



# 10-Minute Supervisor Trainings

Kentucky Soil and Water Conservation Commission

APRIL 2018

## **ETHICS IN CONSERVATION PROGRAMS**

As the district starts a new year and new budget constraints, it is an appropriate time to consider factors that make good board members and effective county leaders. Having been elected by our fellow citizens, we need to hold the trust of our communities in high regard. We must have a strong commitment to the mission of our organization, communicate with all involved, maintain the trust given to us, and put aside personal gain and personal interests in all our decisions and actions. We represent the entire county population and not just those in our neighborhood. We need to consider ourselves “trustees” of the district and do our very best to ensure that this trust is well maintained and that we always operate in the best interest of all those we serve.

Supervisors have a very big advantage in the districts in that we are some of the first individuals to learn about new programs, practices, and opportunities available in our counties. This can be a blessing and also a curse. We will have an advantage with always knowing what resources are available at our disposal: cost share programs, educational programs, and travel opportunities. At the same time we must be very careful in being ethical and honest in all our decisions and actions. Just because we serve on the district board does not automatically put our names on the top of the list for participation in these opportunities. Having a sense of fair play and allowing others the same opportunities that we are afforded should always be in our first thoughts. This means that from time to time we as directors and local conservation leaders may forgo participation in lieu of giving others a chance to participate. This shows true leadership and a servant attitude toward our office.

In today's society, transparency in government is a critical area of concern. The general public seems always eager to "ridicule and blame" elected officials if public trust is broken or perceived to be so. Public perception is vital to the success of any individual member or board. If the perception is that "the only people who ever get selected for cost share programs or trips are board members", then we have a problem. Perception is reality. That means that if the public thinks that we are taking advantage of our position, then in their mind we are taking advantage. This is an area of concern that we should always try to avoid if possible. Keep in mind that as conservation leaders, we are expected to represent our districts at meetings on the local, regional, state, and national levels and no one is asking you not to do so. Just be mindful in giving others the opportunity to participate as well.

As elected officials, it is the role of the Supervisors to make sure programs are known throughout the district. We must educate and advertise with all means necessary to provide adequate participation among all we serve. We must be visible, attend fiscal court meetings, and have the fiscal court members attend our meetings. We must also host yearly cooperators meetings, have an aggressive program of activities, support local youth programs, provide scholarship opportunities for our future conservation leaders, and utilize local resources in promoting and covering all our activities.

Just because we are fortunate to serve as a district supervisor, does not mean that we are entitled to be awarded program participation and/or financial gains each and every time programs are available. Sometimes we have to restrain from participating in funding programs each and every year. Remember, the importance of how the public sees your office and services will become vital in the future for accountability, funding, and the overall success of the district.

#### Questions for Discussion

- How often are our board supervisors selected for program participation compared to the average cooperator? New or young cooperator?
- Do we utilize all resources available for advertising and educating the public in promoting district programs?
- Have there been situations that the public could question the ethics of the group?
- What are the positive steps your board has taken to be more transparent to the public?
- What are some ways that your board can "test" decisions to make sure that it does not put the district in a negative perception?