



United States Department of Agriculture



2017 Annual Report



ARKANSAS

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov

Dear Friends of Arkansas Conservation,

We are pleased to present to you our 2017 annual report. We have much to celebrate because 2017 was another banner year for conservation in Arkansas. Through conservation programs in the Farm Bill that include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas obligated more than \$153 million in financial assistance. Arkansas continues to be on the forefront every day, working with private landowners to help them conserve and restore our natural resources.

NRCS delivered conservation technical assistance through our voluntary Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA). In FY17, NRCS in Arkansas obligated more than \$8 million in CTA. NRCS helped farmers, ranchers and foresters with the conservation planning process ranging from site-specific plans for individuals to more complex community, watershed, or area-wide plans for groups of land managers. CTA furnished by NRCS included conservation planning and practice/system application, technical consultations, and assistance in the technical phases of USDA and State cost-share programs. Conservation plans are the basis for all assistance NRCS provides to private land owners and the basic tool for clients to manage their natural resources. Through participation, producers developed an understanding of the natural resource issues, interactions and treatments necessary for resource sustainability.

Thanks to the extra efforts of NRCS employees and our conservation partners, we continued to manage heavy workloads in many counties to service existing contracts while implementing the Farm Bill. None of our accomplishments would have happened without their dedication, hard work, and extra effort to provide the best possible service for our producers and our partners. I sincerely appreciate their work!

We continue to have great support from the Arkansas Conservation Partnership - Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC), Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD), Arkansas Association of Conservation District Employees, Arkansas Forestry Commission,

Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc., University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and our many other conservation partners.

As we continue throughout this and every year, NRCS Arkansas will continue to work with our conservation partnership to promote the Farm Bill and every avenue and opportunity to provide our customers the services they need to be good stewards of the land. We help people help the land by providing one-on-one personalized advice on the best solutions to address producer production and conservation goals. We will help people make investments in their operations to keep working lands working and improve the health of our soil, water, and other natural resources. We will generate, manage, and share data, technology and standards that enable people to make sound decisions based on sound science. Working together, we will continue help people get conservation on the ground offering technical and financial assistance through our direct relationships with farmers, ranchers and foresters!



Mike Sullivan, ARKANSAS STATE CONSERVATIONIST



Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan reviews cover crops and mob grazing on Long Lake Plantation in Helena.



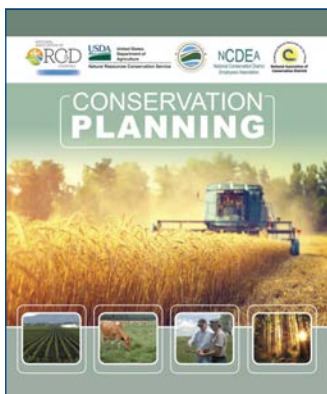
CONSERVATION PLANNING AND ASSISTANCE

NRCS conducted Free Conservation Planning Pilot in Six North Arkansas Counties

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) delivers conservation technical assistance through our voluntary Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA). Although the CTA program does not include financial or cost-share assistance, producers may develop conservation plans, which may serve as a springboard for those interested in participating in USDA financial assistance programs.

In FY 2017, producers in Baxter, Fulton, Izard, Marion, Searcy and Stone counties were given opportunities for a free conservation plan through a pilot program offered by NRCS.

The project was designed to combine the farming or ranching skills of the operator with the



science-based knowledge of an NRCS conservation planner. The voluntary plans were developed with input from the producers and prepared by NRCS. The plans addressed resource concerns dealing with soil, water, air, plants and animals.

A conservation plan includes producer determined objectives and goals; an aerial photo or diagram of the farm; a soil map and soil description of the property; resource inventory data which can include forage or crop production potential, or potential livestock carrying capacity; a list of treatment options; the location and schedule for applying conservation practices; and a plan of operation and maintenance of conservation systems.

The benefits of a conservation plan include:

- Identifies problems or potential problems overlooked on a day-to-day basis
- Protects soil along with the farm's productivity
- Helps comply with environmental regulations
- Helps to qualify for various USDA programs that can help implement the plan
- Flexible to the farms changing operational goals
- Provides for on-site technical assistance

All landowners who have a stake and interest in natural resource management are eligible to receive technical assistance from NRCS. Based on the conservation plans developed, NRCS and our partners provide the guidance and assistance needed to design, layout and install approved conservation practices.

FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION

James Phillips, Former Ag Teacher Now Arkansas Delta Farmer



James Phillips stands in his CRP grass field.

James Phillips is a rice and soybean producer and currently operates on 531 acres of land in Arkansas County, Arkansas. He has been farming since 1980. As a committed conservationist, he strives to protect the soil, water, air, plants, and wildlife. He has planted highly erodible fields with native grasses through USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to stabilize soils from erosion, improve water quality, and improve wildlife habitat for quail, rabbits, and deer.

Mr. Phillips has utilized USDA NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to increase irrigation water quantity in a designated ground

water decline county. He installed a tailwater recovery system which included a surface water reservoir, irrigation pipeline, and nutrient management.

He has also utilized the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to enhance natural resources on his farm. Some of the practices he has adopted are applying enhanced efficiency fertilizer products, discontinue burning crop residue, GPS targeted spray application, and intermittent flooding of rice fields. Mr. Phillips is committed to improving and preserving the natural resources on his land.



TECHNICAL TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE

Helping Landowners Overcome Water Issues

Arkansas's row crop producers are using innovative methods to ensure their crops receive the proper amount of moisture throughout the growing season.

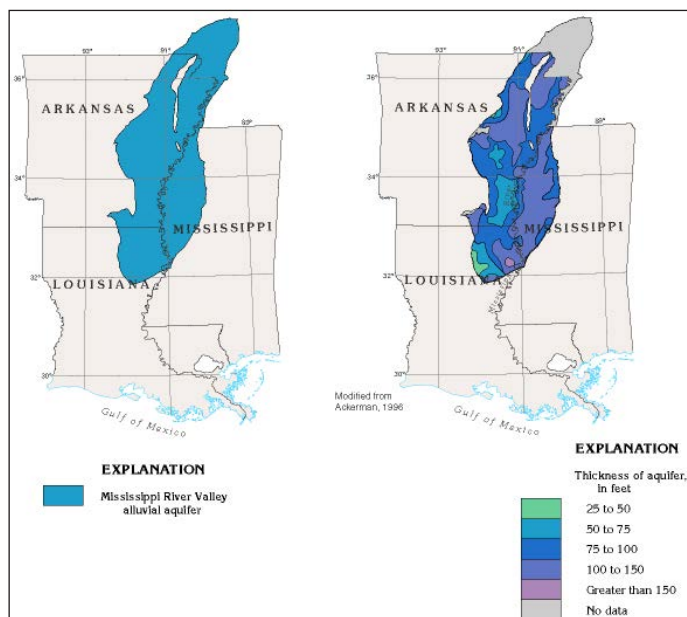
Through technical and financial assistance, NRCS is helping producers develop Irrigation Water Management Plans that address their needs and benefit resource concerns.

Richard Morris and his son, Matt, farm 1,320 acres in Lonoke County growing rice, corn and soybeans. The addition of a 17-acre reservoir, a 1,329-foot-long tailwater pit, landleveling, pipe drops and underground pipelines installed through an EQIP contract, the farm is able to irrigate with 100 percent surface water. The farm gained 133-acre-feet of water storage through the reservoir and tailwater pit.

Steve Stevens, a Desha County farmer, uses polypipe with holes sized to evenly distribute the water on every acre of his 4,300 acres of row crops. This computerized hole selection results in 25 percent less water used and tens of thousands of dollars saved in pumping cost every year. Monitoring shows less than 10 percent of the water and nutrients applied runs off the field.

Robby Bevis, a Lonoke County farmer, has planted cover crops with financial assistance on his farm. This results in more organic matter in the soil, lower soil temperatures and higher water holding capacity. Bevis has reduced the amount of water used for irrigation by 25 to 30 percent.

Mark Isbell, of Isbell Family Farms in Lonoke County, uses alternative wetting and drying for growing his rice. This practice entails dropping the



The thickness of the Mississippi River Valley alluvial aquifer ranges from about 25 to more than 150 feet. The aquifer is more than 75 feet thick in most locations.

water level in the rice paddies to less than 1-inch deep before pumping the water back on the field. By doing this, the fields capture any rain that falls during the summer months—resulting in a savings of 25 to 40 percent of the normal water used, depending on the amount of summer rainfall. In addition to water savings and reduced pumping costs, he is also reducing green-house gas emissions from the rice fields.



