



Ethics & Soil Conservation

Purpose: To ensure all Soil Conservation District supervisors and employees always operate in the best interest of all those they serve.

At its simplest, ethics is a system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their lives. Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy.

Changing Times: The roles, responsibilities and commitments for supervisors has evolved over the decades. As conservation has become a cultural staple in production agriculture, interest in your programs may be higher than you've ever had. The board might also be accountable for an increased amount of funds. Elected officials are obligated by law, ethics and public trust, and are RESPONSIBLE for ensuring taxpayer funds are used legally and wisely, for the purpose of fulfilling their counties conservation plans.

In the loop: Supervisors have the advantage of being the first individuals or producers to learn about new programs, practices and opportunities available to the district. Being ethical in actions and decisions shows true leadership and a servant attitude toward your position in conservation.

Perception is Reality: The general public seems always eager to "ridicule and blame" elected officials if public trust is broken or perceived to be so. If the perception is that, "only people on the board are selected for programs, education, or trips" the soil conservation district has a problem. Perception is reality. If the public believes supervisors are taking advantage of their position, then indeed you are. As supervisors, be mindful of sharing

opportunities for all to participate in conservation occasions.

Supervisor's Commitment: Proper ethics begins with each board member. All officials must be accountable for themselves and each other on matters of conduct. The following Ethics Statements provide guidance in reaching decisions.

- Properly administer the affairs for the district according to state law, Soil Conservation Committee guidance, and by keeping in mind the taxpayers of your community.
- Listen and respect opinions of fellow board members.
- Respect and support the decisions of the board.
- Promote decisions that benefit the public interest of your district.
- Keep all funds and investments of the district safe.
- Maintain positive public image to thwart public scrutiny.
- Be well informed on issues affecting the whole district and community.
- Treat employees fairly and equitably.
- Call attention to any issues that will have an adverse effect on the district.
- Declare any conflict of interest between yourself and the board to avoid voting on such issues.

Discussion Questions:

1. What issues have you witnessed that made you question ethics in a group?
2. What are some ways that your board can "test" decisions to ensure they put the district in the best light?
3. What are some positive steps your board has taken to be more transparent to the public?