

Mini-Cassia Conservation Update



Volume
2026.2

East Cassia, Minidoka, & West Cassia Soil and Water Conservation Districts

EAST CASSIA TURNS 70

East Cassia Soil & Water Conservation District celebrated their 70th Birthday on September 5th.

The District milestone commemorates conservation activities and education in Eastern Cassia County.

Here's a little history on WHY Soil Districts were created...

Following the Homestead Act of 1862, the southwestern Great Plains region of the United States became home to thousands of settlers.

The settlers plowed the prairie grasses and planted dry land wheat or grazed cattle.

Large areas of grassland were destroyed. Gradually, the land was laid bare and significant environmental damage began to occur.

With the severe drought that began in 1930, the over-farmed and over-grazed land began to blow away in the strong winds.



The winds lifted the bare soil up into the air creating huge clouds of dust which billowed up into the sky. In some places, the dust drifted like snow, covering farm buildings and houses.

This was called **The DUST BOWL**.



To combat the severe soil erosion, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Soil Conservation Act into law on April 27, 1935. This Act officially established the Soil Conservation Service which was designed to 1) stop severe soil erosion, 2) manage water resources, and 3) teach sustainable farming techniques to preserve American agricultural lands.

Nearly 3/4 of the continental United States was privately owned, so officials realized that **only active, voluntary support from landowners could enable the success of conservation work on private land.**

Officials knew that leadership for soil conservation should be implemented from the ground up through local units of government, rather than top down from the federal government.

CONSERVATION IN IDAHO & EAST CASSIA

Idaho's Soil Conservation District Law was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor C.A. Bottolfsen on March 9, 1939. Conservation district organization progressed rapidly soon after.

An official meeting was held in March 1956 in Malta to propose the organization of the East Cassia Soil & Water Conservation District and to answer questions for local farmers.

On May 7, 1956, elections were held. 150 landowners voted in favor of creating the East Cassia District, 9 voted against, with 159 total votes cast.

East Cassia Soil & Water Conservation District was officially established on September 5, 1956.

WHAT WE DO TODAY

The East Cassia Soil & Water Conservation District consists of 5 elected Supervisors and 2 Alternate Supervisors who volunteer their time to assist with Conservation efforts in their District. They often work together with Minidoka and West Cassia Districts to accomplish some of their larger activities.

We hold monthly board meetings to discuss conservation efforts and needs.

We hold a seedling tree sale to encourage wind-breaks and habitat plantings.

We provide equipment rentals including a pivot track filler and direct seed drills.

Continued on page 5

SWCD Board of Supervisors

East Cassia SWCD

Chairman.....Rob Cottle.....Richard Kunau.....Dusty Wilkins
 Vice-Chair.....Kurt Heward.....Jordan Searle.....Luke Stevenson
 Treasurer.....Ken Woodworth.....Ken Black.....Lance Lovell
 Member.....Hannah Sanders.....Chad Searle.....Jeff Schow
 Member.....Brogan Higley.....Scott Yost.....
 Associate Member.....Mark Webb.....
 Associate Member.....Steve Ward.....

West Cassia SWCD

Minidoka SWCD

District Employees

Rachelle Osterhout.....Cassia Administrative Assistant
 Doreen McMurray....Cassia Information & Education Specialist
 Sharon Hardy.....Minidoka Administrative Assistant

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

Burley 208-572-3377 / Rupert 208-436-4777

David Mabey.....District Conservationist
 Carolyn Firth.....ISWCC Ag Program Specialist
 Heather Grace.....NRCS Admin
 Madison Pittenger.....Range & Wildlife Biologist

** Spanish translation available upon request.*

CONTACT SWCD OFFICES:

Rupert SWCD Office 208-436-4202
Burley SWCD Office 208-572-3375

Minidoka SWCD email:

minidokaswcd@gmail.com

Cassia SWCD email: ewcswcd@gmail.com

Web page: www.minicassiaswcd.com



NEWSLETTERS

are available by e-mail

To receive this and future newsletters electronically, send your e-mail address to: ewcswcd@gmail.com

Type "NEWSLETTER" in the subject box.

