestock Pipeline
185,685 ft

Riparian Forest Buffer
66.71 ac

Streambank Protection
6,545 ft

Terrace
25,559 ft

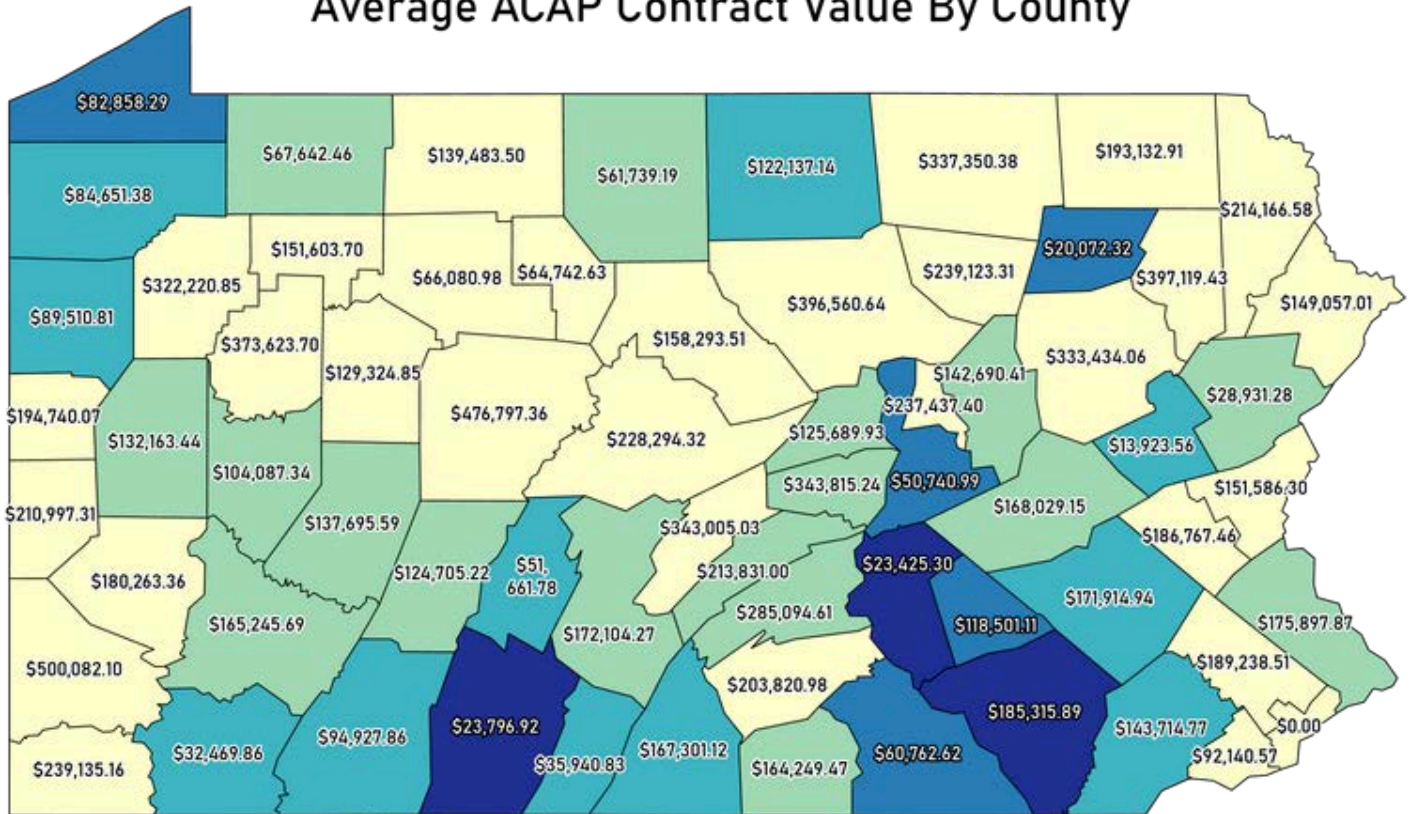
Trails and Walkways
104,108.5 ft

Waste Storage Facility
262

Waterways
42.33 ac

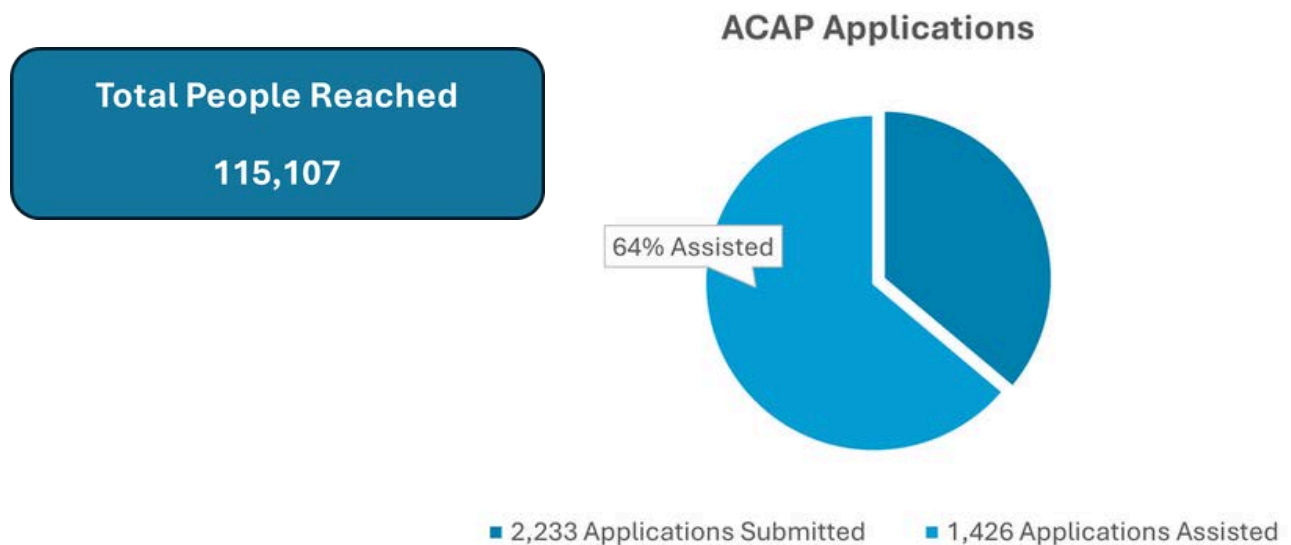
County conservation districts receive applications from farmers to fund one or more BMPs that are included in the farm's plans for nutrient and sediment management. Selected applications will result in a contract between the district and the farmer. Contracts for ACAP projects range in value depending on what best management practices are being implemented: for example small cover crops or large heavy use area protections with waste storage facilities.

Average ACAP Contract Value By County



ACAP People

More than 140 agricultural/technical staff at county conservation districts make the ACAP program a success across Pennsylvania. Their outreach and communication efforts with farmers and ag landowners have reached over 115,000 contacts across the Commonwealth and resulted in over 2,300 ACAP applications.



Annual ACAP MVPs



2024 - Tracey Crawford, Crawford County



2025 - Devyn McPheeters, Centre County

"HAVING CONSISTENT LOCAL STAFF LEADS TO STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS, BETTER TRUST, AND HIGHER QUALITY PROJECTS OVER TIME."

ACAP Awards are given annually at the ACAP Ag Conservation Con

2024

- ACAP Team Collaboration Award: The Lancaster County Conservation District
- ACAP Partnership Award: Team Ag
- Innovative ACAP Project: Delzell and Jadick Project from the Wyoming County Conservation District

2025

- ACAP Team Collaboration Award: Westmoreland Conservation District
- ACAP Partnership Award: Hammer Creek (Lebanon County) Wetland, Floodplain, and Stream Restoration Partnership
- Innovative ACAP Project: Jay Zullinger Project from the Cumberland County Conservation District
- ACAP Rookie of the Year: Emily Stambaugh of the Cumberland County Conservation District

Karl Brown Award for Conservation Leadership

Created in 2024 to recognize a person or group who has demonstrated significant initiative in the field of ag conservation in Pennsylvania.



2024 - Karl Brown, former State Conservation Commission Executive Secretary



2025 - Pennsylvania Senators Gene Yaw and Scott Martin

ACAP Projects

Indiana County - Grassed Waterway



Farmstead stormwater was causing erosion and movement of sediment and nutrients into nearby waterways and impacting the operation's productivity. A grassed waterway was installed with five inlet boxes and stormwater pipe beneath it. Additionally, 404 feet of underground outlets were placed to capture runoff from roofs of farm structures and connected into the stormwater system. The stormwater from the upper farmstead area is captured and discharged into riprap installed at the bottom of the grassed waterway system.



