



A Guide to the 2014 Farm Bill Conservation Programs in Virginia



If you own or manage farm or forest land in Virginia, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help you achieve your land management objectives and vision through 2014 Farm Bill conservation programs.

NRCS is a non-regulatory federal agency that offers technical and financial assistance to address natural resource concerns on privately-owned lands. We work closely with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, state agencies, non-governmental entities, and other partners to meet local needs on a grassroots level.

Through our partnerships, we can coordinate public and private resources to implement scientifically based, locally-led voluntary conservation efforts.

Getting Started with NRCS

You can get NRCS assistance in five easy steps: planning, application, eligibility, ranking, and implementing. Whether you want to lower production costs, increase crop yields, or increase recreational opportunities on your land, it all begins with a plan. Our conservationists are eager to meet with you on your farm or at your local USDA Service Center to custom design a conservation or forest management plan tailored to your operation.

Next, we'll walk you through the application process for financial assistance and tell you what to bring with you to make sure you are eligible for our programs. We accept applications throughout the year and rank them based on the environmental benefits of the planned practices. The highest ranked applications are selected for funding.

Once you sign a contract, we will then work with you to get planned practices installed on your land. You will receive payment for completed work that meets NRCS standards and specifications.

Special Funding Pools

The 2014 Farm Bill continues to address the unique circumstances and concerns of small farms with special funding pools for some NRCS conservation programs:

- New/Beginning Farmers (farming less than 10 consecutive years)
- Socially Disadvantaged Farmers (racial or ethnic groups such as African Americans and Hispanics)

These groups and Veterans who are also beginning farmers are eligible for advance payments and higher payment rates of up to 90 percent of the cost for practice implementation.

Simplified Adjusted Gross Income Limits

Producers whose average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) does not exceed \$900,000 will be eligible to receive payments or benefits from most conservation programs, pending additional eligibility factor approvals. Those with an AGI exceeding \$900,000 will not be eligible.

Visit www.va.nrcs.usda.gov to find your local Service Center and learn more about Virginia programs.

Virginia Natural Resources Conservation Service

nrcs.va.usda.gov/



Program	Description	Who is eligible? What land is eligible?	Agreement Length and Type	USDA Financial Incentives	Participant Obligations
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - Agricultural Land Easement	ACEP works in partnership with eligible entities to protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land.	State and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs.	Permanent easement	NRCS contributes up to 50 percent of the easement purchase based on appraised fair market value with up to 75 percent available for grasslands of environmental significance. Additional benefits of reduced cash match (25 percent or less) may be available through Virginia's Tax Credit for a Qualified Conservation Contribution on agricultural land. (NRCS State Conservationist waiver required.)	Maintain agricultural land use.
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - Wetlands Reserve Easement	ACEP provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through easements.	Private landowners of eligible cropland, grassland, and woodland. Applicants must have owned the land for at least 24 months. Land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program may be eligible with a waiver.	Permanent and 30-year easement options	NRCS pays 50 to 100 percent of the easement value. NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement.	Restore and maintain wetlands as agreed. If restoration is needed, may assist with costs.
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)	A voluntary program to help agricultural producers to convert and maintain environmentally sensitive lands for conservation purposes.	Owners/Operators of eligible crop, pasture, and grass land.	10-15 years	An annual rental payment plus incentives and a percentage of the cost to establish and maintain the practice. <i>*Note: The Farm Service Agency manages CRP/CREP; NRCS provides technical assistance.</i>	Establish, maintain and manage the practice per the conservation plan.
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	CSP rewards farmers who are good conservation stewards of agricultural or wood land and agree to install additional enhancements on contracted acres.	Individuals, groups or entities who own or manage agricultural or wood land with existing conservation practices and who agree to implement additional conservation measures.	5-year contract with possible renewal	Annual payments for maintaining existing conservation practices and compensation for implementing additional enhancement activities. Separate funding pools for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.	Maintain and increase level of current land stewardship.
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	EQIP helps promote farm and forest production by enhancing the protection of environmental resources related to soil, water, air, plants and animals.	Individuals, groups or entities who own or manage farmland, pasture land or non-industrial forest land.	1 - 10 year contract	Compensation for the cost of implementing conservation practices. Beginning, limited-resource, socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers may be eligible for higher payment rates.	Install and maintain conservation practices to NRCS standards.
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)	RCPP promotes coordination with NRCS partners to deliver conservation programs to farmers through partnership agreements.	Agricultural or silvicultural producer associations, cooperatives or groups; state or local governments, American Indian tribes; municipal water treatment entities; conservation-driven non-governmental organizations and institutions of higher education.	Up to five years	Compensation to producers through EQIP, CSP or ACEP for implementing eligible conservation activities and conservation easements.	Partner contributes financially to project. Responsible for outreach to eligible producers. Conducts an assessment of the project's effects.