

Connecticut: Overview

Through the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners interested in improving water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams. NRCS will help producers implement conservation and management practices through a systems approach to control and trap nutrient and manure runoff. Qualified producers will receive assistance for installing conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips and terraces. For over 75 years, NRCS has provided agricultural producers with assistance to implement voluntary conservation practices that protect natural resources while maintaining production and profits.

Connecticut Priority Watersheds

LITTLE RIVER WATERSHED, WOODSTOCK, CONNECTICUT

Local farmers in a public water supply watershed are doing their part to help improve water quality and soil health for the well-being of residents, local fisheries, and wildlife by properly storing and utilizing animal waste and minimizing crop tillage. This also increases recreational opportunities such as fishing, boating and swimming by improving water quality.

The Little River Watershed is a public water supply serving approximately 78% of the population of the Town of Putnam. The watershed covers 35+ square miles, and includes four water body segments listed by the State of Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) as impaired by bacteria and nutrients.

Valleyside Farm, one of the largest dairies in the watershed, crops close



NRCS and farmers improve water quality and soil health in a public water supply watershed NRCS photo.

to 550 acres, and milks about 215 cows. Resource concerns on the farm were the proper storage of sewage from the dairy including manure, milk house waste, and compost. Another concern was silage leachate, which has a biological oxygen demand up to 1,500 times higher than manure, making it a high impact on water quality.

Another farm located up the road has a similar story. Elm Farm crops about 300 acres and milks about 160 cows.

The National Water Quality Initiative will work in selected watersheds to help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners improve water quality and aquatic habitats in impaired streams.

Their concerns involved finding appropriate storage for manure and milk house waste, and manure transfer. The farm's proximity to a small tributary added some complexity.

Over the past five years, utilizing the Environmental Quality Incentives

Program, NRCS and partners have achieved:

- A collaboration with six farms to install waste storage facilities and improve management of nutrients applied to farm fields.
- Proper storage of over 19 million gallons of manure and waste water on an annual basis and preventing it from running off fields into the Little River Watershed.
- The removal of potentially 400,000 lbs. of nitrogen and 240,000 lbs. of phosphorus entering the Putnam public water supply watershed and Long Island Sound annually. These nutrients are utilized by crops rather than potentially polluting surface and ground water. This can also reduce the amount of commercial fertilizer used by the farms.
- Maintenance of the viability of farming in an area with very high development pressure, while improving the infrastructure of the farms for future generations by reducing both inputs and costs on fertilizer application.
- Three large dairy operations are utilizing multi-species cover crops to improve soil health.

- A reduction in odors during nutrient application thus promoting better relationships on the urban/rural interface.
- The infusion of approximately \$3 million into the local economy.

Conservation Funding and Practices

NRCS conservation professionals will provide technical assistance and planning tools to determine which conservation actions will provide the best results to improve water quality on your land. Nutrient management systems, erosion control, conservation tillage, pest management, and buffers systems are just some of the practices being offered as part of the National Water Quality Initiative. To help install these conservation practices, financial assistance to share in the cost of these conservation practices is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Partnerships

NRCS identified priority watersheds through the help of local partnerships and state water quality agencies. Partners sometimes offer financial assistance in addition to NRCS programs. NRCS will continue to coordinate with local and state agencies, conservation districts, nongovernmental organizations and others to implement this initiative. This strategic approach will leverage funds and provide streamlined assistance to help individual agricultural producers take needed actions to reduce the flow of sediment, nutrients and other runoff into impaired waterways.

Producer Benefits

Water quality conservation practices benefit agricultural producers by lowering input costs and enhancing the productivity of working lands. Conservation investments are good for all Americans because well man-

aged farms limit pollution from runoff, produce food and fiber, sustain rural economies, and provide food security to the Nation. All across the country—farmers, ranchers and forest landowners are voluntarily taking action and putting conservation on the ground to improve water quality on millions of acres!

Public Benefits

NRCS is proud to be involved in a nationwide effort with landowners and communities to improve and protect our water resources. The landowners and farmers participating in the initiative will receive conservation payments to work on the land in a sustainable way which provides cleaner water. In addition to the financial assistance, the land will remain productive into the future. Communities benefit by having clean waterways, safer drinking water and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

How to Apply

Almost every county in the Nation has a *USDA Service Center*. To get started, make an appointment at your local office. You will need to establish eligibility and farm records for your land. NRCS will help you complete an application while explaining which conservation practices are available in your watershed. Remember to check with your local NRCS office to see if you are located in a selected watershed. All applications for funding consideration, during fiscal year 2012, must be received by June 15, 2012.

For more Information

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