Carbon County - Heavy Use Area



A large animal concentration area (ACA) of bare soil and manure had developed outside the barn on this beef cattle operation. A concrete heavy use area (HUA) was installed to provide stabilized housing. This ACAP project also included a vegetated treatment area to manage nutrient-laden runoff from the concrete pad, along with a small manure stack area to reduce manure applications during environmentally sensitive times of year.



Berks County - Mushroom Wastewater Storage



Areas of erosion and groundwater contamination existed at this mushroom farm due to production wastewater having inadequate storage and being pumped into failing lagoons or directly onto the land surface. A concrete storage tank with a four-month capacity was installed, and now wastewater can be delivered to a spray irrigation system and used at appropriate times. This project also included stormwater features to direct clean rainwater away from the storage system.

McKean County - Manure Storage and Rotational Grazing



A severely overgrazed pasture became an animal concentration area at this beef operation. The farm also had no manure storage, which was leading to nutrient runoff. The farmer completed an ACAP project that included a roofed manure storage facility, along with rotational grazing plan implementation, access road, and animal trails and walkways.



Greene County - Roofed Heavy Use Area



Congregating animals and unprotected manure piles were causing erosion and nutrient runoff on this farm. This project used combined funding sources, including Growing Greener and EQIP, with ACAP funds to install a roofed heavy use area. The associated BMPs included roof run off structures, animal walkways, and heavy use area protection.

Lebanon County - Animal Walkway



This dairy operation aimed to minimize uncontrolled stormwater and manure runoff while reducing erosion across the farmstead and pasture. Practices included a stabilized stream crossing and a cattle walkway complete with a high-tensile fence. In addition, the eroding pond bank adjacent to the walkway was stabilized with large boulders and the walkway was elevated to prevent further encroachment by the pond. Prior to the project, uncontrolled cattle access to both the pond and stream caused significant erosion, sedimentation, and nutrient runoff.

Montour County - Equine HUA and Watering System



Several areas of bare soil and manure had developed around horse run in sheds in the pasture of this operation. The improved heavy use areas provide adequate space to fully enclose all animals during periods of wet weather, reducing soil erosion issues. This project also included roofed manure storages and watering facilities, eliminating the need for horses to drink from streams and other sensitive areas.

About CACAT

The Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training (CACAT) at Penn State Extension was formed in 2023 in partnership with the Pennsylvania State Conservation Commission (SCC). Funding for the center is provided through the state Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP).



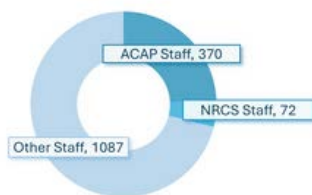
Since its inception, the Center has worked to provide technical assistance, training, and educational resources to ag conservation professionals at local conservation districts and their partners. This support ensures the effective implementation of BMPs funded by ACAP and other agricultural conservation programs.

CACAT offers a wide range of services and resources to support agricultural conservation professionals in their critical work, including:

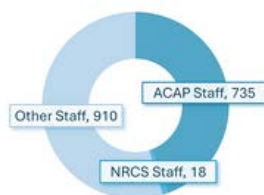
- Ag Conservation Professional Training Events, Annual Conferences, and Webinars
- One-on-One County ACAP Technical Support Visits
- *Ag Conservation Currents* e-newsletter: Keeping professionals informed about the latest developments, resources, and best practices.
- CACAT Website: A centralized hub for training materials, updates, and technical resources.
- ACAP Promotions and Outreach Events: Increasing awareness of funding opportunities and BMP implementation.

CACAT delivers comprehensive educational experiences to enhance expertise and capacity. Educational events fall into three major categories, and while ACAP staff are the focus audience, most events are open to all who are interested in ag conservation professional development.

