



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Indiana Natural Resources Conservation Service

Indiana's USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Provides Innovative Conservation Solutions to Restore, Enhance and Protect Indiana's Lands.



For more than 80 years, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has worked with farmers and landowners to help them manage natural resource concerns on their land and improve the health of their communities. Despite the multitude of challenges 2021 presented, that work continued thanks to the extraordinary effort of our statewide staff. Even as our

workforce was, again, forced to work remotely for most of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they continued to impact and help farmers and landowners throughout the state of Indiana. More than 1,000 contracts were signed for our technical and financial assistance programs putting more than \$44 million of assistance into Indiana in order to protect and improve our soil, water, forestry, energy and wildlife resources. I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS' investments and successes in fiscal year 2021 to highlight what can be accomplished no matter the circumstances.

- Jerry Raynor, State Conservationist

AT A GLANCE: Investments on Private Lands



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Wetland Reserve Easements

Contracts 24
Acres 1,705
Dollars \$7,600,000



Conservation Stewardship Program

Contracts 137
Acres 101,244
Dollars \$11,523,022



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Contracts 857
Acres 114,637
Dollars \$23,665,117



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Contracts 32
Acres 9,706
Dollars \$972,179

FINANCIAL & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS PROGRAM (ACEP)

Wetland Reserve Easements

<i>New Applications</i>	24 applications for 1,705 acres
<i>Closed Easements</i>	26 closed easements
<i>Restoration Completed</i>	25 easements
<i>Compatible Use Authorizations</i>	58 approved
<i>Onsite Monitoring Reviews</i>	266 easements
<i>Offsite Monitoring Reviews</i>	635 easements

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

Ag Land BFR*	\$63,781	297 acres	3 contracts
Ag Land General	\$7.4 million	70,023 acres	64 contracts
Ag Land Organic	\$317,563	3,748 acres	3 contracts
NIPF** General	\$1.1 million	1,606 acres	31 contracts
Renewal Ag Land BFR	\$53,555	423 acres	1 contracts
Renewal Ag Land Gen	\$2.6 million	25,061 acres	33 contracts
Renewal NIPF BFR	\$8,604	18 acres	1 contract
Renewal NIPF General	\$7,956	68 acres	1 contract
Grassland Conservation	\$9,210	102 acres	11 contracts
TOTAL	\$11.5 million	101,347 acres	148 contracts

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

Conservation Activity Plans	\$633,654	40,322 acres	193 contracts
Beginning Farmer	\$1.7 million	3,947 acres	51 contracts
Great Lakes Restoration	\$933,628	8,318 acres	33 contracts
Limited Resource	\$73,285	166 acres	10 contacts
Locally Led/Planning	\$14.87 million	35,464 acres	377 contracts
Mississippi River Basin	\$1.48 million	4,747 acres	21 contracts
Monarch Butterfly	\$3,163	4 acres	2 contracts
National Water Quality	\$1.17 million	10,729 acres	13 contracts
On-Farm Energy	\$131,440	777 acres	21 contracts
Organic	\$142,731	1,122 acres	6 contracts
Socially Disadvantaged	\$56,380	67 acres	8 contracts
Specialty Crop	\$130,779	223 acres	12 contracts
Western Lake Erie Basin	\$815,330	5,902 acres	10 contracts
Wildlife	\$1.48 million	2,850 acres	100 contracts
TOTAL	\$23.7 million	114,637 acres	857 contracts

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

Big Pine Watershed	\$716,241	7,892 acres	20 contracts
Grasslands for Game/Songbirds	\$53,804	48 acres	5 contracts
Soil Health on Reclaimed Mineland	\$150,405	1,441 acres	3 contracts
Southern Indiana Young Forest	\$51,729	325 acres	4 contracts
TOTAL	\$972,179	9,706 acres	32 contracts

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

Total Plans developed for new contracts	Over 2,900
Engineering Designs Completed	Over 800
Plans Written	802
Plans Applied	881
Acres Planned	9,618
Acres Applied	20,180

*BFR = Beginning Farmer/Rancher
 **NIPF - Nonindustrial Private Forest



COVER CROPS



BRUSH MANAGEMENT



NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT



ROOFS AND COVERS



WASTE STORAGE FACILITY

CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Top Five Practices: Applied