Lonoke County district conservationist Kevin Cochran and Shane Harrison (far right) discuss the water control structure with Richard and Matt Morris of Merlin Morris Farms of Lonoke, Arkansas.



FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION

From Corps to Crops; Military Experiences Helps Transition to Farming

One Northwest Arkansas farmer credits his work ethic and experiences gained through 8 years in the U.S. Marine Corps as the catalyst for his new career.

Travis Appel's military career included two deployments—once to Iraq and then with a Marine Expeditionary Unit with the Navy. His first four years of service were spent in artillery and he finished his career in reconnaissance.

"Farming is a nonstop endeavor just like the military," Appel said. "After getting out of the service, I went to the University of Arkansas pursuing a horticulture degree. My goal was to be a greens keeper at a golf course."

However, after an internship with a local farmer, who also worked at the university's farm, he fell in love with farming.

He already had land outside of Springdale, Ark., where he began growing strawberries. His operation now includes pumpkins, tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, squash, watermelons, cantaloupe and sweet onions.

The endeavor eventually led him to the NRCS office in Washington County where he applied for financial assistance as a veteran farmer for two seasonal high tunnels.

"I grow strawberries through winter and tomatoes in the summer in the high tunnels," the Marine sergeant said. "The first year we were picking strawberries from December to June. Without the high tunnel the season is April and May."

He sells produce at the Springdale and Rodgers farmers markets and offers "pick-your-own" strawberries in the spring, and a pumpkin patch in the fall.

Appel has incorporated drip irrigation into his high tunnel system since he believes "it's better for the plants and puts water where it is needed." This controls erosion, helps with fertilizer application and saves him money on his water bill.

"We want to make sure veterans have something to come back to when they get out of the military," said Rhonda Foster, Washington County district conservationist with NRCS. "We have a lot of people getting out of farming. It's good to help beginning farmers install practices that benefit their operation."

"I highly encourage any veteran that is a farmer to visit NRCS," Appel said.



At right, Rhonda Foster, Washington County district conservationist inspects tomatoes in Travis Appel's high tunnel.

FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION

Union County High Tunnel

Leisa and Phil Hamaker are producers in Union County, a StrikeForce Initiative county, where they operate two high tunnels and grow peppers, tomatoes, and squash.

Five years ago, Lesia went to her field service center and learned about high tunnels from her district conservationist. She received financial and technical assistance from NRCS to help her install her first high tunnel.

She began growing tomatoes with the intent of feeding local family members, but the yield that the hoop house produced was so much, she began selling produce at local farmers' markets. She eventually began selling her produce to local grocery stores and restaurants in Junction City.

She and Phil will begin planting in February and will harvest crops all the way until Christmas extending their growing season increasing the financial success of their operation.



Leisa Hamaker and her husband Phil show their high tunnel tomatoes to Union County District Conservationist Pam Billingsley.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals.

It provides financial and technical assistance to install or implement structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land.

The majority of general EQIP funds provided to Arkansas are used to support priority resource concerns identified by conservation districts through local work groups.

Arkansas farmers received more than \$44 million in EQIP financial assistance in FY17, funding 1,511 applications. This financial assistance will help install conservation practices to reduce soil erosion, use water more efficiently and improve grazing land, wildlife habitat and water quality on more than 256,967 acres.

The top practices applied (by the number in contracts) in 2017 are:

- Fence
- Heavy Use Area Protection
- Irrigation Water Management
- Watering Facility
- Nutrient Management
- Livestock Pipeline
- Irrigation Pipeline
- Forage and Biomass Planting
- Structure for Water Control
- Cover Crop
- Irrigation Land Leveling
- Roofs and Covers
- Prescribed Burning

