



2023 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. Indiana NRCS continues to be one of the nation's leaders in helping people help the land by getting conservation on the ground and

positively impacting acres in every corner of the state. In 2023, Indiana NRCS staff throughout the state worked with producers to fund more than \$56 million worth of conservation practices on more than 305,000 acres of farm and privately owned forest land. The more than 1,100 contracts with producers will have a lasting positive impact on Indiana's soil, water, forestry, energy and wildlife resources while also helping to combat climate change. I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS' investments and successes in fiscal year 2023.

-Damarys Mortenson, State Conservationist

AT A GLANCE: Investments on Private Lands



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Wetland Reserve Easements

Contracts 22
Acres 1,378
Dollars \$11,562,798

Agricultural Land Easements

Contracts 1
Acres 157
Dollars \$231,125



Conservation Stewardship Program

Contracts 279
Acres 179,849
Dollars \$19,925,897



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Contracts 883
Acres 125,580
Dollars \$36,564,401



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Contracts 15
Acres 6,482
Dollars \$1,643,215

FINANCIAL & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS PROGRAM (ACEP)

Wetland Reserve Easements

<i>New Applications</i>	22 applications for 1,378 acres
<i>Closed Easements</i>	22 closed easements for 1,042 acres
<i>Restoration Completed</i>	12 easements
<i>Compatible Use Authorizations</i>	49 approved
<i>Onsite Monitoring Reviews</i>	496 easements
<i>Offsite Monitoring Reviews</i>	450 easements

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

Ag Land BFR*	\$339,784	2,410 acres	8 contracts
Ag Land General	\$13,633,924	123,897 acres	118 contracts
NIPF** General	\$1,712,380	6,055 acres	88 contracts
NIPF** BFR*	\$158,491	561 acres	10 contracts
Inflation Reduction Act	\$4,081,318	46,926 acres	55 contracts
TOTAL	\$19,925,897	179,849 acres	279 contracts

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

Beginning Farmer	\$5,992,662	15,154 acres	151 contracts
Climate Smart	\$443,844	1,658 acres	1 contracts
Cropland	\$2,483,770	8,091 acres	34 contracts
Confined Livestock	\$9,930,708	9,446 acres	79 contracts
Conservation Incentive	\$1,065,990	3,585 acres	11 contracts
Forestland	\$738,086	1,261 acres	21 contracts
Great Lakes Restoration	\$2,200,876	13,744 acres	46 contracts
Inflation Reduction Act	\$3,721,526	9,346 acres	76 contracts
Limited Resource	\$1,050,334	666 acres	11 contacts
Mississippi River Basin	\$430,932	2,366 acres	10 contracts
Monarch Butterfly	\$78,995	153 acres	14 contracts
Northern Bobwhite	\$581,254	1,111 acres	24 contracts
National Water Quality	\$665,290	3,410 acres	12 contracts
On-Farm Energy	\$383,464	1,650 acres	13 contracts
Organic	\$259,382	2,296 acres	16 contracts
Planning/Locally Led	\$997,844	38,353 acres	145 contracts
Pastureland	\$1,657,254	4,338 acres	61 contracts
Socially Disadvantaged	\$554,894	799 acres	28 contracts
Specialty Crop	\$1,020,127	1,288 acres	50 contracts
Western Lake Erie Basin	\$914,094	4,445 acres	12 contracts
Wildlife	\$1,393,075	2,420 acres	68 contracts
TOTAL	\$36,564,401	125,580 acres	883 contracts

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

Tri-State WLEB	\$307,036	965 acres	4 contracts
Farmers Helping Hellbenders	\$599,892	1,761 acres	4 contracts
Big Pine Watershed	\$736,287	3,756 acres	7 contracts
TOTAL	\$1,643,215	6,482 acres	15 contracts

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

CRP Plans Written	Over 900
Engineering Designs Completed	Over 900/1,700 acres
Practices Planned	Over 3,200/16,000 acres
Practice Status Reviews Completed	Over 11,000 practices/30,000 acres
Practice Certifications/Checkouts Completed	Over 5,000 practice/13,000 acres

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



Cover Crops



Brush Management



Roofs and Covers



Nutrient Management



Waste Storage Facility

CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Top Five EQIP Practices (Obligated \$)

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

Top Five CSP Enhancements (Obligated \$)

1. Reduce risk of pesticides in surface water - precision pesticide application techniques
2. Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses
3. Reduce risks of nutrient loss to surface water - precision agriculture technologies
4. Reduce risk of pesticides in water and air by utilizing IPM PAMS techniques
5. Crop tree management for mast production

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

TWITTER

59,363 Impressions



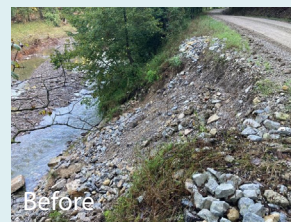
YOUTUBE



EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION (EWP)

EWP helps local communities recover after a natural disaster strikes. The program offers technical and financial assistance to help local communities relieve imminent threats to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms and other natural disasters that impair a watershed.

City of Vincennes (5058):	4 sites - Completed
Dearborn County (5059):	1 site - Completed
Jefferson County (5060):	2 sites - Completed
Switzerland County (5060):	1 site - Completed, 2 Sites Remaining
Johnson County (5061):	1 site - Damage Survey Report (DSR)
Franklin County (5062):	1 site - Completing Damage Survey Reports (DSR)



Jefferson County EWP before and after photos of bank stabilization (sheet piling/soil nailing) on Brush Fork Creek along E. Brushy Fork Road.



Muddy Fork in Clark County, Indiana.

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Dams are silent protectors, located in remote area that protect lives and property downstream. All have a lifespan that requires consistent oversight to ensure they continue to meet state and federal design, safety, and performance criteria. NRCS Watershed REHAB Program provides local sponsors with technical and financial assistance to address concerns before they become a liability.

- Daviess County: Rehabilitation Funding Requested for 2 dams on Prairie Creek
- Perry County: Rehabilitation Funding Requested for 1 dam on Deer Creek
- Clark County: 4 dam assessments completed on Muddy Fork
- Clark County: 1 dam assessment received funding on Broden Tri-County

ENERGY AUDIT HELPS FARMER LOWER COSTS WHILE PROTECTING HIS FLOCK

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) On-Farm Energy Initiative helps farmers make voluntary improvements that can boost energy efficiency on the farm. This emerging agricultural trend produces benefits, including reduced input costs, increased productivity per unit of energy consumed by equipment and lighting, and reduced air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions caused when energy is generated for agricultural use.

When a farmer is approved for an on-farm energy audit contract through EQIP they are provided financial assistance to offset the cost of having an audit conducted by a third-party qualified individual. The auditor will visit the farm and work to calculate the cost of all energy consuming activities on the farm. The auditor will then develop a plan of recommended energy upgrades to reduce energy usage for the benefit of the environment and their bottom line.

For John Baker, a turkey farmer in Washington County, implementing changes from the on-farm energy audit has reduced his propane usage, but even more so it has improved the health of the birds he is raising. Baker has three turkey barns and raises about 28,000 turkeys at a time. He receives them at 5-weeks-old and keep them for 15 weeks with the goal of raising each bird to top 45 pounds.

Since his audit, Baker has installed new insulation in two of his three barns and upgrades in the third planned for the near future, which helps trap heat inside during the winter and keeps the birds comfortable while reducing the amount of active heating he has to provide. He also installed more efficient heaters throughout the barn. The biggest change came in the form of lighting, though.

Baker has switched the 168 bulbs in his three barns to LED lights which saves on energy costs, but also provides a better living environment for the birds. Unlike the previous bulbs, or an

LED bulb just bought off the shelf, these bulbs are specifically designed to provide light at the correct wavelength for the birds and replicate the sunlight they don't have access to while inside the barns. Baker also has better control over them, which enables him to better control the behavior of the birds as they grow and become more aggressive.



John Baker raises about 28,000 turkeys at a time across three barns on his farm in Salem, Indiana. He has worked with NRCS to implement multiple energy efficiency practices including an energy audit, LED lighting, attic insulation and heaters. Photo Credit: Brandon O'Connor.

Historically, the available funding for energy audits and the installation of energy efficient upgrades through Indiana NRCS has been limited, with only about \$50,000 allotted each year through EQIP. That has changed, though, with the influx of funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). IRA provides \$19.5 billion to NRCS over the next five years to help farmers install climate smart agricultural practices, including those related to on-farm energy efficient upgrades.

The possible upgrades are broken down into four broad categories.

1. Energy efficient building envelopes, which includes improving the insulation in confined livestock barns or adding sidewalls to better regulate temperature.
2. Energy efficient lighting systems, which includes the changing of the lightbulbs on the farm much as Baker has.
3. Energy efficient agricultural systems operations, which includes upgrades to motors, heaters and other mechanical processes on farms.
4. Combustion system improvements, which includes changes such as switching the engines that operate center pivot irrigation systems from gas powered to electric.

No matter which category of upgrade you believe would benefit your farm, the first step is to apply for an on-farm energy audit. That enables the farmer to see what upgrades are needed and then they can work with their district conservationist to prioritize the changes and apply for assistance in making them.

To help farmers prepare for that meeting, NRCS has developed a series of free energy estimator tools where farmers can put in information about their operation and estimate how much energy they use and could save by switching. The available tools include one that calculates how the energy uses in confined animal housing barns. Additional tools will estimate how much fuel a row crop farmer could save by switching to no-till farming and the energy associated with running irrigation systems. The tools can be accessed at <https://energytools.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.

For more information about how NRCS can help you conduct an energy audit on your farm contact your district conservationist by visiting <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/indiana-service-centers>.

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.

During FY23, Indiana NRCS accomplished the following:

549 volunteers as individuals or in groups

3,998.75 hours logged

100% of offices reported Earth Team contributions

Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved Indiana NRCS approximate \$127,160 according to the Independent Sector's value of volunteer time and supported conservation in every single USDA Service Center in Indiana.



FY23 Earth Team Volunteer of the Year, Marilyn Ellicott helps out at a service center tree sale event.

URBAN SOIL HEALTH PROGRAM

NRCS serves 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, NRCS addresses many needs - restoring the health of the environment and people.

As part of this effort, Indiana NRCS partnered with the Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts to develop the Urban Soil Health program. The program staff consists of program director Elli Blaine and a soil health specialist working out each of Indiana NRCS' four area offices.

The Urban Soil Health Program team works with conservation partners and farmers across Indiana to form local Soil Health Working Groups that provide soil health education and address the needs of small-scale vegetable growers. Their Urban Soil Health Specialists and working group members train local conservation staff, growers and the general public at field days, workshops, one-on-one meetings, and via site visits and technical assistance.



The Urban Soil Health Team and attendees at the Dan Perkins Field Day.