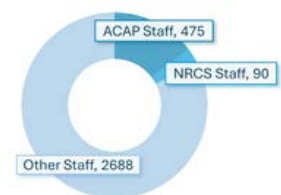
AG LITERACY TRAINING (17)



FUNDING AND ADMIN TRAINING (13)



AG BMP TRAINING (15)

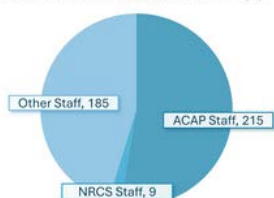


Attendance at CACAT educational events, by major subject, since CACAT's founding in 2023

ACAP Training

A portfolio of training events has been developed specifically to support ACAP and the county conservation district staff who administer ACAP across the Commonwealth.

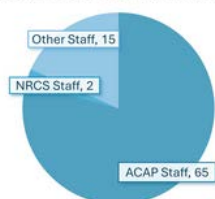
ACAP ANNUAL CONFERENCE (2)



ACAP Ag Conservation Con

Format: 3-day Conference with Field Trips
Audience: All ACAP Staff and Ag Conservation Professionals
Frequency: Once per year
Presenters: Invited Guests & CACAT

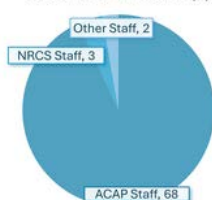
ACAP KEYSTONE TRAINING (3)



Ag Conservation Keystone Training

Format: 3-day Workshop with Site Visit
Audience: New ACAP Staff and interested new ag conservation professionals
Frequency: 2-3 per year
Presenters: CACAT

ACAP PAS TRAINING (2)



PAS Fundamentals Training

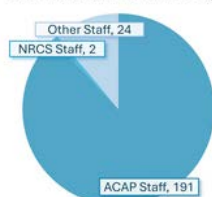
Format: 1 or 2-day Classroom Workshop
Audience: ACAP Staff Seeking PAS Certification, other ag conservation professionals seeking increased skills
Frequency: Approximately one topic each quarter
Presenters: CACAT with PSU & NRCS guests

First events
held in July
2025

PAS Applied Training

Format: 1 or 2-day Classroom Workshop
Audience: ACAP Staff who completed PAS Fundamentals Training requirements
Frequency: Following PAS Fundamentals schedule
Presenters: HRG with CACAT support & invited guests

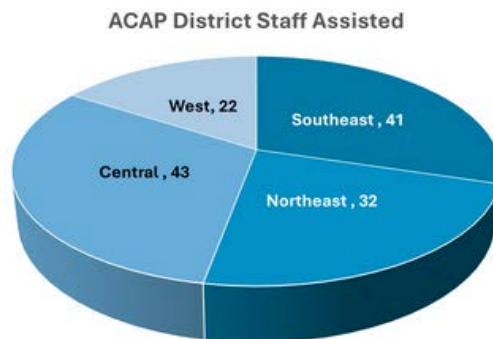
ACAP ADMIN TRAININGS (5)



