

1 AN ACT relating to soil conservation.

2 *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:*

3 ➔SECTION 1. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 262 IS CREATED TO
4 READ AS FOLLOWS:

5 (1) The Division of Conservation, with the advice and input of the Department of
6 Agriculture, shall establish and implement the Healthy Soils Program in order to
7 promote the use of healthy soil practices by Kentucky's farmers, both urban and
8 rural. The division shall:

9 (a) Provide technical advice and assistance on healthy soil practices;

10 (b) Assist farmers with soil health assessments; and

11 (c) Aid farmers with the development and implementation of soil health plans.

12 (2) The commissioner of the Department for Natural Resources shall approve grants,
13 made on a competitive basis, and other types of financial incentives to local
14 governments, schools, and public, private, and charitable entities to finance
15 projects in furtherance of the Healthy Soils Program. Part of promoting healthy
16 soil practices shall be the efficient application of chemicals and amendments on
17 agricultural and nonagricultural land. The commissioner shall develop a low-
18 cost loan program for Kentucky farmers to adopt and implement a soil health
19 plan. Priority for financial assistance shall be given to veteran farmers or
20 ranchers, beginning farmers or ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers or
21 ranchers, as those terms are defined in 7 U.S.C. sec. 2279(a).

22 (3) Expenditures from the Healthy Soils Program fund established in Section 2 of
23 this Act shall be used for the purposes of this section to complement rather than
24 replace existing local, state, private, or federal funding for related programs. The
25 department may enter into agreements with other state and federal agencies to
26 implement the Healthy Soils Program.

27 (4) The Department for Natural Resources shall promulgate administrative

1 regulations in accordance with KRS Chapter 13A to implement the Healthy Soils
2 Program pursuant to this section and administer the Healthy Soils Program fund
3 pursuant to Section 2 of this Act.

4 ➔SECTION 2. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 262 IS CREATED TO
5 READ AS FOLLOWS:

6 (1) The Healthy Soils Program fund is hereby created and established in the State
7 Treasury as a separate trust and agency account. The fund shall be used for
8 running the Healthy Soils Program, making grants and loans, and offering other
9 financial incentives in support of Section 1 of this Act. The fund may receive
10 appropriations from the General Assembly, grants, gifts, federal funds, or any
11 other funds, both public and private, for the purpose of supporting and abetting
12 the Healthy Soils Program.

13 (2) Notwithstanding KRS 45.229, any moneys remaining in the fund at the close of
14 the fiscal year shall not lapse but shall be carried forward to the next fiscal year.
15 Any unallotted or unencumbered balance shall be carried forward. Funds shall
16 be invested pursuant to KRS 42.500 and any income earned from the investments
17 shall be credited to and become part of the fund.

18 (3) Disbursements from the fund shall be made by the Treasurer upon writ from the
19 commissioner of the Department for Natural Resources.

20 ➔Section 3. KRS 146.100 is amended to read as follows:

21 (1) The secretary of the Energy and Environment Cabinet, with the approval of the Soil
22 and Water Conservation Commission, shall appoint a director of the Division of
23 Conservation with experience in professional agricultural activities, including
24 healthy soil practices as defined in Section 5 of this Act, and who shall serve as
25 executive officer for the commission. The director shall serve at the will of, and
26 receive compensation as may be determined by the secretary of the Energy and
27 Environment Cabinet with the advice of the Soil and Water Conservation

1 Commission. In addition to any other duties assigned to him or her by the secretary
2 of the Energy and Environment Cabinet, the director shall exercise, subject to the
3 approval of the secretary, general administrative supervision over all activities,
4 employees and property of the commission.~~[.:]~~

5 (2) The secretary of the Energy and Environment Cabinet may employ other officers,
6 employees, and agents, who shall serve at his or her will as he or she deems
7 necessary, with the advice of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission, and
8 shall provide for surety bonds for members, the director, officers, employees or
9 agents if entrusted with funds or property.

10 ➔Section 4. KRS 224.71-110 is amended to read as follows:

11 (1) The Agriculture Water Quality Authority is created and administratively attached to
12 the cabinet. The authority shall be a multidiscipline peer group that shall evaluate,
13 develop, and improve best-management practices in conservation plans, compliance
14 plans, and forest stewardship management plans; establish statewide and regional
15 agriculture water quality plans; and otherwise promote soil and water conservation
16 **and restoration** activities that protect waters of the Commonwealth from the
17 adverse impacts of agriculture operations within the Commonwealth. The cabinet
18 shall provide staff to the authority.

