



Protecting the soil, water, plants, animals and air on your farm or ranch is central to the long-term sustainability and profitability of your operation. To help protect and enhance those critical resources, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has a number of voluntary programs to give you the technical and financial assistance you may need.

For orchardists, there are several conservation practices that can provide significant resource protection and utilization. A few of the most popular practices include...



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 NRCS Natural Resources
 Conservation Service
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PROTECT

the resources you need...

And get the help you need to do it.



Conservation practices for your orchard

Irrigation system upgrades

By upgrading to newer, more efficient irrigation systems, many orchard growers find they not only save water, but they save on labor and energy costs. Upgrading an irrigation system that will save at least 10 percent of water will often qualify for assistance.

Plantings for beneficial insects and habitat (hedgerows, tree/shrub establishment, windbreaks)

Hedgerows, tree/shrub plantings, and windbreaks not only reduce the potential for spray drift, but they sequester carbon from the atmosphere and provide habitat for pollinators and beneficial insects that are important components of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan. Ladybeetles, lacewings, parasitic wasps, tachinid flies, predatory mites, spiders, and earwigs are a few examples. Windbreaks also provide protection from the elements.

Structures for wildlife

(kestrels, owls, mason bees, bats, etc.)

Providing nesting boxes for birds of prey, pollinators, and for bats, not only creates habitat, but it may also help with the biological component of an IPM plan. Kestrels are known to chase away and eat starlings, owls munch on rodents, mason bees pollinate in colder and wetter weather than honey bees, and bats feast on pests like codling moth.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

We provide assistance with developing an IPM plan, as well as incentives for utilizing mating disruption, the transition to non-organophosphate insecticides and utilization of tower sprayers. Correct amounts and timings of pest control measures also have the potential to save money.



Nutrient Management

Soil testing helps determine what nutrients are already in your soil. Using this and other data, together we can determine the amount, timing, and placement of fertilizer that combines environmental stewardship, economics, and fruit productivity and quality as compatible goals.

Soil moisture monitoring

Monitoring soil moisture can have the biggest impact on savings of time, water, and money. Managing the amounts and timing of irrigation water can reduce leaching of fertilizer, saving money by keeping the nutrients in the plant root zone. This practice also can reduce pumping costs by not applying unnecessary irrigations, and can potentially reduce water use.

How the program works...

Financial assistance for most of these practices is provided through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which offers contracts that generally pay 50 percent of the cost of the practice - though under some circumstances, such as with beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers - payments may be up to 90 percent. Contracts may span a maximum term of ten years, but are generally three years in length.

Eligible applicants who are engaged in livestock, agricultural or forest production on eligible land may participate in the EQIP program. EQIP activities are carried out according to a conservation plan developed in conjunction with the participant 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. Interested applicants may sign up at anytime, though the NRCS has periodic cut-off dates for application ranking.

How to apply...

The EQIP application process consists of the following six steps:

1. Submit an application to a local USDA Service Center, NRCS office.
2. Producer and land eligibility are determined by the local office.
3. NRCS ranks each application using the locally developed natural resources ranking process.
4. When funds are allocated, NRCS commits funds to high ranking applications.
5. NRCS works with the applicant to develop a conservation plan and contract containing practices which will solve identified resource problems.
6. Following contract signature by NRCS and the selected entity, funds are obligated to the project and the participant may begin to implement practices identified in the conservation plan.

For more information contact your local USDA-NRCS Service Center office.

www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov