



United States Department of Agriculture

2014 Farm Bill

INDIANA NRCS FACT SHEET

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What's in the 2014 Farm Bill for NRCS Customers?

The Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 Farm Bill, was signed by President Obama on February 7, 2014. The Act repeals certain programs, continues some programs with modifications, and authorizes several new programs administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

OVERVIEW

Private citizens own over 90 percent of the land in Indiana which includes nearly 15 million acres of farmland and about 4 million acres of forestland, making stewardship absolutely critical to the health of our environment. Each day, these farmers and forest landowners are making decisions about natural resource use and management that impact soil and water quality. With NRCS' help, many are managing more productive lands while improving healthy ecosystems.

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance for voluntary conservation programs for all kinds of land, natural resources, and people. We provide help with identifying resource concerns and developing a plan to address those concerns. We offer a number of conservation programs to help reduce erosion, protect streams and rivers, restore and establish fish and wildlife habitat, improve air quality and conserve energy.

NRCS is the lead USDA agency for conservation on privately owned working lands.



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NRCS offers voluntary programs to eligible landowners and agricultural producers to provide financial and technical assistance to help manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. Through these programs NRCS develops conservation plans and contracts to provide financial assistance that help landowners implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns or opportunities to help save energy, improve soil, water, plant, air, animal and related resources on agricultural lands and non-industrial private forest land.

Conservation Stewardship Program: CSP helps agricultural producers maintain and improve the existing conservation systems on their land and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. CSP is for farmers who already practice good stewardship on their land and are willing to take additional steps to conserve natural resources.

Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment (limit of \$40,000 annually over five years).

All agricultural operations (cropland, forest land, grass land, pasture) and non-industrial private forest lands are eligible. Farmers receive an annual payment for five years, based on their level of stewardship.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to plan and install conservation practices to address natural resource concerns on working lands. Agriculture producers and owners of non-industrial private forestland and tribes are eligible to apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm lands. EQIP dollars can be used for wildlife enhancement, livestock watering facilities, pastureland improvement, manure management, soil health practices (e.g., cover crops or no till), water quality practices, forestry management, etc.



EASEMENT PROGRAMS

NRCS offers easement programs to landowners who want to maintain or enhance their land to benefit agriculture and/or the environment. All NRCS easement programs are voluntary. NRCS provides technical help and financial assistance, but local landowners and organizations are needed to make NRCS easement programs successful.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program: The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands. Under the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) component, NRCS helps non-governmental organizations, Indian tribes, state and local governments protect working agricultural lands and limit nonagricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program: The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) helps landowners in targeted areas of the state restore, enhance and protect forestland resources on private lands through easements and financial assistance. Through HFRP, landowners promote the recovery of endangered or threatened species, improve plant and animal biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration.

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

NRCS works with partners to leverage additional conservation assistance for agricultural producers and landowners in priority conservation areas.



Resource Conservation Partnership Program: The Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination with NRCS partners to deliver conservation programs to farmers through partnership agreements. RCPP works on regional or watershed scales with partners to help producers restore and sustain soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Conservation Innovation Grants: Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands to address some of the nation's most pressing natural resource concerns. NRCS identifies successful projects for potential integration of technologies and approaches into NRCS' toolkit of conservation practices. Projects often result in production and operational benefits as well.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program: The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program helps protect lives and property threatened by natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to preserve life and property threatened by excessive erosion and flooding. Activities include removal of debris from streams, protection of destabilized stream banks, establishment of cover on critically eroding lands, etc. Sponsors are responsible for providing land rights to do repair work and securing the necessary permits, furnishing the local cost share, and accomplishing the installation of work.

Landscape Initiatives: Landscape Initiatives enable NRCS to more effectively address priority natural resource concerns by delivering systems of practices, primarily to the most vulnerable lands within geographic focus areas. Landscape Initiatives, such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, use a science based approach and depend on established local efforts and partnerships. Studies have shown that focusing our resources can help NRCS and its partners can generate three to five times the benefit of more general approaches to conservation implementation. The improved natural resource protection with initiatives can result in many benefits, including improved water quality and quantity, reduced soil erosion and enhanced wildlife habitat.



Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program:

VPA-HIP is a competitive grants program that helps states and Indian tribes increase public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing or hiking. These incentives include payments for conservation services to landowners who allow the public to hunt, fish, hike, horseback ride or otherwise recreate on their land and increase acreage enrolled for public access.

Watershed Rehabilitation: NRCS received funding in the new Farm Bill to rehabilitate watershed structures nationwide. Local sponsors must apply for assistance and are responsible for 35 percent of the cost of repairs. The new bill extends authority to appropriate additional dollars each year through 2018 on a discretionary basis.

CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NRCS works with private landowners on a voluntary basis to create lasting conservation and make improvements to our environment. Technical assistance is available to any group or individual interested in conserving our natural resources and sustaining agricultural production in Indiana. Professional conservationists serve every county in Indiana. They help land users to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources and to help land users make sound natural resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands.

This assistance can help land users:

- Maintain and improve private lands and their management
- Implement better land management technologies
- Protect and improve water quality and quantity
- Maintain and improve wildlife and fish habitat
- Enhance recreational opportunities on their land
- Maintain and improve the aesthetic character of private land
- Explore opportunities to diversify agricultural operations and
- Develop and apply sustainable agricultural systems

This assistance may be in the form of resource assessment, practice design, resource monitoring, or follow-up of installed practices.

OTHER INFORMATION

Payment Schedules: The Farm Bill maintains the authority for NRCS to make program payments based on practice payment schedules. Payment schedules are an estimation of the incurred cost of implementing a conservation practice in a geographic area. The authority to make payments based on payment schedules replaces the authority to make cost-share or incentive payments.

Adjusted Gross Income: Adjusted gross income (AGI) provisions have been simplified and modified. Producers whose average AGI exceeds \$900,000 are not eligible to receive payments or benefits from most programs administered by NRCS and the Farm Service Agency (FSA). This provision replaces the \$1 million AGI non-farm income provision for conservation programs. Previous AGI provisions distinguished between farm and non-farm AGI.

Compliance: Compliance with Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions continues to be required for participation in most NRCS and FSA programs. These provisions place restrictions on the planting of an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land or wetlands. They prohibit the conversion of a wetland to make possible the production of an agricultural commodity. The Act continues to require an acreage report for all cropland on the farm.

The Farm Bill re-links conservation compliance with provisions to crop insurance premium subsidies. New provisions are created for determinations, administration, and penalties related to HELC and WC provisions that are unique to crop insurance. FSA will make HELC/WC eligibility determinations for crop insurance participants based on NRCS technical determinations of HELC/WC compliance.

In addition to identifying crop insurance as a covered program, the Farm Bill defines timelines and mitigation authority. NRCS also has a new opportunity to assist farmers with wetland conservation compliance issues on their farms. The mitigation bank pilot provision has been modified to require the Secretary work with third parties to establish mitigation banking opportunities for program participants.





Conservation Stewardship Program: The new Farm Bill extends the reservation of five percent of CSP acres for **beginning farmers** until FY 2018. The 2014 Farm Bill includes a new preference for **beginning farmers who are also veterans**.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: **Beginning farmers, historically underserved farmers and military veterans who are beginning farmers** receive higher payment rates for implementing practices and priority consideration for funding. The Farm Bill also expands EQIP authority to provide advanced payments to these special emphasis groups and increases the authority to make advanced payment from 30 percent to 50 percent. The new Farm Bill extends the reservation of five percent EQIP funds for beginning farmers until FY 2018, including a new preference for **beginning farmers who are also veterans**.

SPECIAL EMPHASIS GROUPS

The 2014 Agricultural Act continues to address the unique circumstances and concerns of **beginning** and **limited resource farmers**, as well as **socially disadvantaged farmers** (minorities) and **military veterans who are beginning farmers**. The bill provides for voluntary participation, offers incentives, and focuses on equity in accessing USDA programs and services. Enhancements include simplified and improved programs and services and flexibility in decision making (with most decisions made at the local, state or tribal level).

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program: The Farm Bill reduced the land tenure requirement from seven years (under the former WRP) to two years under the Wetland Reserve Easements component of ACEP, expanding the opportunity for **beginning farmers** to participate.

Conservation Reserve Program: The Farm Bill continues the Transition Incentives Program (TIP) to facilitate the transfer of land under a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract from **retiring farmers** to **beginning farmers** by allowing conservation and land improvements during the last year of the CRP contract. TIP now includes eligibility for **military veterans who are beginning farmers**. CRP is administered by FSA with NRCS providing technical assistance.

SPECIALTY CROPS AND ORGANICS

The conservation programs available through NRCS are available to any agriculture producer (including row crops, livestock, forestry), but there are targeted funds available to Specialty Crop and Organic Producers. NRCS defines specialty crops as any crop other than corn, soybeans, or wheat grown for grain. Organic producers are defined as those either certified USDA Organic, certified exempt, or are pursuing USDA Organic certification.

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