If you want your name removed from the newsletter mailing list, just let us know.

Monthly Board Meetings

East Cassia SWCD - 1st Tuesday of each month

West Cassia SWCD - 2nd Tuesday of each month

Minidoka SWCD - 2nd Wednesday of each month

Any changes to meeting schedules will be posted in our offices and on our website at www.minicassiaswcd.com.

DISTRICT SUPERVISORS

Supervisors for the Soil and Water Conservation Districts are landowners in Cassia and Minidoka Counties who volunteer their time. They are interested in farming issues and want to make a positive difference in their communities. Serving as a Supervisor is a great opportunity to learn how to improve your own operation as well as help to make a positive difference within your own community.

If you are interested in serving on the Soil & Water Conservation District Board in your county, contact a current board member or call one of the NRCS offices for information.

Did You Know??

Your local Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a local unit of government.

It, along with the other 49 conservation districts in Idaho, although not a taxing entity, they each receive money from the state of Idaho as well as their local county government.

The district supervisors, generally a board of five elected officials, receive no compensation.

Services provided by your local Soil & Water Conservation District centers around soil and water education and Conservation improvements.

CONTACT US

Cassia SWCD Office

1361 East 16th Street
 (In the USDA Service Center)
 Burley, Idaho

Monday-Thursday 9:00-2:00
208-572-3375

Minidoka SWCD Office

98 South 200 West, Suite B
 (Next to the Rupert Golf Course)
 Rupert, Idaho

Tuesday-Friday 9:00-2:00
208-436-4202

The "Conservation Update" is published 3 times a year by the East Cassia, Minidoka, and West Cassia, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and mailed to approximately 1,000 landowners, and sent by email to several hundred more. The distribution mailing list is maintained by the Information & Education Specialist in Burley, Idaho. Names may be added or removed from the mailing list for the next publication by calling 208-572-3375.

East Cassia, Minidoka, and West Cassia, Soil and Water Conservation Districts are non-profit organizations. All programs and services of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, marital status, or handicap.

Welcome To Our New Pheasants Forever Employee

Welcome to Madison Pittenger, Range & Wildlife Biologist for Pheasants Forever. Madison, born and raised in Salina, KS, first became interested in wildlife biology through volunteering at her local zoo as a teenager. She obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees from Fort Hays State University in Western Kansas. Her master's research centered around ground beetle assemblages in native, invasive, and encroaching grassland habitats.

After working throughout the Midwest, Madison moved to Burley in December 2023 and was awestruck by the picturesque mountains and deserts that comprise southern Idaho. She is excited to expand connections from previous position to work with a variety of federal, state, and NGO partners to achieve large-scale, landscape-level habitat improvement goals.

Outside of work, Madison enjoys painting, skiing, and recently started playing drums. Welcome Madison.



COUNTY FAIR DISPLAYS

The Soil & Water Conservation Districts put up displays spotlighting District activities at both the Minidoka County Fair and the Cassia County Fair.



REBATES for COVER CROP Plantings in Minidoka County

Minidoka Soil & Water Conservation District is offering a rebate to farmers who are planting cover crops. Some of the requirements include:

- * Must be in Minidoka County,
- * Planting cover crops or planting ground cover,
- * Using best practices in the fall or early spring to assist in mitigating wind and water erosion on highly erodible fields,
- * Up to 120 acres can qualify for up to \$6 per acre,
- * Seed mixes must be in accordance with Idaho Seed law.

Applications and detailed information are available in our office at

98 South 200 West, Suite B, Rupert, ID
(on the Rupert/Paul Hwy, near the Rupert Golf Course)
or call us at 208-436-4202.

WEBSITES worth checking out!