EQIP SUB ACCOUNT	CONTRACTS	ACRES TREATED	OBLIGATIONS
Beginning Farmer/Rancher	52	4,750.40	\$1,463,012
Forest Service Partnership	42	5,992.60	\$938,863
Illinois River (Eucha/Spavinaw)	9	640.30	\$1,057,643
Limited Resource	3	302.60	\$158,386
Locally Led	803	117,744.80	\$23,832,891
Mississippi River Basin Initiative	109	18,086.70	\$5,754,939
National Water Quality Initiative	29	7,977.20	\$1,077,448
On-Farm Energy	36	1,247.80	\$1,932,476
On-Farm Energy CAPS	75	4,924.50	\$171,706
Organic Certified	4	1,492.60	\$106,004
Organic Transition	7	96.60	\$74,027
Planning	51	58,459.20	\$167,896
Pollinator	24	3,287.50	\$191,699
Socially Disadvantaged	35	3,587.00	\$1,611,536
State	109	10,428.60	\$1,870,575
Strike Force Initiative	80	10,114.30	\$3,134,032
Water Quality Monitoring Activity	2	190.00	\$285,222
Wildlife 5%	40	7,509.00	\$949,078
(blank)	1	136.00	\$29,266
TOTAL	1,511	256,967.70	\$44,806,697

Data Source: REAP/Protracts — 12/06/2017



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Arkansas NRCS enrolled 32 easements totaling 13,082 acres of wetlands through the ACEP Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE). Obligations in FY17 totaled more than \$39 million.

ACEP	OBLIGATIONS
Wetlands Reserve Easements	\$31,681,449
Wetlands Reserve Easement Restoration	\$7,445,650
TOTAL	\$39,127,098

Data Source: REAP/NEST — 12/06/2017

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to undertake additional conservation activities to improve and maintain the existing conservation on their land.

The program provides financial and technical assistance to conserve and enhance soil, water, air and related natural resources.

In FY17, 786 new contracts were developed enrolling 878,487.38 acres. The contracts will provide more than \$15.6 million in financial assistance to participants over the five-year contract agreements

Total CSP payments for existing contracts were more than \$68.1 million.

CSP	CONTRACTS	ACRES TREATED	OBLIGATIONS
Agriculture Lands – Beginning Farmer	59	51,307.99	\$633,879
Agriculture Lands – General	615	791,714.66	\$14,427,984
Agriculture Lands – Socially Disadvantaged	43	12,022.07	\$308,211
Forestland – Beginning Farmer	10	1,516.07	\$33,304
Forestland – General	55	21,723.19	\$250,507
Forestland – Socially Disadvantaged	4	203.40	\$6,641
New FY17 Contract Totals	786	878,487.38	\$15,660,526
Payments in FY17 for Previous Years Contracts	--	--	\$52,490,628
TOTAL			\$68,151,154

Data Source: REAP/Protracts — 12/06/2017

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance through partnership agreements and Farm Bill programs.

RCPP encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales.

RCPP	CONTRACTS	ACRES TREATED	OBLIGATIONS
East Fork Cadron Creek	18	4,572	\$590,637
Greers Ferry Lake Watershed	8	1,217	\$271,334
Illinois River Watershed	9	788	\$345,155
Mississippi River Basin	8	21,740	\$153,974
Red River	2	265	\$82,447
Rice Stewardship Partnership	25	42,050	\$423,471
TOTAL	70	70,632	\$1,867,018