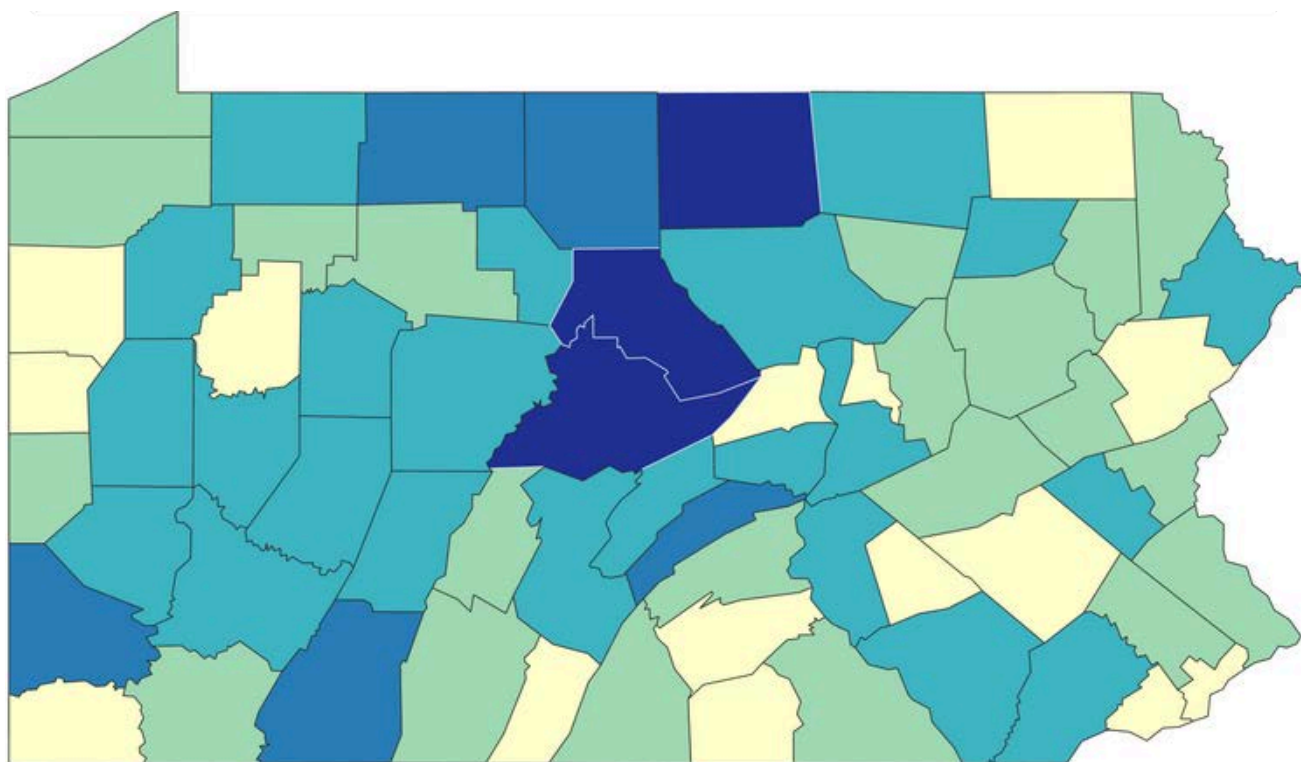
ACAP Admin Training

Format: 1-day Classroom Workshop
Audience: ACAP Staff
Frequency: Annually in Regions (or less frequently)
Presenters: SCC with CACAT support

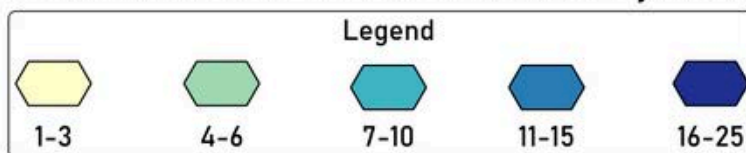
ACAP Technical Assistance



CACAT and SCC offer a range of **technical assistance services** to support conservation districts with ACAP project planning, evaluation, and implementation, including site visits, proposal development, and design support. These services typically include evaluating resource concerns, developing BMP recommendations, creating design packages, and offering training opportunities for district staff.



Technical Assistance Visits to Counties By ACAP Staff*

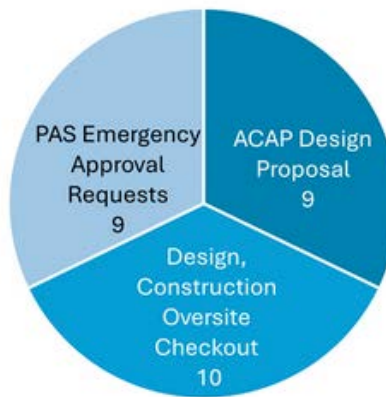


* ACAP staff at both CACAT and PA SCC

Data period: Inception - 6/20/2025

Launched in December 2024, the **Engineering Assistance Request Program (EARP)** supports ACAP conservation projects by offering basic and advanced technical services, including planning, surveying, design, and construction oversight, utilizing staff support and contracted engineers.

Total Engineering Assistance Requests



Practice Approval System (PAS)

Launched in June of 2025, the **Practice Approval System (PAS)** empowers conservation professionals under delegation agreements to independently design and approve conservation practices through a structured certification and training process, supported by ongoing reviews for quality assurance. Six packages of conservation practices have been developed and a series of fundamental and applied training events are being launched throughout 2025 and 2026. Completion of training, a mock practice design package, and an actual project design are required steps in the PAS certification process.