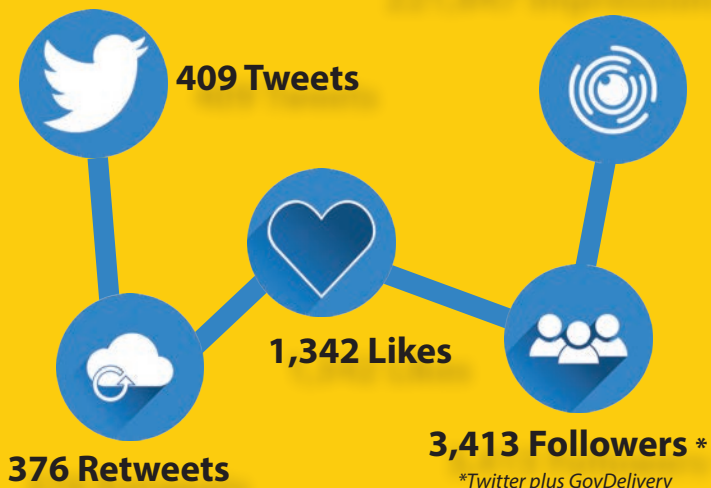
1. Cover Crops
2. No-Till
3. Nutrient Management
4. Conservation Crop Rotation
5. Pest Management

Top Five Practices: Obligated Dollars

1. Cover Crops
2. Brush Management
3. Nutrient Management
4. Roofs and Covers
5. Waste Storage Facility

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

221,647 Impressions



LANDOWNER TRANSFORMS CROPLAND INTO WILDLIFE OASIS

Sitting on his deck in Starke County, overlooking one of the many water-filled areas created during the three year restoration of 200 acres of former farmland, Mark Magura was trying to enjoy the cool evening temperatures of late spring before the summer heat arrived. But his moment of peace in the spot where he says he is the happiest, was constantly being interrupted. Land that had for years been home mostly to corn and soybeans was now flourishing with life. Birds were chirping, frogs were croaking and a myriad of other sounds so filled the landscape, Magura couldn't even hear himself think.

Magura bought the 272-acre plot in the early 2000s. For the first decade-plus he owned the property, now known as Leap Frog, about 220 of the acres were farmed under lease agreements with a variety of farmers.

It was during those years that Magura first started working with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), laying the foundation for the eventual wetland restoration on a large portion of the property. He first enrolled the property in multiple Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts over the years to address resource concerns before deciding to go forward the easement designation.

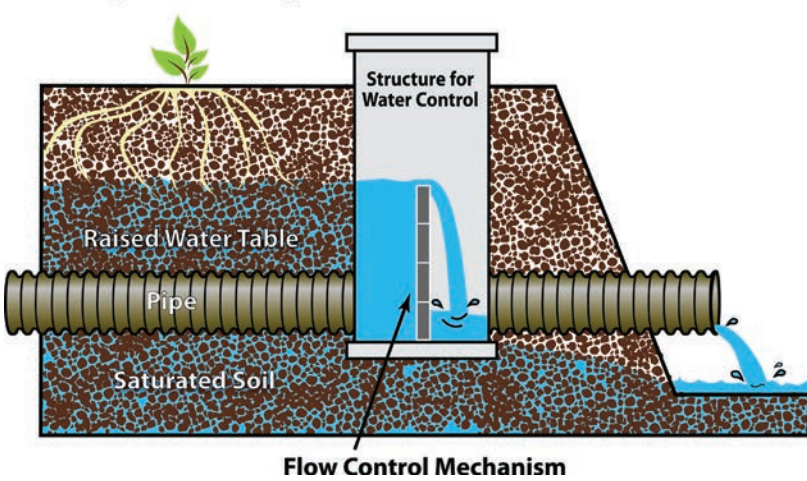
In 2018, he officially started the process of enrolling 200 of the 272 acres he owned into a permanent easement through the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program, starting a three-year restoration process. The restoration included tree plantings throughout the property and prairie establishment through the planting of conservation cover as well as the installation of 16 acres of macrotopgraphy (macros).

While Magura says it was a big decision to turn the land into a permanent easement, the decision was ultimately about what was right for the land and for future generations.