19 (2) ~~[Within six (6) months of July 15, 1994,]~~The Soil and Water Conservation
20 Commission shall submit to the Governor for appointment to the Agriculture Water
21 Quality Authority a list of three (3) persons recommended by each of the following
22 state agencies and organizations:

- 23 (a) Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts;
24 (b) Kentucky Department of Agriculture;
25 (c) University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension
26 Service;
27 (d) Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.;

1 (e) Division of Conservation, Energy and Environment Cabinet;

2 (f) Division of Forestry, Energy and Environment Cabinet;

3 (g) Kentucky Geological Survey; ~~and~~

4 (h) Environmental organizations; and

5 (i) Organic agriculture organizations.

6 The membership of the Agriculture Water Quality Authority appointed by the
7 Governor shall consist of one (1) representative from each of the groups identified
8 in paragraphs (a) to ~~(i)(4)~~ of this subsection and two (2)~~three (3)~~ members at
9 large from agriculture operations. The Soil and Water Conservation Commission
10 shall solicit nominations from Kentucky agriculture operations organizations and
11 submit those names to the Governor for selection of the two (2)~~three (3)~~ members
12 at large from agriculture operations. Initial terms shall be staggered, and~~The~~
13 ~~Governor shall select four (4) members to serve two (2) year initial terms, four (4)~~
14 ~~members to serve three (3) year initial terms, and three (3) members to serve four~~
15 ~~(4) year initial terms.~~ all succeeding terms shall be four (4) year terms. Vacancies
16 shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments. A representative
17 from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and a representative from the
18 United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency may also be
19 appointed by the Governor to serve on the authority. One (1) representative each
20 from the Division of Water, Energy and Environment Cabinet and the Department
21 for Public Health, Cabinet for Health and Family Services shall serve as ex officio
22 members.

23 (3) It shall be the responsibility of the Agriculture Water Quality Authority to establish,
24 at a minimum, the following five (5)~~four (4)~~ committees for agriculture
25 operations, with membership outside the Agriculture Water Quality Authority:

26 (a) Livestock and poultry;

27 (b) Crops, including but not limited to tobacco, corn, soybeans, small grains,

1 fruits and vegetables, pasture, and timber;

2 (c) Pesticides, fertilizers, and other agricultural chemicals;~~{and}~~

3 (d) Farmstead issues; and

4 (e) Healthy soil practices as defined in Section 5 of this Act.

5 (4) The Agriculture Water Quality Authority shall have the following responsibilities:

6 (a) Review water quality data as available;

7 (b) Review university research on water quality and alternative best-management
8 practices research;

9 (c) Evaluate the adoption and effectiveness of best-management practices, and
10 modify best-management practice design standards to improve water quality
11 protection practices;

12 (d) Develop by July 1, 1996, statewide agriculture water quality plans to address
13 identifiable water pollution problems from agriculture operations, and
14 continue to evaluate and modify the agriculture water quality plans, as
15 necessary to prevent water pollution from agriculture operations;

16 (e) Assist with the review of state-funded and other water quality monitoring data
17 and with the establishment of agriculture water priority protection regions;

18 (f) Provide technical assistance to persons engaged in agriculture operations and
19 to the Soil and Water Conservation Commission in its efforts to coordinate
20 water quality protection as related to agriculture operations;

21 (g) Work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States
22 Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency, and conservation districts to
23 disseminate to agriculture operations the best-management practices,
24 conservation plans, compliance plans, forest stewardship management plans,
25 and agriculture water quality plans which address the protection of
26 groundwater and surface water;

27 (h) Provide the Governor and the Legislative Research Commission with biennial

1 reports of the progress of the Agriculture Water Quality Authority program;
2 and

3 (i) Establish procedures for modifications to be incorporated into statewide or
4 regional agriculture water quality plans.

