



United States Department of Agriculture

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

DELAWARE FY 2017 Accomplishments Report



Helping People Help the Land

www.de.nrcs.usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

State Conservationist's Message

Fellow Conservationists and Friends,

I am so grateful for the opportunity to share this 2017 Accomplishments Report for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Delaware with you.

Each year I comment on the remarkable level of conservation implemented, but this year has truly been an exceptional year in getting conservation on the ground. We were able to fund more than \$8.1 million in conservation assistance through our Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) alone, which is phenomenal. In addition, we were able to match nearly \$1 million with two conservation partners to double the amount of financial assistance that will be available to farmers to improve water quality and increase energy efficiencies. This was done through the public-private partnership of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Each year, we are doing more to assist landowners with voluntarily practice implementation to improve soil health, water quality, air quality, wildlife habitat, and more.

At the national level, conservation planning continues to be a priority among NRCS and our national conservation partners. At the state level, the Delaware staff and conservation partnership have been fully engaged in the conservation planning process to strengthen and reinvigorate our resource priorities in the state. We will continue to ensure field staff have the right expertise and have the tools to work effectively with our diverse customers to help them meet their conservation, production and economic goals.

As we continue to move forward into fiscal year (FY) 2018, Delaware NRCS is working to ensure our programs and services are delivered efficiently and with integrity. We are confident that together with our conservation partners we will strengthen the ability of farmers to care for the land as we continue to fulfill our core priorities:

Long-Term Conservation Planning ensures that we, in collaboration with our conservation partners, are effectively helping farmers address their conservation goals not only today and in the near future, but over the long-haul. We will need to stay in tune with farming changes into the future.

Soil Health management is a key to the long-term production and sustainability of our farmers' working lands. Without the proper care of soil, farmers would not be able to efficiently produce the crops that provide food and nutrients to all.

Conservation Delivery looks at the implementation side of conservation planning and ensures that our landowners understand this comprehensive approach to conservation land application. In conservation planning, our highly-skilled conservation partnership planners work with landowners to identify problems and opportunities, determine objectives, analyze resource data, and then formulate and evaluate alternatives to achieve their desired goals.

Employee Development is needed to meet the complexities that arise with technology advancements to keep our technical leadership strong. This ensures we continue being a subject-matter expert for our customers in technical assistance and planning.

I encourage you to review this report to gain a better insight into our delivery of technical and financial assistance and the importance of voluntary conservation for all Delawareans.

Yours in conservation,



Kasey L. Taylor
State Conservationist, Delaware



Inside this issue:

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
 - *Agricultural Land Easements Component*
 - *Wetlands Reserve Component*
- **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)**
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**
- **Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) and Conservation Planning**
- **Engineering**
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
- **Soil Sciences and GIS**



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) has two components--one for agricultural lands (ACEP-ALE), one for wetlands (ACEP-WRE)--in which financial and technical assistance is provided to conserve these lands and their related benefits.

Agricultural Land Easements

(ACEP - ALE) - Under this component, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps partners protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land.

NRCS works with approved state or local units of government and certain nongovernmental organizations who arrange for the purchase of development rights through conservation easements on private lands. The entity holds and manages these conservation easements in perpetuity.

NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement on approved parcels. All parcels are ranked individually on their own merit. Funds will be awarded to the highest ranked eligible parcels through a statewide competitive process. Partner entities must bear the cost of appraisals, surveys when needed, title search, legal and closing costs, and monitoring and enforcement of the easement.

2017 Accomplishments

Delaware NRCS entered into an agreement with the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation (DALP) Foundation to purchase easements on 13 farms in Delaware.

ACEP-ALE provided funds of \$1.3 million to the DALP Foundation to help purchase these farmland easements, which total \$2.63 million. The total acreage enrolled into the preservation easements total 1,118.15 acres.

Wetlands Reserve Easements

(ACEP - WRE) - Under this component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands. Through the wetlands reserve enrollment options, NRCS may enroll eligible land through:

Permanent Easements – Permanent easements are conservation easements in perpetuity. NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement. Additionally, NRCS pays between 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs.