The results of the change are already being seen on the property. As Magura walked Indiana NRCS staff through the site on a warm June morning, quail began to rustle in the underbrush of a restored prairie. A whistle and call from Magura drew them closer before they took flight and fled to the trees that had originally been planted through CRP more than a decade earlier. Later, as they paused beside one of the macros, frogs jumped from the shore to the water as birds swam and ate vegetation that had sprouted beneath the surface.



Indiana NRCS State Conservationist Jerry Raynor (R) and Magura's neighbor Frank Bottos (L) discuss the macros on the property as part of the WRE program.



WATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM HELPS CRITICAL WATERSHED

Since he started farming in the late 1970s, Michael G. Werling has worked with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to implement almost every conservation practice applicable to his land. He no-tills his fields and plants cover crops in-between cash crop seasons. He's installed a two-stage ditch and filter strips to help manage nutrient runoff. He has also enrolled some of his land into the USDA Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), installing grass waterways and planting pollinator habitats throughout his operation.

At first the decision to implement the practices was purely practical. He had some erosion issues on his land and wanted to preserve his soil. But as the years have passed, the purpose has changed from a desire to improve his operation, to a sense of duty to protect the environment around his farm.

That desire led him to work with his district conservationist and NRCS engineer to install two drainage water management structures on a 36-acre parcel that is part of his farm.

Werling's farm is part of the St. Mary's River watershed near Decatur, Indiana in Adams County. The river joins with the St. Joe River to form the Maumee River, which eventually drains into Lake Erie. By installing the two drainage water management structures, he is able to trap water in his fields instead of allowing it to drain freely through

the tiles and into the watershed. As the water sits in the fields, excess nitrogen is displaced making the eventual outflow of water less harmful to the water system it will join.

The concept is simple. By adding or removing boards in the structure, Werling can raise and lower the field's water table. When all the boards are in place, the water is almost completely trapped upstream and very little can drain through his tiles into the nearest waterbody. When all the boards are removed, the water flows freely. He can also adjust the level to variable stages in between. Adjusting the flow raises and lowers the water table in the soil profile, which the plants can use during dry spells. The soil can also filter excess nutrients out of the water while it sits trapped in the soil profile.

At the bare minimum the structures have to be managed twice a year. After harvest season in the fall the boards are put in, trapping water during the fallow season when runoff is the worst. In the spring, the boards are taken out to allow the field to drain for planting. A more hands-on approach can also be taken, and the water table can be elevated after planting to trap some water in the field through the summer. While trapping water through the summer has been shown to have some yield benefits for farmers, the main benefit of the structures is the water quality impact they have by reducing nutrient runoff.

EARTH TEAM VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

NRCS is proud of the dedicated Earth Team volunteers and staff who have committed their time and talents to conserving and protecting our natural resources. Even during the midst of a pandemic, volunteers in Indiana have stepped up to the plate to help people help the land.

During FY21, Indiana NRCS accomplished the following:

641 volunteers as individuals or in groups
3,678 hours logged

Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved Indiana NRCS approximate \$104,970 according to the Independent Sector's value of volunteer time and supported conservation in every single USDA Service Center in Indiana. Indiana is one of only three states to reach 100% office utilization this year.



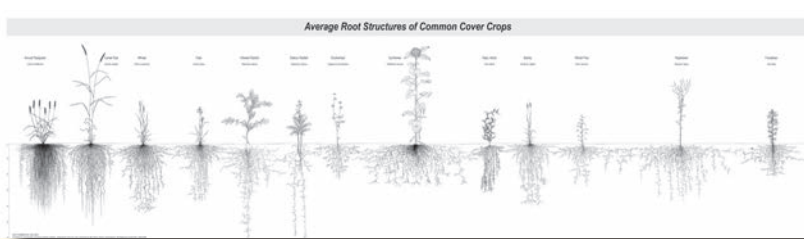
Bart Pitstick and Alan Smock take a break from planting cover crops on the Vincennes University Campus

URBAN ASSISTANCE

At NRCS, we serve all agriculture – large to small, conventional to organic, rural to urban. As American agriculture continues to grow in new directions, NRCS conservation assistance is growing along with it. By bringing cultivation and opportunity to both rural and urban areas, we address many needs - restoring the health of the environment and people.