Cassia & Minidoka Soil & Water
Conservation Districts

www.MINICASSIAswcd.com



Idaho Association of Soil
Conservation Districts

IASCD.org



Mid-Snake Resource, Conserva-
tion, and Development

<https://midsnakercd.org/>



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Tuesday, January 26, 2027

- Sign up online at:
- www.minicasazwcd.com
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CONTACT US

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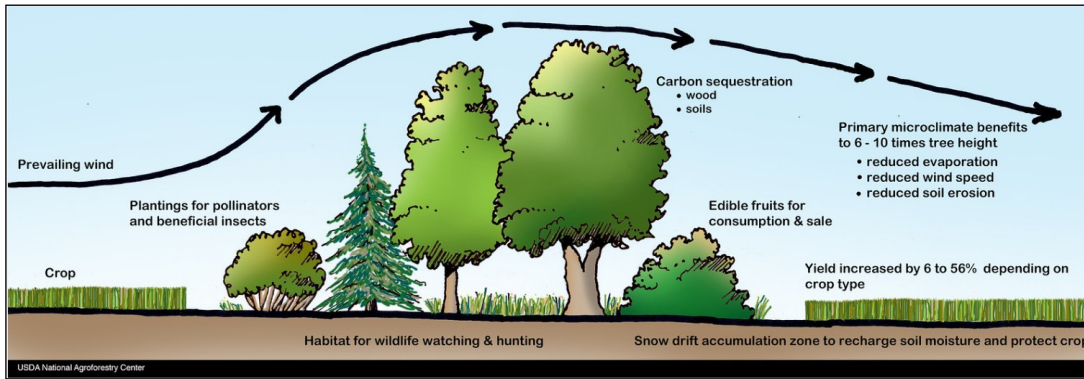
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START Planning Your Windbreak NOW

By Doreen McMurray, Information & Education Specialist
East Cassia & West Cassia Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Windbreaks provide protection from blowing wind and snow, habitat for wildlife, and add beauty for increased property value. Windbreaks around your home or livestock feeding areas can make a difference in reducing not only wind velocity, but reducing blowing snow and dirt. Windbreaks also gentle extreme temperatures by reducing wind chill during cold seasons, or by providing shade in the summer. A windbreak properly placed near a roadway reduces the need for plowing snow and increases visibility from blowing snow or dust. Trees also provide wildlife habitat. Planting trees increases property value and works well as a privacy hedge.



The first step in planning a windbreak is to consider where a windbreak is needed or where you would like the trees or shrubs to be planted. For a windbreak, it is recommended to have 3 to 5 rows for maximum benefit but even one row will provide some positive results. Measure the width of your area and determine how many rows you want or

Continued on page 6

East Cassia Turns 70 - Continued from page 1

We provide **education for Adults** including 3 newsletters each year, a website with conservation activities and information, a cost-share moisture monitoring project, and Workshops for landowners addressing current farming issues & topics.

We meet with County Commissioners each year to discuss conservation issues and funding needs.

We provide **education for youth** such as the poster contest for 5th & 6th grade students, Natural Resource Camp and Know Your Government scholarships, speech contests for high school students, College Scholarships, and we assist with hosting the Idaho State Soils Contest CDE (Idaho State FFA & 4-H Land & Soil Evaluation CDE).

We present awards to honor landowners who are good stewards of the land and teachers who work to educate youth about agriculture and conservation. And much, much more !!!



East Cassia SWCD Supervisors L to R: Kurt Heward, Ken Woodworth, Hannah Sanders, Rob Cottle, and Brogan Higley.

1956 - 2026

Happy Birthday

EAST CASSIA
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Serving Eastern Cassia County for 70 years

1361 East 16th Street, Burley, ID
208-572-3375
ewcswcd@gmail.com
minicassiaswcd.com

Check out
our District GOALS
As stated in our Annual Plan
and 5-Year Plan at:
www.MINICASSIASwcd.com



Start Planning Your WINDBREAK Now!

Continued from page 5

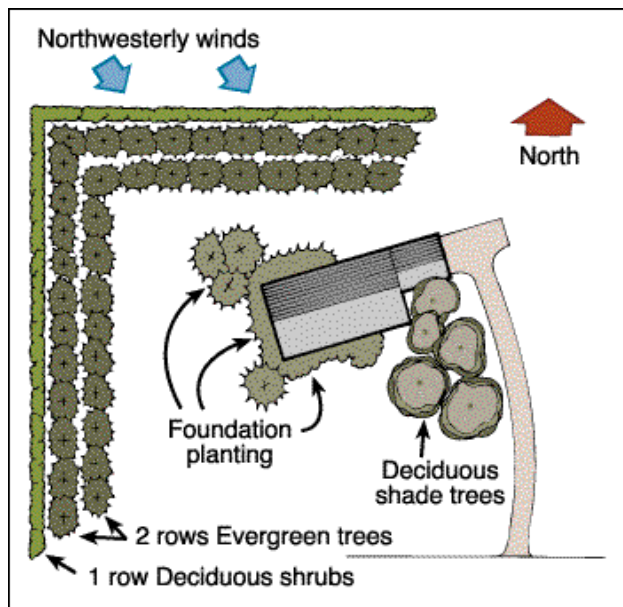
break needs to be dense near the ground. So, select a bushy, dense deciduous shrub for the windward or outside row. Shrubs make ideal single row or double row low windbreaks around yards and gardens. They are often used for living snow fences and provide excellent wildlife habitat. They also provide the needed protection for evergreens to get established in a windbreak. Many varieties also add beautification as they have blossoms.

Planting a different variety of tree or shrub in each row provides the greatest benefit. Deciduous trees are often used for a middle row in a windbreak. They are generally faster growing than evergreens and thus provide earlier protection. Evergreen trees are an important part of a windbreak because they provide excellent protection year-round with coverage close to the ground. Evergreens should be included in a windbreak whenever possible. You can plant one or two evergreen rows on the leeward side of the windbreak. The final row could be another shrub row. Remember that 3-5 rows are best, but you can plant more or less as room allows.

A few things to remember: Do some research. Plan your windbreak carefully taking into consideration the greatest benefits from wind and sun. Measure your area and plan appropriate room for trees to grow. Consider irrigation and protection from animals while trees are getting established. For survival of your trees during planting, take precautions to keep the roots damp.

The most economical way to start a windbreak is to plant seedlings. Their success rate is very good. Seedling Trees are available to order now from the Soil & Water Conservation Districts. The seedlings come in bundles of 5 trees per bundle for a cost of \$25 plus tax for each bundle. You can pre-order your trees starting in January 2027. The seedlings will arrive in late April.

Planting instructions, windbreak information, seedling tree sale order forms, and tree & shrub photos will be available soon on our website at www.minicassiaswcd.com. For more information, call 208-572-3375 or 208-436-4202.





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Minidoka office: 208-436-4202

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Info on our website: www.minicassiaswcd.com



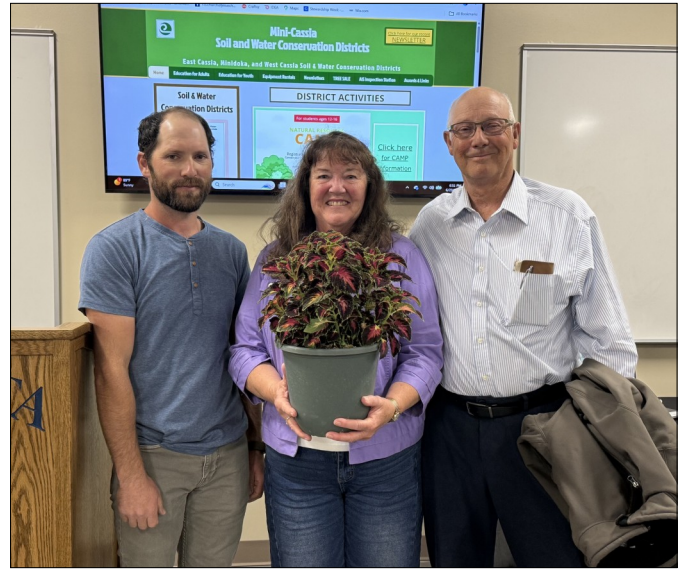
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East Cassia Soil & Water Conservation District.

