

Increasing engineering Capacity in Ag Conservation

PA's Practice Approval System in ACAP

Things You Need to Know

Ag Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP)

- Formed in 2022 by State Law
- Administered by the PA State Conservation Commission (SCC)
- Dedicated state funding delegated to county conservation districts
- Supports farmers in implementing Ag Best Management Practices (BMPs)



Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program

Administered by Pennsylvania State Conservation Commission

More Things You Need to Know

The Center for Ag Conservation Assistance Training (CACAT)

- Formed in 2023
- Funded by the SCC via ACAP
- Part of Penn State Extension
- Provides educational programs and technical assistance to county ACAP staff and related ag conservation community members



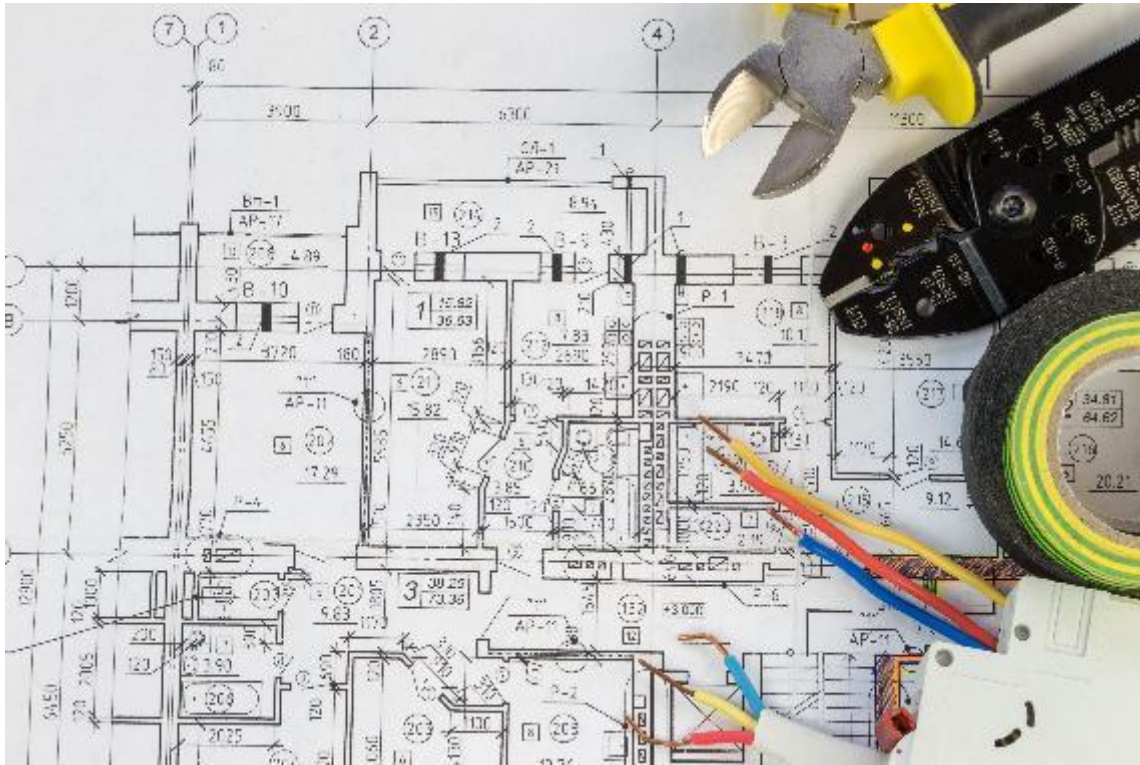
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The Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training



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Not everything is “E” Engineering



- Engineering Law in PA requires certain acts to be completed only by licensed professional engineers (PEs)
- Ag Conservation programs rely heavily on PEs to do more than just what they are required to do

What is “e” engineering?

- Low-risk ag conservation practices
 - Fences for grazing pastures
 - Animal trails and walkways
 - Gravel pads for watering systems
 - Roof gutters and underground outlets in barnyards
 - Terraces for cropland stormwater flow
 - And more...

Who can do “e” engineering?



Conservation professionals with training and experience



Those with oversight from a PE



Those working under delegations with agencies that have the authority to approve their work

ACAP's Practice Approval System (PAS)

A path for PA's conservation district employees

- To design, review, and verify conservation practices
- Practices that **do not** require certification by a registered professional engineer under the applicable laws or regulations of PA.

A partnership of SCC, CACAT, and selected
Contract Engineer (HRG)



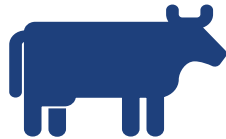
Framework for training, approval, and
tracking of qualified conservation
professionals working under this system.