5 (5) The cabinet's Division of Water shall approve or disapprove any statewide and
6 regional water quality plan within thirty (30) days of receiving the plan from the
7 Agriculture Water Quality Authority. All provisions of a statewide or regional
8 water quality plan not found deficient shall be approved. If the Division of Water
9 finds any provision of the statewide or regional agriculture water quality plan
10 deficient, the Division of Water shall give written notice to the authority of those
11 provisions found to be deficient. Within the thirty (30) days following the notice of
12 deficiency, the authority shall deliver to the Division of Water a written response
13 setting forth proposed solutions to the deficiencies. Any deficiencies which remain
14 unresolved shall be resolved in a manner agreed to jointly by the Division of Water
15 and the authority within sixty (60) days unless the Division of Water and authority
16 jointly agree to an extension or alternate dispute resolution. The Division of Water
17 shall approve or disapprove all modifications to the statewide and regional plans as
18 set forth at KRS 224.71-120(8).

19 ➔Section 5. KRS 262.010 is amended to read as follows:

20 (1) "Board" means the board of supervisors of a conservation district;

21 (2) "Commission" means the Conservation Commission;

22 (3) "District" means a conservation district whenever used in KRS 262.010 to 262.660
23 or a watershed conservancy district whenever used in KRS 262.700 to 262.795;

24 (4) "Due notice" means notice published in accordance with the legal notice provisions
25 of KRS Chapter 424;

26 (5) **"Healthy soil practices" means agricultural practices supported by the United**
27 **States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service's**

Environmental Quality Incentives Program that feed the soil, reduce erosion, improve soil structure, enhance nutrient cycling, and encourage water retention by utilizing four (4) principal practices as follows:

(a) Using plant diversity to improve diversity in the soil;

(b) Managing soils with less disturbance to the soil;

(c) Keeping plants growing year-round to feed the soil; and

(d) Keeping the soil covered as much as possible;

(6) "Infrastructure" means the plant and assets required for maintaining a district office;

~~**(7)**~~~~**(6)**~~ "Land occupier" or "occupier of land" includes any person other than the landowner who is in possession of any lands lying within the district, whether as lessee or otherwise;

~~**(8)**~~~~**(7)**~~ "Landowner" or "owner of land" includes any person who holds legal or equitable title to the land within the district determined as follows:

(a) By his, her, or their names appearing on the recorded deed to the land;

(b) By title derived through a probated will or by the laws of descent and distribution under KRS Chapter 391;

(c) Where a minor or person adjudged mentally disabled is the owner of land within the district, the guardian or conservator or whoever has the power of attorney shall have the right to vote for such landowner under the provisions of KRS Chapter 262;

(d) Where the will has not been probated by the date of the referendum or election as provided in KRS Chapter 262, the executor of the deceased landowner shall have the right to vote for the devisee or devisees;

(e) Where the land within the districts is held in trust, the trustee shall have the right to vote for the landowner under the provisions of KRS Chapter 262;

(f) A landowner shall be entitled to but one (1) vote whenever he **or she** is given the right to vote under KRS Chapter 262 regardless of the number of tracts or

1 parcels of land which he or she owns either wholly or in part, within the
2 district;

3 (g) Where a trustee, executor, guardian, conservator, or other person with
4 authority to vote for a landowner exercises such duty in relation to two (2) or
5 more estates or tracts of land, within a district, such person shall have the right
6 to vote separately for each such landowner which he or she represents within
7 the district; or

8 (h) In the case of a dispute as to whether or not a person has the right to vote in an
9 election or referendum under the provisions of KRS Chapter 262, the person
10 seeking such right must provide to the satisfaction of the polling
11 superintendent that he or she has the right to vote under this section;

12 **(9) "Soil health" means the overall composition of the soil and its continued capacity**
13 **to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans;**

14 **(10) "Soil health assessment" means a suite of soil health indicator measures such as**
15 **amount of organic matter in the soil, soil structure, infiltration and bulk density,**
16 **water holding capacity, microbial biomass, and soil respiration;[-]**

17 **(11) [(8)] "Supervisor" means one (1) of the members of the governing body of a**
18 **conservation district; and**

19 **(12) "Watershed health" means the continued capacity of surface water and**
20 **groundwater ecosystems to function as a vital living ecosystem that is resilient to**
21 **drought and storm events and that sustains plants, animals, and humans.**

22 ➔Section 6. KRS 262.020 is amended to read as follows:

23 The purpose of a soil and water conservation district is to conserve, restore, and develop
24 all renewable natural resources within the district. In so doing, the district is authorized to
25 undertake, sponsor, or participate in projects and activities which promote the health,
26 conservation, restoration, development, maintenance and use of the land, water, trees and
27 other renewable natural resources of the district. Such projects and activities shall include

