

### Director Positions Open

**Berrien Conservation District** is seeking candidates to run for a four-year Director position for the District Board. Two positions are open. A candidate must be at least 18 years old and a resident of Berrien County.

Interested candidates should call 269-471-9111 ext 3 or visit the Berrien Conservation District office at 3334 Edgewood Road, Berrien Springs, MI between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm to learn more. Deadline for submission of election petitions including five nominating signatures is December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

A farming background is not required but is helpful. The Conservation District is looking for individuals that care about the natural resources of Berrien County and can contribute to the conservation mission.

Duties include attendance at monthly board meetings and voting on district policies; the director shall represent the district in a positive and supportive manner, secure funding for district programs, meet with legislators on a local, state, and federal level as needed, attend trainings, be informed on natural resource issues, and participate in district events and programs. Note: This is not a paid position however mileage and a monthly meeting stipend is given.

## Michigan's Produce Safety Risk Assessment

For direct market  
fruit and vegetable  
producers



### New Technician and Programs at the Berrien Conservation District!

#### *Prevention Is Key In Produce Safety*

It is essential to be able to identify risks on the farm; especially when growing fresh fruit and vegetables. The Berrien Conservation District has added two new programs, the Produce Safety Risk Assessment and On-farm Readiness Review, to help farmers in Berrien, Van Buren, Kalamazoo, and Allegan Counties assess their risks when growing, handling, harvesting,

storing and transporting their fresh produce.

The **Produce Safety Risk Assessment (PSRA)** is completely confidential, voluntary and free. All risks identified, and notes taken will stay on the farm and are used for educational purposes for the operation. A PSRA can be requested by **any grower**; regardless of acres, produce output, income and method of distribution. The off-season is a perfect time to take advantage of the education provided by the assessment tool. An assessment can be requested through the conservation district.

An **On Farm Readiness Review (OFRR)** is a confidential, free and voluntary program that helps to assess the grower's readiness for a state inspection. If you are a farm that has an annual gross income over \$25,000 on a three-year average of fresh produce sales – you may have to comply with the Federal Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule. The Produce Safety Technician will have updated information regarding mandatory grower trainings and can help conduct an On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR). This is something the farm can initiate with the Technician, or by requesting one by e-mail to [ofrr@msu.edu](mailto:ofrr@msu.edu). For best results, the OFRR's should take place during harvest of at least one type of produce being grown on the farm. This will ensure an adequate measure is taken on the farm's readiness. More information is available at <https://www.berriencd.org/produce-safety-fsma>



Meet **Victoria Toney**, our newest employee and technician. Victoria started with the conservation district October 1st. Her position is paid for through a grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

She has a passion for the agriculture industry in Michigan and is ready to provide educational assistance to growers of fresh fruits and vegetables on produce safety. Victoria is well trained on the Produce Safety Risk Assessment and the On Farm Readiness Review.

She works closely with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michigan State University, and the Produce Safety Alliance to help bring awareness to what is required by the FDA for produce growers. She can be reached at the district office at 269-471-9111 x3 or email [Victoria.Toney@macd.org](mailto:Victoria.Toney@macd.org).

### **Watch out for these new and old invasive species that threaten SW Michigan**

Michiganders are asked to be on the lookout for a number of vines that might be lurking in our woods, yards, and parks. Native vines are important in our forests for a lot of reasons, from soil stabilization to pollinator habitat, but the invasive ones typically take over and damage trees, shrubs, and fences. The SWxSW Corner CISMA, a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area helping Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties, wants to help residents find and treat these creepy vines before they get out of control. Look for these four vines that have been found in our area: black swallow-wort, Chinese yam, Kudzu, and Oriental Bittersweet.

**Black Swallow-wort** was commonly introduced as an ornamental plant, but quickly escaped and started causing problems. This time of year, home owners can look for long, thin “Milkweed like” seed pods, which hang from the vine and the plant will look brown and crispy, though they may still be holding onto some of their fluffy seeds. In the spring, you can also look for the glossy, dark, opposite leaves and dark purple itty-bitty star shaped flowers. Swallow-wort earned its place on the CISMA’s watch list, since Monarch Butterflies mistake the invasive plant for common milkweed. When Monarchs lay eggs on swallow-wort the larvae do not survive. So they threaten one of America’s best known pollinators.

**Chinese yam** was also brought here for its showy looks and for its starchy root. The key winter tell on these plants are the “air potatoes” that grow along the vine. These are popular with squirrels, which only helps it spread faster. During the summer, it will also put on large, spade shaped leaves, which can shade out and kill off other plants.

**Oriental bittersweet** is especially popular around the holidays for the bright red-orange berries it keeps throughout the winter, even appearing on Pinterest and in the Martha Stewart Magazine! But this plant can completely strangle trees, making it a bad choice for wreaths or other crafts. Look for those bright berries held all along the vine, instead of just at the ends.

**Kudzu** may be the newest to the bunch but is also the most well-known. It is sometimes called ‘the vine that ate the South’, but unfortunately it has been moving north. Kudzu was planted during the dustbowl for soil stabilization but can get out of hand in open areas or forest edges. The climbing vine can swamp trees and harm habitat. Right now, it may still have its hairy bean like pods, but next summer it will leaf out with its distinct three-part leaves and bright purple flowers.

Please report these if you see them, either to the CISMA directly, or on [MISIN.msu.edu](http://MISIN.msu.edu). The latter is a program hosted by MSU to help Citizens and managers track the spread of invasive species. If you need help treating a plant, have questions, or aren’t quite sure what you have, you can contact the CISMA.

The grant funded organization is always happy to look at photos, come out for a home visit, or help residents come up with a management plan. Contact us at the Berrien Conservation District at 269-471-9111 x3, or email the CISMA Coordinator [eleanor.serocki@macd.org](mailto:eleanor.serocki@macd.org). Photos and contributing article by Eleanor Sorocki.

**Black Swallow-wort**



**Oriental Bittersweet**



**Chinese Yam**



**Kudzu**