Data Source: REAP/Protracts — 12/06/2017



FY17 Financial Assistance by Program and County

COUNTY	ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM	CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM	WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENTS	REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM	TOTAL FY17 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
ARKANSAS	\$1,693,784	\$8,108,720	\$1,762,407		\$11,564,911
ASHLEY	\$270,977	\$1,474,791	\$16,556		\$1,762,324
BAXTER	\$216,066	\$165,185			\$381,251
BENTON	\$1,016,866	\$10,374		\$59,139	\$1,086,379
BOONE	\$276,525	\$21,829			\$298,354
BRADLEY	\$157,463	\$6,703			\$164,166
CALHOUN	\$38,016	\$17,038			\$55,054
CARROLL	\$471,492				\$471,492
CHICOT	\$629,831	\$2,775,318	\$28,058		\$3,433,208
CLARK	\$256,813	\$5,680			\$262,493
CLAY	\$410,085	\$1,407,730			\$1,817,815
CLEBURNE	\$315,609	\$35,807			\$351,416
CLEVELAND	\$418,574	\$20,049			\$438,623
COLUMBIA	\$248,848	\$45,318			\$294,166
CONWAY	\$735,892	\$221,866	\$926,100		\$1,883,858
CRAIGHEAD	\$1,687,354	\$3,341,143		\$30,932	\$5,059,429
CRAWFORD	\$245,209	\$29,275			\$274,484
CRITTENDEN	\$266,903	\$597,858			\$864,761
CROSS	\$1,619,101	\$2,256,185		\$129,385	\$4,004,671
DALLAS	\$160,693	\$11,802			\$172,495
DESHA	\$2,572,389	\$5,535,712	\$165,779		\$8,273,880
DREW	\$294,697	\$1,361,372			\$1,656,069
FAULKNER	\$1,625,188	\$465,973	\$32,346	\$590,637	\$2,714,143
FRANKLIN	\$486,587	\$2,511			\$489,098
FULTON	\$1,121,854	\$83,065			\$1,204,919
GARLAND	\$87,595	\$16,993			\$104,588
GRANT	\$72,773	\$8,695			\$81,468
GREENE	\$1,178,521	\$1,624,123		\$25,923	\$2,828,567
HEMPSTEAD	\$669,850	\$18,391			\$688,241
HOT SPRING	\$179,936	\$7,920			\$187,856
HOWARD	\$814,468				\$814,468
INDEPENDENCE	\$312,411	\$531,421	\$9,428,426		\$10,272,258
IZARD	\$929,844	\$81,435			\$1,011,279
JACKSON	\$632,783	\$2,914,787	\$42,693		\$3,590,263
JEFFERSON	\$1,668,468	\$4,652,923			\$6,321,390
JOHNSON	\$214,451	\$15,255			\$229,706
LAFAYETTE	\$411,347	\$549,357		\$36,732	\$997,436
LAWRENCE	\$197,994	\$3,252,911	\$2,267,100		\$5,718,004

Data Source: REAP/FMMI — 12/06/2017



FY17 Financial Assistance by Program and County (continued)

COUNTY	ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM	CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM	WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENTS	REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM	TOTAL FY17 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
LEE	\$857,783	\$2,506,166			\$3,363,949
LINCOLN	\$787,492	\$3,826,341			\$4,613,833
LITTLE RIVER	\$140,983	\$1,500			\$142,483
LOGAN	\$890,166	\$22,518			\$912,684
LONOKE	\$911,722	\$3,200,843		\$153,974	\$4,266,539
MADISON	\$331,131	\$21,359			\$352,490
MARION	\$257,567	\$165,480			\$423,047
MILLER	\$105,091	\$196,987		\$45,715	\$347,793
MISSISSIPPI	\$1,127,756	\$1,832,075	\$1,342,757	\$214,416	\$4,517,004
MONROE	\$230,215	\$2,095,063	\$2,004,647		\$4,329,925
MONTGOMERY	\$222,459				\$222,459
NEVADA	\$216,634	\$40,497			\$257,131
NEWTON	\$209,126	\$4,002			\$213,128
OUACHITA	\$273,820	\$3,421			\$277,241
PERRY	\$566,063	\$90,271			\$656,334
PHILLIPS	\$958,067	\$4,025,820	\$8,304,176		\$13,288,063
PIKE	\$581,718	\$47,101			\$628,819
POINSETT	\$938,427	\$1,116,446		\$22,815	\$2,077,688
POLK	\$849,768	\$3,757			\$853,525
POPE	\$852,101	\$220,749			\$1,072,850
PRAIRIE	\$259,648	\$1,834,974	\$1,630,931		\$3,725,552
PULASKI	\$442,897	\$317,089			\$759,986
RANDOLPH	\$306,961	\$425,760			\$732,721
SALINE	\$49,277				\$49,277
SCOTT	\$580,627				\$580,627
SEARCY	\$948,064	\$211,373		\$163,036	\$1,322,473
SEBASTIAN	\$327,414				\$327,414
SEVIER	\$623,254	\$98,037			\$721,291
SHARP	\$556,968	\$220,077			\$777,045
ST. FRANCIS	\$1,001,425	\$2,802,664	\$4,165,394		\$7,969,483
STONE	\$496,269	\$136,181			\$632,450
UNION	\$281,860	\$10,709			\$292,569
VAN BUREN	\$460,680	\$54,357		\$108,298	\$623,335
WASHINGTON	\$1,154,880			\$286,016	\$1,440,896
WHITE	\$204,429	\$383,358	\$1,045,221		\$1,633,008
WOODRUFF	\$388,655	\$458,094	\$5,964,506		\$6,811,255
YELL	\$808,043	\$102,572			\$910,615
GRAND TOTAL	\$44,806,697	\$68,151,154	\$39,127,098	\$1,867,018	\$153,951,967