For details, visit our website at
www.minicassiaswcd.com or call **208-572-3375**.



Soil Districts Hold ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET

Minidoka SWCD hosted the joint Annual Awards Banquet for the Soil & Water Conservation Districts in Cassia & Minidoka Counties on June 23, 2026. Districts presented scholarship awards, Supervisor and Employee Service Awards, College Scholarship Awards, and Conservation Teacher and Farmer Awards.



Top Left: East Cassia's Conservation Farmer of the Year Award - Cleve & Karol Smith. (presented by East Cassia Chairman Rob Cottle & East Cassia Vice-Chair Kurt Heward)

Top Right: West Cassia Conservation Farmer of the Year Craig & Beverly Searle. (presented by West Cassia Supervisor Scott Yost)

Left: Minidoka FFA Teachers of the Year Jessica Stapelman and Sophie Cowgill. Not pictured Rick Stimpson and Layton Bohlman. (presented by Minidoka Supervisor Jeff Schow, Minidoka Chairman Dusty Wilkins, and Minidoka Treasurer Lance Lovell)

Right: Scholarship Students who attended Natural Resource Camp spoke of their experiences -



Ethan and Lincoln Bowers, and Payson Suchan.

Far Left: East Cassia Teacher of the Year Award Cami Schumann from Raft River High School FFA. (presented by East Cassia Chairman Rob Cottle)

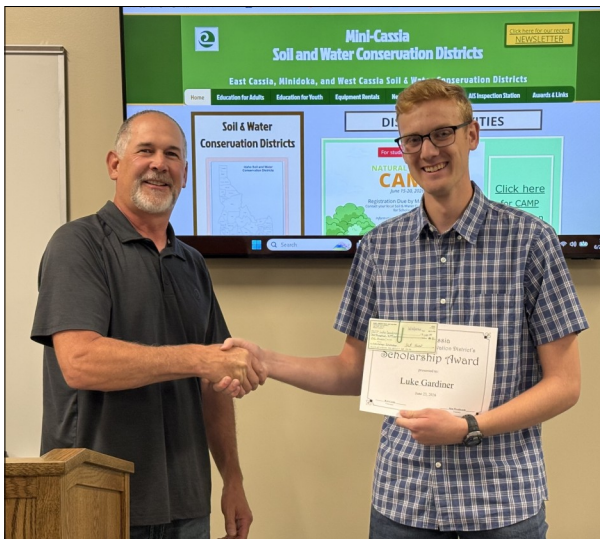
Left: East Cassia 20 Year Service Pin to Mark Webb. (presented by East Cassia Supervisor Hannah Sanders)



Top Left: **Minidoka 10-Year Employee Appreciation Award to Sharon Morris.** (presented by Minidoka Vice-Chairman Luke Stevenson, Supervisor Jeff Schow, Chairman Dusty Wilkins, and Treasurer Lance Lovell.

Top Right: **East Cassia & West Cassia 5-Year Employee Appreciation Award to Rachelle Osterhout.** (presented by East Cassia Chairman Rob Cottle and West Cassia Chairman Richard Kunau)

Below: **College Scholarship Awards** (below) Left: East Cassia Scholarship - Luke Gardiner (presented by East Cassia Chairman Rob Cottle), Center: Minidoka Scholarship - Emma Walton, and Right: West Cassia Scholarship Tristan Vega (presented by West Cassia Supervisor Chad Searle).



Below: Students Adam Overholt and Kaiya Lee represented all the scholarship students who attended the **Know Your Government** Conference.