30-year Easements – 30-year easements expire after 30 years. Under 30-year easements, NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement. Additionally, NRCS pays between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

Term Easements - Term easements are easements that are for the maximum duration allowed under applicable State laws. NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the term easement. NRCS also pays between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

2017 Accomplishments

Delaware completed restoration on four wetland reserve easement sites totaling 199 acres throughout the state in FY 2017.

Two new WRE project applications were approved for funding for a total of \$356,800 on 127 acres. Two additional wetland reserve easement applications were funded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This project funding totaled \$277,000 on 99 acres.

Outreach efforts to identify potential areas for restoration and preservation were conducted and will continue into FY 2018.



Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

Agricultural Management Assistance provides financial and technical assistance to farmers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations.

Farmers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices (including soil erosion control, integrated pest management or transition to organic farming).

Historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged producers, and Veterans who are beginning farmers)

may be eligible for a higher practice payment rate for the implementation of conservation practices and conservation plans.

AMA is available in 16 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

2017 Accomplishments

Delaware received 11 AMA applications in FY 2017. Delaware approved all contracts, which cover 60.2 acres for a financial assistance total of \$108,385.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities, and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems. CSP participants are maintaining and enhancing the treatment of soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plants, animals and energy. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, improved pasture land and nonindustrial private forestland.

In FY 2017, NRCS initiated improvements that made CSP easier to understand, more flexible and more accommodating to local priorities. NRCS added a significant number of enhancements and practices.

CSP is available to all producers nationwide, regardless of operation size or crops produced. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis with announced ranking cut-off dates when the ranking and funding of applications on file will occur. Applications need to include the applicant's entire operation and are evaluated and ranked relative to other applications that address similar resource

concerns in Delaware. In the ranking process, applicants receive credit for both - conservation measures they have already implemented and for new measures they agree to add. The applications addressing the most resource concerns to the highest degree will receive the highest rankings.

2017 Accomplishments

In FY 2017, Delaware NRCS provided \$307,156 in financial assistance through 13 new contracts and 13 renewals on 6,466 acres during the 2017 sign-up period. Renewals were offered to CSP program participants who signed up in 2012 and whose contracts were up for expiration.

All CSP contracts are for a term of five years. Overall, DE NRCS is currently providing technical and financial assistance to 85 active CSP contracts on 65,813 acres totaling \$2.894 million annually.

(Note: CSP payments are administered on an annual basis.)



Conservation Technical Assistance

The Conservation Technical Assistance Program provides technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. The CTA program provides the technical capability, including **conservation planning**, design and implementation assistance, that helps people plan and apply conservation on the land. This assistance is provided to individuals, groups and communities who make natural resource management decisions on private, tribal and other non-federal lands.

NRCS, through the CTA Program, provides conservation technical assistance to address natural resource conservation issues that are of local, state or national concern.

The CTA Program provides the local delivery system and the foundational technical expertise for other NRCS programs. The CTA Program is unique because it provides a substantive level of technical expertise, background and support for Federal, State and local conservation programs. One-on-one help through flexible, voluntary programs occurs every day in local NRCS offices.

Conservation Planning

Conservation planning is a process from which conservation plans are developed by working with the landowner to first understand the resource needs and the landowner's desired land use goals. Based on sound scientific practices, NRCS provides hands-on assistance to help the landowner develop a conservation plan.

A conservation plan is the record of the landowner's decisions and supporting information for treatment of one or more identified natural resource concerns as a result of the planning process. The plan describes the schedule of implementation for practices needed to solve identified natural resource concerns and takes advantage of opportunities.

The benefits for the producer to develop a conservation plan are many. Conservation plans provide a strategic

guide for reaching land-use and natural resource goals and provide a complete assessment/inventory of a landowner's resources. Implemented conservation plans have a positive impact on the bottom line and help improve the condition of their natural resources.