PAS Certification Packages

Current



Watering
Systems



Grazing
Management



Barnyard
Stormwater



Stream
Corridor

Future



Cropland
Practices



Cropland
Stormwater

PAS Certification Process

Keystone Training



PAS Fundamentals



PAS Applied Learning



Mock Plan



Project Review

Emergency Temporary Approval for PAS



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Do you have current or previous NRCS JAA for the requested conservation practices?

☐ Yes

☐ No



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Initial Impacts – Grazing Management

Fundamentals Training

- 70% increased knowledge of grazing BMPs
- 67% increased confidence in implementing grazing BMP tools

Applied Training

- 74% increased knowledge of technical skills for designing grazing BMPs
- 89% increased confidence in completing grazing BMP designs

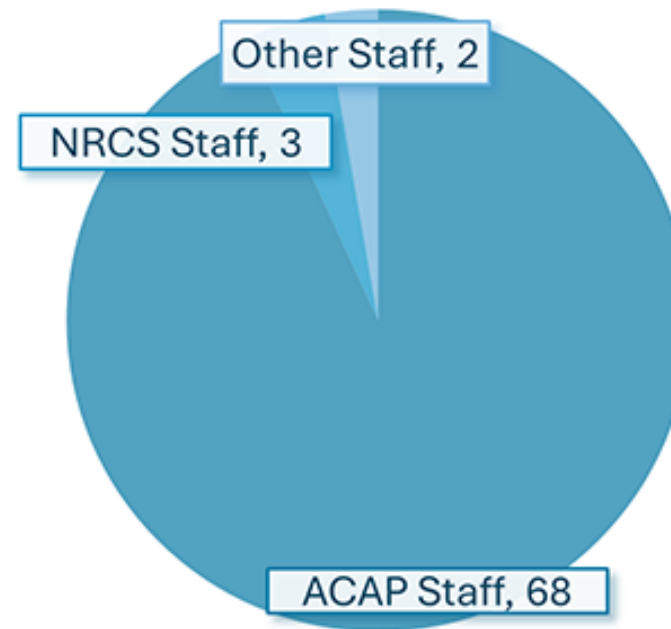
Mock Plans

- 31 submitted to date
- 28 provisional certifications

Project Review

- 6 real-world projects submitted

ACAP PAS TRAINING (2)



BMPs Included

- Fences
- Trails and Walkways
- Forage and Biomass Plantings
- Critical Area Plantings



How it's Going

Initial Impacts – Other Packages

- 22 mock **watering system** design submissions
 - Provisional approval for 9 practitioners.
- 8 mock **stream corridor** design submissions
- 18 **barnyard stormwater** applied training attendees



Where it's going...

What's Next?

- Roll Out of Remaining Packages (through end of 2026)
- Tracking Use of Certification
- QAQC of PAS Practitioners
- Revisions and Refinement



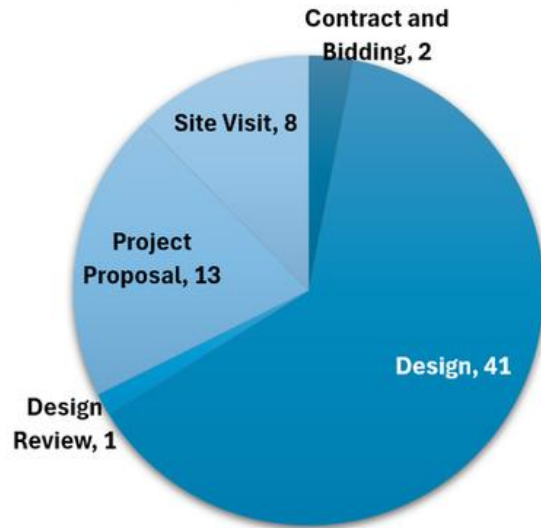
“E” Engineering Support

When a PE is Needed



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Engineering Assistance Request Program (EARP)



- Launched in December 2024
- provides conservation districts with support for ACAP projects
- staff expertise and contracted engineering services
- planning, surveying, design, and construction oversight



Regional ACAP Engineer Pilot Program

- Spring 2026
- CACAT partnered with the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD)
- PA SCC/ACAP Financial Support
- Expanding long-term engineering capacity statewide
- Dedicated regional technical support to conservation districts





Where it's going...

What's Next?

- Expand regional ACAP engineering staff
- Update EARP application and prioritization process to include regional ACAP engineering staff
- Revisions and Refinement

Questions?



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