Snake River Quagga Treatment Update

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

August 26, 2026

<https://invasivespecies.idaho.gov/snake-river-treatment>



Conservation District
POSTER
Contest

For 5th & 6th Grade Students

1. Use 14" x 22" poster board.
2. Any media may be used to create a flat or two-dimensional effect.
3. ALL WORK must be done by student.
4. Use the theme and may reflect soil, water, wildlife, forest, or range conservation.
5. Posters are due in October (exact deadline for each district is posted on our website at www.minicassiaswcd.com).

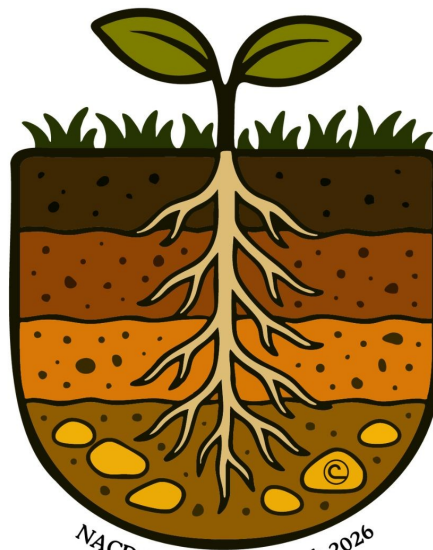
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NACD Stewardship Week 2026

2026 Theme
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Conservation District
SPEECH
Contest

for High School Students

1. Students must be in grades 9-12.
2. Contestant must have an interest in agriculture, resource conservation, or the environment.
3. Contestant must fill out and submit an application form (found on our website at www.minicassiaswcd.com)
4. The SPEECH shall be at least 3 minutes and not more than 5 minutes.
5. Speech must be student's original text, researched & written by student.
6. Notes may be used at district level only.
7. Local contest will be held on Tues, November 4, 2025.

Check our website for details at: **www.minicassiaswcd.com**

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Mini-Cassia Producers EXPERIMENT with SOIL MOISTURE SENSORS to SAVE WATER

By Steve Stuebner

Producers in the Mini-Cassia region of Southern Idaho are finishing up the third year of a Moisture Monitoring project involving the use of Soiltech moisture sensors in crop fields. The Soiltech moisture sensors provide real-time data on soil moisture, temperature, and humidity. A number of farmers in the East Cassia, Minidoka and West Cassia Soil and Water Conservation Districts say they are getting improved real-time information about soil moisture, which can help landowners be more precise with their use of water for irrigation. Some of the Mini-Cassia farmers have commented that they didn't realize that they had been over-watering their crops, District officials said. By using the moisture monitors, they have been able to reduce pivot sprinkler rotations, officials said.

"It's been really insightful to see what the soil moisture conditions are," said Jason Webb, an East Cassia District farmer who grows sugar beets, potatoes, wheat and corn. Webb has been using the sensors in potato and beet fields. "It's been a good tool for us."

The hardest part is getting everything set up, Webb said. The Soiltech sensors need to be buried 6"-8" below the ground in crop fields, and software and apps need to be installed on a smartphone to monitor the soil conditions. Once those things are in place, you can establish a baseline and then check the monitors for soil moisture, humidity and temperature.

"It's a little more precise in checking your soil moisture," he said. "But it's still a good idea to dig into your fields and check on soil moisture that way as well. There's never a replacement for that."

An AT&T-Soiltech case study found that irrigators using soil moisture sensors can see a 10 percent reduction in water use, or a savings of 500 million gallons of water, by using the sensors, in a typical growing season.

"In a year when water is tight like this one, I know the growers have at least 50 things to worry about, so if you can save some water with Soiltech sensors, that can provide a little peace of mind," said Ehsan Soltan, CEO of Soiltech.

Emily Bedwell, Ph.D., a University of Idaho Extension Irrigation Specialist based in Kimberly, agrees. "Absolutely, it's an important tool to help producers optimize their water use this year."