Conservation planning is a priority among NRCS and national conservation partners to improve conservation delivery. To ensure planning continues to be successfully integrated into technical assistance approaches, some of the following efforts are underway or in process:

- Establish a minimum set of requirements that must be completed in order to be a certified conservation planner;
- boot-camp training sessions that will expand on conservation planning for conservation district and NRCS employees;
- Program Support Specialists to assist field offices by completing administrative tasks related to contract management, allowing field staff more time in the field planning; and
- Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative that combines tools and processes such as assessing soil erosion, wind erosion, etc...

Delaware NRCS along with state and local partners are fully on board with these efforts and are moving them forward. One initiative that has greatly accelerated conservation planning is soil health. With the initiative, a Soil Health Partnership was formed, including NRCS, the Districts, Cooperative Extension, farmers, and others to promote the benefits of soil health and conservation planning.

Planning partners include Delaware's Conservation Districts, Delaware Department of Agriculture, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, the Delaware Conservation District Employees Association and the First State Resource Conservation and Development Council.



Engineering

The Delaware NRCS Engineering Staff provides sound technical leadership and principles to producers and customers to implement conservation systems and practices on the land. Assistance is provided through evaluation, survey, design, and construction layout and supervision of practices implemented to address natural resource concerns.

Quality assurance is an important role of the Delaware Engineering team. Engineering oversight of projects implemented through public funding assures they meet NRCS Standards and Specifications and function properly to solve the resource concern as intended.

The engineering team is also responsible for training field staff as new technology emerges, new conservation practices are introduced, or as new employees are hired. Advances in survey equipment, computer-aided design and drafting, and engineering software require that the staff master this technology and be able to train field personnel so they can most efficiently implement conservation programs.

All of the implementation accomplishments included in this report have, in some way, been assisted by the Delaware NRCS Engineering Team.

During 2017, the engineering staff provided technical assistance for traditional waste management practices including manure storage structures, composters and heavy use area pads as construction of many new poultry farms continued in Delaware. Staff also implemented erosion control practices such as streambank stabilization, grade stabilization, grassed waterways, and additional structural practices including agrichemical handling facilities, irrigation water management practices and practices to benefit wildlife such as shallow ponds.

It was a busy year for Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) implementation with the construction of five restoration projects, design of three projects including a 360-acre project with over 30 individual sites, and four more projects in the planning stages.

The engineering staff helps get conservation on the ground.



Wetlands provide habitat for wildlife, improve water quality, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and much more.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through contracts up to a maximum term of ten years in length. These contracts provide financial assistance to help address and improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and other related natural resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. Another purpose of EQIP is to help producers meet Federal, State, Tribal and local environmental regulations.

EQIP provides financial assistance payments to eligible producers based on a portion of the average cost associated with practice implementation. Technical assistance is available to help producers develop conservation plans, which are required to obtain financial assistance.

Historically underserved (HU) producers (limited resource farmers, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged producers, and Veterans who are beginning farmers) may be eligible for a higher practice payment for the implementation of conservation practices and conservation plans. HU producers may also be eligible for advance payments up to 50 percent of the estimated contractual payment in order to begin installation of approved conservation practices with an NRCS approved design.

Producers may use a certified Technical Service Provider (TSP) for technical assistance needed for certain eligible activities, services and the development of conservation plans.

Delaware's EQIP incorporates environmental priorities as identified at the state level (State Technical Committee) and local levels (Local Work Groups) into the selection of what specific program options will be offered, and

what factors, questions and screening tools will be used in the application ranking process. Ranking worksheets for each program option include evaluation questions that reflect national, state and local priorities.

2017 Accomplishments

Delaware received 726 EQIP applications for FY 2017.

Delaware approved 208 contracts covering 31,744 acres for a financial assistance total of \$8,130,712. Included in these numbers are 68 approved contracts covering 1,928 acres assisting beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers with financial assistance totaling \$3,812,046.

EQIP funding options:

Beginning Farmers
Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)
Energy Initiative
Limited Resource Farmers
National Water Quality Initiative
Organic Initiative
Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative
Socially Disadvantaged Producers
Veterans

Top Practices:

Heavy Use Area Pads
Waste Storage Structures
Energy
Irrigation (Water Management)
Cover Crops
Nutrient management
Composters



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program is the newest conservation tool of USDA NRCS created in the 2014 Farm Bill.