To ensure ACAP projects continue to move forward while PAS is being rolled out, we have granted **PAS Emergency Temporary Approval** to conservation district staff who have proven competency in projects they are planning, with oversight by HRG, Inc., SCC, and CACAT staff. 9 PAS Emergency Approvals have been given for projects such as fence, animal trails and walkways, access roads, stream corridor, and roof gutters.



HRG is a key partner in the success of ACAP Technical Assistance. HRG provides two key services to ACAP.

1. Engineering assistance to a select number of ACAP projects across the Commonwealth
2. Development of the Practice Approval System (PAS)

ACAP Partnerships

Partnerships with Conservation Districts are essential to ensuring local control and effective implementation of the Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP). These collaborations leverage the districts' on-the-ground knowledge and trusted relationships with farmers, enabling tailored conservation practices that address unique regional needs while maximizing environmental and agricultural benefits.



Wyoming County Conservation District hosted a pasture walk to discuss rotational grazing, fencing design, grazing summer annuals, and how ACAP can aid farmers in improving their grazing practices.



Tioga County Conservation District hosted a legislative breakfast for local and state officials to highlight the district's accomplishments and ACAP projects.



Berks County Conservation District hosted a Legislative Breakfast at a local mushroom operation, providing an opportunity to showcase the results of collaborative efforts between multiple agencies and funding sources. The breakfast featured an overview of the project's scope and impact, as well as remarks of support from attending legislators.

The Warren County Conservation District constructed a float to participate in the Russell Parade on May 24, 2025 to promote the ACAP program to the public.



Juniata County Conservation District hosted a Women in Agriculture meeting with speakers from partnering agencies such as NRCS, HRG, and more. Topics discussed included funding conservation practices through partnerships (pairing NRCS EQIP funds with ACAP funds).



Allegheny County Conservation District hosted an ACAP project spotlight field day for other districts, public, farmers, additional agencies. ACCD staff highlighted how programs, funding, and landowner-driven initiatives can enhance farmland health and build ecological resilience.

Partners in Ag Conservation Excellence (PACE) was established in Oct 2023 after the signing of an MOU between the SCC, PSU, and USDA-NRCS. These partners are committed to providing the best support possible to ag conservation efforts in Pennsylvania, in a collaborative and coordinated way. The group meets quarterly to discuss emerging opportunities in training and technical assistance, as well as cohesive implementation of jointly funded ACAP and EQIP projects.



Ag Conservation Education Collaborative:

DEP, SCC, PACD, SCC, and PSU meet every two months to discuss educational offerings and opportunities to the ag conservation professional community. We recognize that all of our organizations have similar audiences or similar training needs. Through intentional partnerships, we can increase our effectiveness and decrease unnecessary burdens on county conservation district staff and other ag conservation professionals seeking to advance their careers.

ACAP Workforce Development

Ensuring the sustainability of programs like ACAP and the resilience of agricultural systems depends on engaging new talent to sustain and also enhance the ag conservation professional workforce.

Recruiting:



CACAT and the SCC have collaborated with partner ag conservation employers at six career fairs aimed at college and high school students in agricultural, earth science, and engineering pathways.

Open jobs in Ag Conservation at districts and partner organizations are promoted through the CACAT website and newsletter, emailed directly to a growing list of students who have expressed interest, and are on LinkedIn.

Undergraduate Engagement:

Student interns have the opportunity to work with CACAT and partner with conservation districts during spring and fall semesters and during summer breaks.

The Dept of Ag & Biological Engineering in the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences is excited to partner with ACAP to launch two new undergraduate courses for the future ag conservation professional community.



ABSM 325: Conservation-related agricultural structures (starting in fall of 2025) will delve into the expanding importance of sustainable agriculture, focusing on the planning of agricultural structures that can improve livestock and crop management, reduce soil erosion and runoff, and protect stream quality.

ABSM 326: Conservation and management practices in agriculture and natural resources (starting in spring 2026) will provide a foundation for understanding natural resource challenges with a specific focus on water and soil. Students will learn to inventory resource challenges on farms using aerial photos, GIS tools, and other digital resources and real-world visits, identify various best management practices (BMPs) to address the resource challenges, and understand how to properly plan the practices.

This document was prepared jointly by the PA State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Penn State Extension Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training (CACAT) through a contract with the SCC.

Figures are based on GIS data supplied by conservation districts in June 2025. For more information, visit <https://extension.psu.edu/cacat>