Bedwell is experimenting with the Soiltech moisture sensors on a sugar beet field and cover crop mixes at the University of Idaho Kimberly Research and Extension Center. The moisture sensors are valuable because they provide information about the soil moisture in the plant root zone below the earth's surface, she noted.

The sensor units provide detailed readings on moisture in the soil. "It's a percentage of units of water per units of soil," she said. "Different plants have different water needs. And the crop water needs are dynamic throughout the growing season."

The Moisture Monitoring Project began in 2024 when the East Cassia, Minidoka and West Cassia districts had the idea of running a project where landowners could try out moisture monitors to see if it could help them to better manage their irrigation. The Districts planned to encourage landowners to participate in the project by covering a large percentage of the expenses. Twelve growers signed up for the project and

52 monitors were purchased. At the end of the three-year project, the growers will own the moisture sensors and can continue to use them.

"Cover Crops have been the subject of education by the Districts since 2017. We are now going underground – in the ground with moisture monitors. These monitors could be the next generation of technology in helping our growers understand soil moisture with real time data," the Districts said in an information sheet distributed to local producers.

The cost to the growers was \$1,050, officials said. The total investment for the Districts and each producer was \$2,451 to cover the cost of 3 monitors, along with a 3-year subscription per monitor and one antenna. Some growers purchased extra antennas, hoping to more easily collect data.

In 2024, a soil moisture monitoring project featuring the Wood River and Gooding soil conservation districts also showed positive results (story was featured in the February 2024 issue of Conservation the Idaho Way). In that project, the districts received a grant from the Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) to help cover program costs.

In the Mini-Cassia Moisture Monitoring Project, the three Districts paid for approximately 60% of the project costs, and the growers paid for approximately 40%. These costs included the purchase of the monitors, one antenna for each grower, and the data subscription. The project also included a Grower Forum each year to provide education and help in using the equipment.

The Districts' goal in financing such a large portion of the project was to provide an incentive for local producers to try them out, officials said. With a drought summer and water-short supplies gripping many producers in Southern Idaho, conserving water will be crucial to stretch irrigation supplies as far as possible so farmers can produce a good crop.

Carolyn Firth, Agricultural Program Specialist for the Conservation Commission, notes that conserving water in the Mini-Cassia region is important for additional reasons. The farms overlie the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) Ground Water Management Area (GWMA), and they have 303(d)-listed water bodies that run through them, meaning that some beneficial uses are not supported. In Cassia County, in addition to it being within the ESPA GWMA, it also has five Critical Ground Water Management Areas located within it. "So water quantity is a major resource concern," Firth said. "Groundwater quality is also a major resource concern, since a significant portion of Minidoka County is a Nitrate Priority Area, ranked #3 in the state, and the northern part of Cassia County (Marsh Creek Nitrate Priority Area) is ranked #5 in the state."

"If producers watch their irrigation use carefully, the risk of water transporting nitrates into groundwater will be decreased," Firth said.

More Producer perspectives on the Soiltech sensors

Chad Searle, Supervisor of the West Cassia District, said he has been using four moisture sensors in his fields. He grows sugar beets, corn, wheat, alfalfa and beans.

"The sensors give you a 2nd opinion or a little more peace of mind about your soil moisture," Searle said. "They've been working pretty well, but the software isn't real user-friendly. I've struggled a little bit at times with connectivity issues. I've been working with the techs to help me understand it better."

Searle does recommend the product to help producers know when their fields have been watered enough or need more water.

"Overall, I've been pretty happy with them," he said.

Lucas Spratling, an East Cassia farmer who raises crops in the Raft River area, said he put three of the sensors in a 125-acre field to get a more precise idea of soil moisture. "You can find that some parts of the field are quite dry and others are too wet," he said.

He irrigates the field with a center pivot. "It's crucial to know

what's going on with the soil moisture in your crop field," he said.