Data Source: REAP/FMMI — 12/06/2017



NRCS FY17 Financial Assistance by Congressional District

Congressional District 1

COUNTY	TOTAL FY17 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
ARKANSAS	\$11,564,911
BAXTER	\$381,251
CHICOT	\$3,433,208
CLAY	\$1,817,815
CLEBURNE	\$351,416
CRAIGHEAD	\$5,059,429
CRITTENDEN	\$864,761
CROSS	\$4,004,671
DESHA	\$8,273,880
FULTON	\$1,204,919
GREENE	\$2,828,567
INDEPENDENCE	\$10,272,258
IZARD	\$1,011,279
JACKSON	\$3,590,263
JEFFERSON	\$1,580,348
LAWRENCE	\$5,718,004
LEE	\$3,363,949
LINCOLN	\$4,613,833
LONOKE	\$4,266,539
MISSISSIPPI	\$4,517,004
MONROE	\$4,329,925
PHILLIPS	\$13,288,063
POINSETT	\$2,077,688
PRAIRIE	\$3,725,552
RANDOLPH	\$732,721
SEARCY	\$132,247
SHARP	\$777,045
ST. FRANCIS	\$7,969,483
STONE	\$632,450
WOODRUFF	\$6,811,255
TOTAL	\$119,194,735

Congressional District 2

COUNTY	TOTAL FY17 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
CONWAY	\$1,883,858
FAULKNER	\$2,714,143
PERRY	\$656,334
PULASKI	\$759,986
SALINE	\$49,277
VAN BUREN	\$623,335
WHITE	\$1,633,008
TOTAL	\$8,319,942

Congressional District 3

COUNTY	TOTAL FY17 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
BENTON	\$1,086,379
BOONE	\$298,354
CARROLL	\$471,492
CRAWFORD	\$137,242
MARION	\$423,047
NEWTON	\$106,564
POPE	\$1,072,850
SEARCY	\$1,190,225
SEBASTIAN	\$163,707
WASHINGTON	\$1,440,896
TOTAL	\$6,390,757

Congressional District 4

COUNTY	TOTAL FY17 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
ASHLEY	\$1,762,324
BRADLEY	\$164,166
CALHOUN	\$55,054
CLARK	\$262,493
CLEVELAND	\$438,623
COLUMBIA	\$294,166
CRAWFORD	\$137,242
DALLAS	\$172,495
DREW	\$1,656,069
FRANKLIN	\$489,098
GARLAND	\$104,588
GRANT	\$81,468
HEMPSTEAD	\$688,241
HOT SPRING	\$187,856
HOWARD	\$814,468
JEFFERSON	\$4,741,043
JOHNSON	\$229,706
LAFAYETTE	\$997,436
LITTLE RIVER	\$142,483
LOGAN	\$912,684
MADISON	\$352,490
MILLER	\$347,793
MONTGOMERY	\$222,459
NEVADA	\$257,131
NEWTON	\$106,564
OUACHITA	\$277,241
PIKE	\$628,819
POLK	\$853,525
SCOTT	\$580,627
SEBASTIAN	\$163,707
SEVIER	\$721,291
UNION	\$292,569
YELL	\$910,615
TOTAL	\$20,046,534

Date Source: REAP/FMMI — 12/06/2017

Includes: Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Wetland Reserve Easements.

Figures in blue denote counties with two Congressional Districts.





The northern bobwhite quail was added to the Working Lands for Wildlife program in 20 Arkansas counties in FY17. Over 5,000 acres were enrolled to restore and protect bobwhite habitat—empowering landowners to make wildlife-friendly improvements to their land while at the same time making their operations more resilient and productive.



A flooded corn field near Des Arc in Prairie County. Substantial rain hit the region in late spring 2017.





USDA is an equal opportunity
provider, employer, and lender.

December 2017

