

A SELECTION OF MOST COMMONLY UTILIZED NRCS PROGRAMS

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) to provide a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practices and a maximum term of ten years. These contracts provide incentive payments and cost-shares to implement conservation practices. Persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land may participate in the EQIP program. EQIP activities are carried out according to an environmental quality incentives program plan of operations developed in conjunction with the producer that identifies the appropriate conservation practice or practices to address the resource concerns. The practices are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions. The local conservation district approves the plan.

EQIP may cost-share up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. Incentive payments may be provided for up to three years to encourage producers to carry out management practices they may not otherwise use without the incentive. However, limited resource producers and beginning farmers and ranchers may be eligible for cost-shares up to 90 percent. Farmers and ranchers may elect to use a certified third-party provider for technical assistance. An individual or entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, cost-share or incentive payments that, in the aggregate, exceed \$450,000 for all EQIP contracts entered during the term of the Farm Bill.

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) provides cost share assistance to agricultural producers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality, and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations. Producers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices, including soil erosion control, integrated pest management, or transition to organic farming.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. Through WHIP USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. WHIP agreements between NRCS and the participant generally last from 5 to 10 years from the date the agreement is signed.

WHIP has proven to be a highly effective and widely accepted program across the country. By targeting wildlife habitat projects on all lands and aquatic areas, WHIP provides assistance to conservation minded landowners who are unable to meet the specific eligibility requirements of other USDA conservation programs.

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)

The Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranchland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA

partners with State, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value of the conservation easement.

To qualify, farmland must: be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe, or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan for highly erodible land; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services; and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production. Depending on funding availability, proposals must be submitted by the eligible entities to the appropriate NRCS State Office during the application window.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency and Forest Service are coordinating implementation of GRP, which helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands. The program will conserve vulnerable grasslands from conversion to cropland or other uses and conserve valuable grasslands by helping maintain viable ranching operations.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The NRCS goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

CSP is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private and Tribal agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, and range land, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation. The program is available in all 50 States, the Caribbean Area and the Pacific Basin area. The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program provides technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. The CTA Program provides the technical capability, including direct conservation planning, design, and implementation assistance, that helps people plan and apply conservation on the land. This assistance is provided to individuals, groups, and communities who make natural resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands. NRCS, through the CTA Program, provides conservation technical assistance that addresses natural resource conservation issues at the local level that are of State and national concern.

Conservation Planning Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides conservation planning and technical assistance to clients (individuals, groups, and units of government). These clients develop and implement conservation plans to protect, conserve, and enhance natural resources (soil, water, air, plants, and animals) within their related social and economic interests.

Conservation planning is a natural resource problem-solving and management process. The process integrates ecological (natural resource), economic, and social considerations to meet private and public needs. This approach, which emphasizes identifying desired future conditions, improves natural resource management, minimizes conflict, and addresses problems and opportunities.

The success of conservation planning and implementation depends upon the voluntary participation of clients. The planning process used by NRCS is based on the premise that clients will make and implement sound decisions if they understand their resources, natural resource problems and opportunities, and the effects of their decisions.

Conservation planning helps clients, conservationists, and others view the environment as a living system of which humans are an integral part. It enables clients and planners to analyze and work with complex natural processes in definable and measurable terms.

The NRCS objective in conservation planning is the sound use and management of soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources to prevent their degradation and ensure their sustained use and productivity while also considering related human social and economic needs.