1 ~~[but not be limited to]~~ conservation **and healthy soil** practices on agricultural lands, the
2 control of soil erosion, retardation of water runoff, the construction of flood prevention
3 and control reservoirs, the maintenance of flood plains, the promotion of projects to
4 **ensure**~~[assure]~~ an adequate municipal, industrial and agricultural supply of water,
5 watershed stabilization, the avoidance and abatement of sedimentation and pollution in
6 streams and other bodies of water, forestation and reforestation, the establishment of
7 parks and outdoor recreation areas, the protection of open space, greenbelt areas and
8 scenery, the preservation of wilderness areas, the protection of fish and wildlife, **the**
9 **protection and restoration of soil and watershed health and biological diversity,**
10 **assisting rural and urban agricultural producers in soil health assessments and in**
11 **developing soil health plans,** working for the location of highways, industries, housing
12 developments, airports and other structures as are consistent with the district's objectives
13 and will offer the least possible interference with the conservation and best multiple use
14 of the renewable natural resources, and all other activities consistent with the total natural
15 resources development of the district.

16 ➔Section 7. KRS 262.748 is amended to read as follows:

- 17 (1) Upon determination by the board of directors of a watershed conservancy district
18 that the improvement, continuing operation, or maintenance of a watershed project
19 is necessary, the board of directors may adopt a resolution which shall set out:
- 20 (a) A list of the benefited lands located in the flood plain, as determined by the
21 board of directors, giving the acreage of such lands and the names of the
22 **landowners**~~[owners]~~ thereof as defined by KRS 262.010~~[(7)]~~ with a
23 classification of such lands or parts thereof into classes in order that
24 assessments may be made according to direct benefits; and
- 25 (b) The annual assessments to be levied upon the lands set out in the resolution on
26 the basis of a certain amount per acre according to benefits received, not to
27 exceed in any one (1) year a sum per acre specified in the resolution.

- 1 (2) The board of directors shall cause due notice of the resolution to be given to all the
2 owners of benefited lands, as determined by the board. Said notice shall set out the
3 time and place of a meeting of the board of directors of the watershed conservancy
4 district at which owners of benefited lands who may be liable for the annual
5 assessments may be heard.
- 6 (3) At the hearing upon the resolution, owners of benefited lands may voice their views
7 concerning the proposal as to whether it should be undertaken, and the scope
8 thereof, or the degree of benefit received by their lands. The board shall prepare a
9 record summarizing the proceedings. If the board of directors determines as a result
10 of the hearing that the proposal should be carried out as planned, it may make such
11 changes or revisions in the resolution as it deems proper and shall give due notice
12 of an election to be held at which benefited landowners may vote on the question of
13 annual special assessments to defray the cost. The notice of the election shall
14 include the text of the resolution of the board in its final form. The board of
15 directors may give due notice as provided in KRS 262.010(4).
- 16 (4) The board of directors shall prepare the following question to be presented to the
17 voters: "Should the assessment for improvement, continuing operation, or
18 maintenance proposed by resolution of the..... Watershed Conservancy District be
19 adopted?" Voters shall be instructed to vote "yes" or "no" on the proposition. Only
20 owners of benefited land as set out in the resolution shall be eligible to vote. The
21 board of directors may provide for a meeting of the landowners at which the vote
22 may be cast, in which case qualified voters may vote by absentee vote. The board
23 shall appoint a polling superintendent and other necessary election officers, giving
24 representation to the opponents of the question as well as to proponents.
- 25 (5) If a majority of those voting upon the proposition favor the assessment the board
26 shall give due notice of the vote. Any owner of property to be benefited by the
27 project may, within forty (40) days after publication of such notice, file an action in

1 the Circuit Court of the county in which his or her lands are located seeking relief
2 by declaratory judgment or injunction. If a suit is filed, the county attorney shall
3 represent the board of directors in upholding the validity of the proposed
4 assessment. After the lapse of time specified herein all actions by owners of
5 properties to be benefited shall be forever barred.

6 (6) If no suit is filed and no injunction issued within the time allowed in subsection (5)
7 of this section, the board of directors shall levy annual assessments effective only
8 upon the benefited properties and based on the acreage thereof. The annual
9 assessment shall be made by the board of directors at the same time and in the same
10 manner as provided in KRS 262.765 for taxes generally and shall be collected as
11 provided in KRS 262.770. The assessments shall constitute liens against the land
12 benefited and shall attach to the land, taking precedence over all other liens except
13 state, county and municipal taxes and prior improvement assessments.

