



United States Department of Agriculture

American Farmland Trust National Conference
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2014

Farm Bill

NRCS Conservation Programs

**Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service**

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Who is the Natural Resources Conservation Service?

- An agency of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Established in 1935 as the Soil Erosion Service
- Formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) (until 1994)
- Not a regulatory agency

And what does NRCS do?

- Provide technical and financial assistance to land users to protect their natural resources – soil, water, air, plants and animals
- More simply put –

NRCS – Helping People Help the Land

Technical Assistance

- Work with land users to develop conservation plans to utilize their land to its fullest potential while protecting the natural resources
- Provide engineering design assistance for conservation practices such as animal waste management facilities, grassed waterways, and livestock watering systems
- Provide technical assistance to communities to help with storm damage

Financial Assistance

- Provide financial assistance to land users to implement conservation practices to address resource concerns
- Provide funds to communities when natural disasters strike
- Provide entities funds to help purchase conservation easements to protect farmland

Agricultural Act of 2014

Title II – Conservation

- Subtitle A: Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Subtitle B: Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Subtitle C: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Subtitle D: Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)
- Subtitle E: Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- Subtitle F: Other
 - Conservation of private grazing land
 - Grassroots source water protection program
 - Voluntary public access and habitat incentive program
 - Agriculture conservation experienced services program
 - Small watershed rehabilitation program
 - Emergency watershed protection program
 - Terminal Lakes
 - Soil and Water Resources Conservation

NRCS Programs Under the Agricultural Act of 2014

(not all-inclusive)

| 2008 Farm Bill | 2014 Farm Bill |
|---|---|
| Financial Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) • Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) • Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) | Financial Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) • Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) |
| Easements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) • Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) • Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) • Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) | Easements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Lands Easements (ALE) • Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) • Healthy Forest Reserve Program |
| Partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) • Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI) • Great Lakes Basin Program | Partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPPI) |

Opportunities for Working Lands

- *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)*
 - *Includes wildlife concerns*
- *Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)*
- *Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)*
- *Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Agriculture Land Easements (ACEP – ALE)*



Protecting Wetlands

*Agricultural Conservation Easement
Program - Wetlands Reserve
Easements (ACEP – WRE)*



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to landusers to treats to soil, water, air and related resources on their land
- Promotes ag production and environmental quality as compatible goals
- Works with private cropland, grazing land and forestland
- Funding is competitive

Examples of Conservation Practices for which financial assistance is available

- Grazing systems practices including livestock watering tanks and fencing to better distribute grazing/keep cattle out of streams
- Grassed waterways to control erosion
- Conservation tillage and cover crops for erosion and soil health
- Manure storage facilities, nutrient management
- Buffers and field borders
- Forest stand improvement
- Seasonal high tunnels

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- Helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems
- Adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)

- Helps agricultural producers use conservation to manage risk and address natural resource issues through natural resources conservation.
- Available in 16 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically **LOW** (Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming)
- Persons or legal entities cannot receive more than \$50,000 in AMA program payments per fiscal year.

Historically Underserved: Limited Resource Producers, Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged, and Veteran Farmer



Advantages: Higher payment rates,
may have less competition



Historically Underserved Customers

Limited Resource Producers

- For federal fiscal year 2015, person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$176,800 in each of the tax years 2012 and 2013, **AND**
- Has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four **or** less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.
- There is a Limited Resource Producer self-determination tool available at: <http://www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/> or in hard copy from NRCS field offices.

Beginning Farmers

- A person who has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of an entity, and
- The person will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

Socially Disadvantaged

- A farmer or rancher who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Does not include women as a group.
 - American Indians, Asians, African Americans, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics

Veteran Farmer (FY 2014 Definition) – New in the 2014 Farm Bill

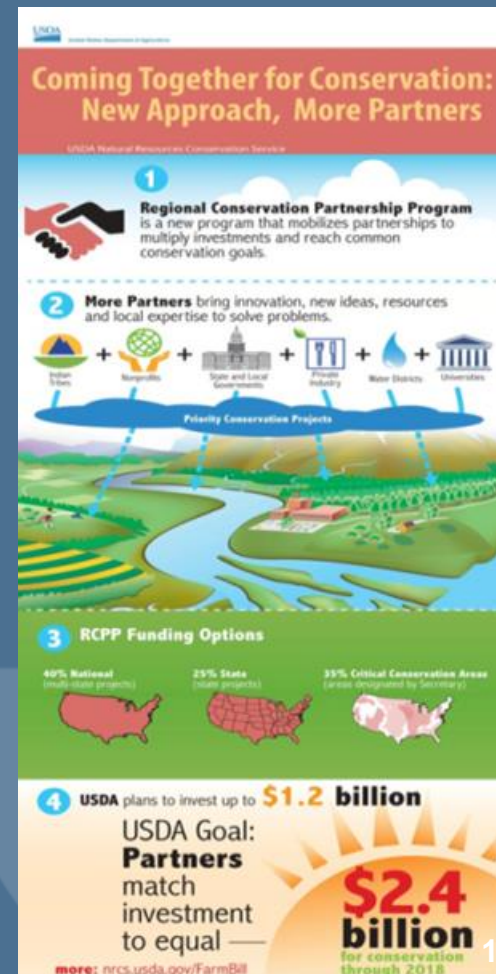
- A person who served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable and who also meets the definition of beginning farmer or rancher (BFR).



- Will need to establish records with the Farm Service Agency(FSA)
- Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) with FSA – \$900,000 under the 2014 Farm Bill
- If doing business as an entity (EIN), will need DUNS and SAM registration.

Regional Priorities and Partnerships

- The new **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)** consolidates four existing programs into one that will support projects that, through existing NRCS programs, improve soil quality, water quality, or wildlife habitat in a specific area or region.
 - Consolidated programs include: Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, and Great Lakes Basin Program.
 - Covered programs: EQIP, CSP, ACEP, HFRP
- With this new focus on regional conservation priorities USDA can maintain and strengthen existing regional initiatives while developing new priorities with partnership involvement.
- This program affords NRCS the opportunity to work in priority areas designated at the national, state and regional levels.





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