3,000+
People
Reached



100+
Events
Held



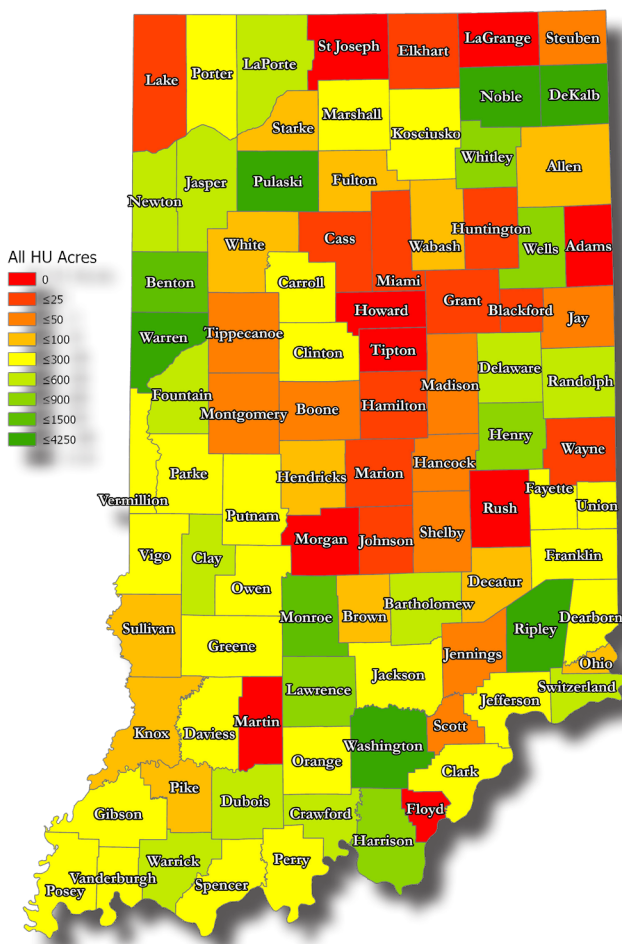
80
Site
Visits



60
Technical
Assists

COMMITMENT TO ADVANCING EQUITY, JUSTICE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Historically Underserved Conservation Acres by County



Since NRCS' establishment, unfortunately, underserved communities and individuals have experienced significant barriers to equity, equality and justice in agency programs and policies. NRCS is committed to advancing equity, justice, and opportunity for agency employees and those we serve by sustaining a culture that operates with a value for equity and equal opportunity for all. In its commitment to equity, NRCS is taking steps that include:

- Reviewing and modifying programs, practices and policies to address historic and structural barriers and to ensure fair and equitable treatment.
- Prioritizing funding for projects that support underserved communities and producers.
- Continuing to support Community Based Organizations, the historically underserved, and partners that are instrumental in the development of communities on behalf of NRCS through conservation outreach.
- Investing in training, program outreach, and partnerships to expand access to NRCS assistance for underserved communities and producers.
- Committing to comprehensive delivery of technical service and clear, straightforward, and effective communications to all customers to ensure we are reaching underserved communities and producers.

In FY23, NRCS invested close to \$8.1 million on approximately 20,000 acres to Indiana farmers and forestland owners. This is broken down by:

- Nearly \$6.5 million was distributed to beginning farmers on 18,125 acres.
- Over \$550,000 dispersed to socially disadvantaged farmers on close to 800 acres.
- More than \$1 million to limited resource farmers on 665 acres.



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.

In FY23, Indiana NRCS renewed their agreement with W4L to extend the program another five years. After the agreement was signed in March, 2023, W4L held five learning circles, reaching 82 women landowners in Indiana. The primary topic for this year's circles was soil health but circle topics also included regenerative farming practices, managing for pollinators and wildlife, and conservation planning.

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



BLACK LOAM CONFERENCES

Legacy Taste of the Garden and their partners hosted the second annual Black Loam Conference at the Madam Walker Legacy Center in downtown Indianapolis. Led by the Jamerson family, this conference, along with four regional meetings, came together through the dedicated work of a dynamic team to identify the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) farming communities' needs throughout the state.

The Black Loam conferences are committed to building agricultural relationships and providing support to gain access to conservation information. The conference and regional meetings connect with underserved regional communities to provide introductions to USDA programs and resources available to BIPOC and socially disadvantaged rural, urban and community producers. The goal is to assist them in accessing and increasing participation in USDA programs, loans, grants and scholarships, sustainable agriculture practices, business planning and community development.

In FY23, Indiana signed an agreement to hold these events throughout Indiana for the next five years. This year, the Black Loam events educated more than 300 BIPOC farmers throughout Indiana.



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1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

fax: (202) 690-7442; or

email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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