RCPP encourages multiple partners—such as private companies, local and tribal governments, universities, non-profit groups and other non-government partners—along with farmers, and forest landowners to design conservation-based solutions that work best for their region. Local partners and the federal government both invest funding and manpower to projects to maximize their impact.

RCPP allows local partners the opportunity to design and invest in conservation projects that are specifically tailored to make an impact well beyond what the Federal government could accomplish on its own.

RCPP Funding - Funding for RCPP is allocated to projects in three different categories:

Critical Conservation Areas (CCA)- Each CCA has an overarching goal that includes addressing priority resource concerns that are common throughout the area.

There are eight geographic areas chosen by the Secretary of Agriculture as CCAs. These receive 35 percent of funding. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed CCA encompasses about a third of Delaware.

National - For nationwide and multistate projects that further the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of natural resources. These receive 40 percent of funding.

State - For projects in a single state that address state-specific or national priorities. These receive 25 percent of funding.

2017 Accomplishments

Delaware funded two proposals out of its state funding pool.

The proposal, **Cost-share Opportunities for Beginning Farmers** was submitted by Kent Conservation District (KCD) along with other key agricultural partners. KCD along with public and private partners will assist new and beginning farmers in Kent County with initial costs associated with poultry operations, particularly with waste and manure disposal. The goal is to improve water quality by reducing nutrients entering surface and ground water.

The proposal, **Energize Delaware Farm Energy Efficiency Program**, was submitted by the Delaware Sustainable Energy Utility and other partners. The Delaware Sustainable Energy Utility and EnSave worked to develop a program that will offer energy audits, renewable energy assessments, grants, loans and connections with other sources of funding to address energy conservation. The goal is to assist poultry farmers with improving the energy efficiencies of their farming operations.



Soil Sciences and Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

The main goal of the soils staff in Delaware is to provide scientifically defensible and timely delivery of technical soils information to internal and external partners to meet their ever changing resource challenges. Accurate soils information is the foundation on which NRCS and many partners base their resource initiatives on.

Over the last year the soils staff in Delaware in cooperation with the soil survey division updated 23,846 acres of soil information to more accurately reflect our understanding of these soils. In addition, 19,747 acres of Subaqueous Soils (SAS) were mapped in Delaware and was published on November 1, 2017 for resource managers who work in the Inland Bays. Delaware is one of five states which now can provide subaqueous soils information to the public. These types of additions and edits will occur yearly as the soils data is updated in real time.

Accurate soils information is currently available online for the whole state through [Web Soil Survey](#), [SoilWeb apps](#), [Geo-Spatial Data Gateway](#) and the electronic [Field Office Technical Guide eFOTG](#).

Moreover, Technical Soil Services (TSS) remain the largest work load for the staff in Delaware. Requests range from onsite geo-technical investigations for agricultural structures and best management practices to environmental compliance requirements associated with Farm Bill Programs. In addition, with the advent of purchasing a portable X-ray Florence (XRF) and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) unit we can now determine the level of metal contents in the soil in the field and locate subsurface soil features without the typical disturbance of digging test pits.

In addition, the GIS staff is preparing the partnership and producers for the transition to the new Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI). This platform, in the future, will allow producers to request technical conservation assistance online through a computer or smartphone application. Producers will be able to monitor progress on their technical and financial assistance requests in real time, and ask questions or submit feedback to the appropriate NRCS staff.

**The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of
The United States Department of Agriculture.**

**For more information, contact Dastina Wallace, public affairs specialist, at
302-678-4179. Or visit Delaware NRCS online at www.de.nrcs.usda.gov.**



In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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

Note:

All data included in this report has pulled by NRCS' program specialists through the Program Contracts System, known as ProTracts or through the National Easement Staging Tool (NEST). ProTracts is a web-based system used to manage program data for AMA, CSP and EQIP; NEST is a web-based system used to manage program data for NRCS' easement programs including ACEP-ALE and ACEP-WRE.