Indiana NRCS has a history addressing the challenges of conservation and supporting urban farmers in their efforts to achieve a healthy environment and local, healthy, sustainable food for their communities. While many of our programs support all farmers, regardless of how long they have been in the business, NRCS also offers special provisions just for beginning farmers.

In addition to our on-going technical and financial assistance, Indiana NRCS has recently funded over \$2.4 million, with non-federal partnership match of over \$1 million, to help meet the needs of urban agriculture. These agreements will bring an additional nine professional conservationists, targeted outreach and technical assistance funding to help local conservation and agricultural leaders best address the needs of the farmers in urban communities.



CCSI ROOT PROJECT

Cover crops are an essential part of healthy soil.

As part of the Indiana Conservation Partnership's ongoing efforts to educate, train and inform about soil health, the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI) developed a graphic showing the cross-sectional view of several popular and effective cover crops.

This high-quality graphic is extremely detailed and scalable. It's available for non-commercial use for presentations, seminars and workshops when cover crops are discussed. You can download the images here: <https://www.ccsin.org/root-project>.

CCSI promotes the adoption of science-based, farmer-proven practices through grassroots leadership. CCSI envisions an Indiana with healthy and productive soils, clean water, profitable and resilient agriculture, healthy, diverse ecosystems, and where our communities embrace a conservation ethic.

For more information about CCSI visit: <https://www.ccsin.org/>

CCSI is funded, in part, by the Indiana Natural Resources Conservation Service.

URBAN GARDEN FLOURISHES, MAKES IMPACT IN FOOD DESERT

In Sharronna Moore's neighborhood, located just outside of Indianapolis, Indiana, getting to the grocery store is no small feat. There is no store within walking distance and none of the closest grocery stores are located on a direct bus route. When her neighbors do make it to the store, efficiency, cost and shelf-life outweigh factors such as nutritional value when they decide what to buy.

As she looked around her community and her own life, Moore could trace many of the issues she saw back to food and the choices they were forced to make due to difficulty of access. So, in 2016 she set out to give her community access to the healthy, fresh food they so desperately needed.

In late 2016, she approached a local beverage distributor she lived near that had a large, unused plot of land and asked if she could turn it into a garden. They offered to rent her the land for \$1 a year and she has spent the last four years transforming it from an empty lot of nothing but grass into a flourishing urban farm that provides food to her entire community.

Soon after starting, Moore heard about the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and reached out. She applied for the agency's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and was able to receive priority access to the program as a socially disadvantaged, limited resource and beginning farmer. The EQIP funding she received funded most of the cost for a high tunnel, installed in 2018.

Over the last couple years, Moore has used the farm to have a generational impact on her community by transforming into an almost entirely youth led operation. Students as young as 12 can come and farm, learn about healthy food and then take fresh food and the lessons they learned back home to share with their families. They have also opened a mobile farm stand that goes directly to people's houses, nursing homes and schools so people who don't have transportation can purchase healthy food.

The high tunnel has played a key role in the success of the community garden because they are able to grow food almost year-round. The neighborhood's food security issues don't suddenly disappear in the winter and even with a couple inches of snow on the ground in early February the high tunnel is still brimming with life and providing fresh greens to her community.



Sharronna Moore

WOMEN4THELAND

Most women farmers and landowners share strong conservation values and want their land farmed sustainability into the future. Women4theLand (W4L) is a partnership of conservation and natural resource agencies and organizations working together to provide education and resources to Indiana women landowners, farmers and natural resource professionals. W4L uses the learning circle model to provide information in a comfortable, informal setting where women learn from professional conservationists as well as from each other. W4L provides education and information about conservation management practices, new technology, communicating effectively with tenants, financial assistance programs, where to find assistance and more.



19
Virtual



7
In-Person



435
Virtual



125
In-Person



15
Topics



22
Circles Held



11
Partners



391
Attendees

The primary topic for this year's circles was soil health but circle topics also included invasive species, forestry management, pond ecosystems, managing for pollinators and wildlife, conservation planning, and working with your farmer on leases.

For more information on Women4theLand, visit: www.women4theland.org

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