14 ➔Section 8. KRS 262.778 is amended to read as follows:

15 (1) Upon determination by the board of directors of a watershed conservancy district
16 that a watershed project is necessary, and upon approval of the plans for same by
17 the board of supervisors, the board of directors shall adopt a resolution which shall
18 set out:

19 (a) A description of the project in general terms;

20 (b) A list of the benefited lands located in the flood plain, as determined by the
21 board of directors, giving the acreage of such lands and the names of the
22 landowners~~[owners]~~ thereof as defined by KRS 262.010~~[(7)]~~ with a
23 classification of such lands or parts thereof into classes in order that
24 assessments may be made according to direct benefits;

25 (c) The total cost of the project; and

26 (d) The fact that the cost shall be met by a bond issue payable solely from annual
27 assessments to be levied upon the lands set out in the resolution on the basis

1 of a certain amount per acre according to benefits received, not to exceed in
2 any one (1) year a sum per acre specified in the resolution, with the annual
3 assessments to extend over a period of years specified in the resolution not to
4 exceed thirty (30) years.

5 (2) The board of directors shall cause due notice of the resolution to be given to all the
6 owners of benefited lands, as determined by the board. Said notice shall set out the
7 time and place of a meeting of the board of directors of the watershed conservancy
8 district at which owners of benefited lands who may be liable for the annual
9 assessments may be heard.

10 (3) At the hearing upon the resolution, owners of benefited lands may voice their views
11 concerning the proposed project as to whether said project should be undertaken,
12 and the scope thereof, or the propriety of placing their lands in the project area or
13 the degree of benefit received by their lands. The board shall prepare a record
14 summarizing the proceedings. If the board of directors determines as a result of the
15 hearing that the project should be carried out as planned, it may make such changes
16 or revisions in the resolution as it deems proper and shall give due notice of an
17 election to be held at which benefited landowners may vote on the question of
18 annual special assessments to defray the cost of the project. The notice of the
19 election shall include the text of the resolution of the board in its final form. The
20 board of directors may give due notice as provided in KRS 262.010(4).

21 (4) The board of directors shall prepare to be presented to the voters the question:
22 "Should the assessment proposed by resolution of the Watershed Conservancy
23 District be adopted?". Voters shall be instructed to vote "yes" or "no." Only owners
24 of benefited land as set out in the resolution shall be eligible to vote. The board of
25 directors may provide for a meeting of the landowners at which the vote may be
26 cast, in which case qualified voters may vote by absentee vote. The board shall
27 appoint a polling superintendent and other necessary election officers, giving

1 representation to the opponents of the question as well as to proponents.

2 (5) If a majority of those voting upon the proposition favor the assessment, the board
3 shall give due notice of the vote and the fact that bonds will forthwith be issued
4 payable from special assessments. Any owner of property to be benefited by the
5 project may, within forty (40) days after publication of such notice, file an action in
6 the Circuit Court of the county in which his or her lands are located seeking relief
7 by declaratory judgment or injunction. If a suit is filed, the county attorney should
8 represent the board of directors in upholding the validity of the proposed bond
9 issue. After the lapse of time specified herein, all actions by owners of properties to
10 be benefited shall be forever barred.

11 (6) If no suit is filed and no injunction issued within the time allowed in subsection (5)
12 of this section, the board of directors shall by resolution authorize the issuance of
13 bonds designated "watershed project assessment bonds," determining the principal
14 amount thereof and establishing the denominations and maturity dates thereof and
15 shall levy an annual assessment effective only upon the benefited properties and
16 based on the acreage thereof. The annual rate of such assessments shall be fixed
17 when other taxes of the district are levied and shall be sufficient in each year to
18 provide for the payment of such bonds and interest coupons as they mature and
19 sufficient to provide a fund equal to twenty percent (20%) of the average annual
20 principal and interest requirements, the same to constitute a "debt service reserve"
21 as a precaution against possible default by failure to collect annual levies. The
22 bonds shall state on their face that they do not constitute a debt of the district but
23 are payable solely from collection of special assessments made upon benefited
24 lands lying in the watershed conservancy district.