Spratling noted that the Raft River area has received only 2 inches of moisture since January. The Raft River Basin is part of a Critical Ground Water Management Area, managed by the Idaho Department of Water Resources. Next year, the Raft River Basin will be managed as part of the ESPA Area of Common Groundwater Supply. Producers in the area will be subject to potential groundwater restrictions based on a longstanding water call by the Surface Water Coalition in the Magic Valley. All of those things will make it even more critical for Raft River producers to manage their water wisely, Spratling said.

Some growers have converted their pivot sprinklers to low-elevation spray application (LESA) irrigation systems, which feature tubes that extend from the pivot to the top of crops to reduce water and evaporation losses. LESA systems can reduce water use by up to 18%. Less water use also can save on energy pumping costs.

"There's no one solution to this issue," Spratling says. "It's going to take a combination of things to make it work."

Aaron Firth, District Agriculture Manager for Amalgamated Sugar and a former ag crop consultant, agrees. Firth assisted producers in the Minidoka Soil Conservation District with a moisture-monitoring project using Soiltech sensors in 2023. "We bought 70-75 of those sensors for that project, and shared them with 12 different growers. They put 3-4 sensors in each field," he said. "That project worked out well. Several of the producers said they saved about 1-2 inches of water that year."

It's important to install antennas with the Soiltech sensors so they can easily transmit data when they're buried in the soil, he said.

More tips on water-saving techniques

Besides Soiltech, there are some other moisture sensor products available to growers, he noted.

Installing LESA on pivots is another way to save water, as Spratling noted. Producers also can buy smaller nozzles to reduce water use, he said.

Another water-saving tip: Farmers may want to try a free online irrigation scheduling tool available from Washington State University, Firth said.

That tool is integrated with AgWeatherNet and many other agricultural weather networks throughout the Western United States. It

works well on any mobile phone as well as any computer that has internet access. It automatically gets Evapotranspiration (ET) and rainfall estimates from weather stations and tracks the soil water deficit so growers can know when to irrigate and how much.

AgriMet stations in Southern Idaho provide that free service if producers get signed up to use it, Firth said, adding, "That free tool can be almost as helpful as in-soil moisture monitors."

Bedwell agreed with Firth's recommendations on water-saving techniques. She also recommended that growers could save water by irrigating at night, when there is less wind and less evaporation. Growers should research the specific needs of the crops they're growing, she said. "Sugar beets and potatoes have higher water needs compared to small grains. Your crops are going to have different water needs during the growing season as well."

She commended the Mini-Cassia Districts for providing an incentive for producers to try the soil moisture sensors. "There's such a risk for producers when it comes to trying new things," she said. "Incentive programs like that can reduce the risk and encourage producers to improve their operations."



Steve Stuebner writes for Conservation the Idaho Way on a regular basis. (Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission)



East Cassia, Minidoka, & West Cassia
Soil & Water Conservation Districts
1361 East 16th Street
Burley, ID 83318

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West Cassia - 2nd Tuesday of each month.

Call 208-572-3375 for details.

Minidoka - 2nd Wednesday of each month.

Call 208-436-4202 for details.

Minidoka SWCD

Phone: 208-436-4202

minidokaswcd@gmail.com

East & West Cassia SWCDs

Phone: 208-572-3375

ewcswcd@gmail.com

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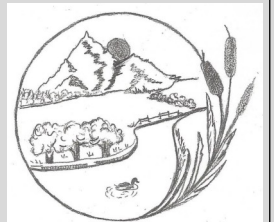
East Cassia
Soil & Water Conservation District

1361 East 16th Street
Burley, ID 83318

208-572-3375
ewcswcd@gmail.com
www.minicassiaswcd.com

Minidoka
Soil & Water Conservation District

208-436-4202
minidokaswcd@gmail.com
98 South 200 West,
Suite B
Rupert, ID 83350



West Cassia
Soil & Water Conservation District

1361 East 16th St.
Burley, ID 83318

ewcswcd@gmail.com
minicassiaswcd.com
208-572-3375