NRCS Conservation Programs in Nebraska

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2018 FARM BILL
“Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018”
Farm Bill Implementation

- **FY 2019**
  - Existing Rules and Mandates

- **FY 2020**
  - Phase-1 – Interim Rules

- **FY 2021**
  - Phase-2 – Final Rules
2018 Farm Bill Process

• Incorporate decisions into draft interim regulations
  – Obtain approval from Department and OMB
  – Publish in Federal Register for 60 day comment period
• Review comments received on interim regulation
• Prepare final regulation and publish in the Federal Register
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
FY19 ACEP-ALE - Implementation

- ALE (General)
  - Agreement approved with 2 parcels
  - Located in Webster and Sioux Counties.
    - 4039 acres
  - Entity holding easement
    - NE Land Trust
  - Final Estimated Federal Cost = $675,010.00

- RCPP – ALE
  - 3 Agreements approved with 1 parcel each
  - Located in Phelps, Clay and Fillmore Counties
    - 348 acres
  - Entities holding easements
    - Little Blue NRD, Tri-Basin NRD and the Upper Big Blue NRD
  - Final Estimated Federal Cost = $472,420.00
FY19 ACEP-WRE Implementation

- Nine offers to purchase – Accepted
  - WRE
    - 7 approved
    - Located in Otoe, Dodge, Holt, Custer, Platte and Valley Counties
    - 439.3 acres
    - $2,072,534.00
  - WREP
    - 1 approved
    - Located in Hall County
    - 15.6 acres
    - $62,478.00
  - RCPP-WRE
    - 1 approved
    - Located in Hall County
    - 42.0 acres
    - $366,105.00
FY2020 ACEP-WRE Compensation

• For FY2020 we have requested an extension of the FY2019 Area Wide Market Analysis (AWMA).
• Land values are within +/- 10% since the 2019 AWMA was completed.
• In FY2021, we will be required to obtain a new AWMA.
Nebraska Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)
Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC's) for FY 2020
NOT to EXCEED RATE = $4,488.00 for all land uses
FY2020 ACEP sign-up information

• With the new 2018 farm bill, new rules and regulations are being worked on in D.C.

• A sign-up deadline will not be announced until this has been completed.
  – We are hoping for a late winter or early spring sign-up.
  – Ranking system will be changed
  – We are sure there will be other changes.

• WRP Teams are still working with possible applicants to look at sites and develop restoration plans
ACEP-ALE: Grassland of Special Environmental Significance (GSS)

- Means grasslands that contain little or no noxious or invasive species as defined by State or Federal Law.
- Are subject to the threat of conversion to non-grassland uses or fragmentation and the land is:

  1(a) Rangeland, pastureland, shrubland or wet meadows on which this vegetation is dominated by native grasses, grass-like plants, shrubs or
  1 (b) Improved naturalized pastureland, rangeland and wet meadows

and,
ACEP-ALE: Grassland of Special Environmental Significance (GSS)

2(a) Provides, or could provide, habitat for threatened or endangered species or at-risk species

2(b) Protects sensitive or declining native prairie or grassland types or grasslands buffering wetlands, or

2(c) Provides protection of highly sensitive natural resources as identified by the State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Committee.
ACEP-ALE: Grassland of Special Environmental Significance (GSS)

NRCS may authorize a waiver to increase the Federal share of the cost of an agricultural land easement to an amount not to exceed 75% of the fair market of the agricultural land easement if all of the following apply:

- The eligible entity has identified on the application that the offered parcel is applying for funding consideration as a GSS.
- NRCS determines the land to be enrolled meets the GSS definitions
ACEP-ALE: Grassland of Special Environmental Significance (GSS)

- An eligible entity will share in the cost of purchasing an agricultural land easement in an amount that is no less than 33.33% of the Federal share. The eligibility entity share may include a qualified landowner contribution if the eligible entity contributes its own cash resources in an amount that is at least 16.67% of the Federal share.

- The eligible entity agrees to incorporate and enforce additional deed restrictions to manage and enforce the easement to ensure the GSS attributes are protected.
ACEP-ALE: Grassland of Special Environmental Significance (GSS)

- States must designate eligible lands for GSS consideration
- State Technical Committee concurrence required
  - Nebraska NRCS is requesting to designate the entire state of Nebraska eligible for GSS as long as the definitions of GSS are met, and
  - That the application does not exceed 5% cropland.

- We will then review this next year once we get an idea of the interest in this portion of the ACEP-ALE program.
2019 Spring Flood
EWP – Floodplain Easement Program

• Sign up ended October 31, 2019.
• 28 active applications on approximately 6300 acres.
• Nebraska received an initial allocation of $4.3 million for easement purchases and restorations.
• With only 5 cost estimates completed, there is a need of over $13,000,000 in these 5 applications.
• National Office Personnel visiting NE, IA and MO this week with staff.
Conservation Stewardship Program
Conservation Stewardship Program - Nebraska

- Results of 2019 General Signup
  - Applications = 614
  - New contracts = 226
  - Acres in contracts = 467,707
  - Contract obligations = $22M
Conservation Stewardship Program - Nebraska

• Results of 2019 General Signup
  – New contracts in 59 counties
  – Counties with highest number of new contracts:
    • Harlan, Lincoln, Nemaha
Popular CSP Activities in 2019

• Prescribed Grazing
• Pest Management
• Cover Crops
• Tree/Shrub Establishment
• Nutrient Management
CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative

- The Agricultural Improvement Act (2018 Farm Bill) authorized NRCS to enroll producers with eligible base acres in GCI contracts from FY2019 – 2023. The GCI assists producers in protecting grazing uses; conserve and improve soil, water and wildlife resources; and achieving related conservation values.
CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative

• Eligible Land
  – Base acres documented as grass, idle, or fallow through the years 2009 – 2017.
  – Entire farm # base acres must be eligible
  – Must address a resource concern associated with grassland.
CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative

• Applicant Eligibility
  – Must be the operator, owner or other tenant, and must have control of the land and have an interest in the operation where the base acres are located.
CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative

• Payment = $18 /acre/year
• Contract term = 5 years
• Applicants can only enroll once during the 5-year farm bill
CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative

• Nebraska 2019 GCI signup
  – 246 contracts
  – 73 different counties
  – $1.5M in obligations
  – Brown, Holt, Lancaster, Lincoln and Thurston have most contracts (>10).
FY2020 CSP-GCI

- CSP-GCI
  - Ranking cutoff – November 8
  - 210 applications
  - 57 counties
  - Contracts obligated by January 24, 2020
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

• Funding (National):
  • $700 million in FY19
  • $723 million in FY20
  • $750 million in FY21
  • $800 million in FY22
  • $1 billion in FY23
FY2020 CSP Fund Allocation - Nebraska

• Nebraska
  – $10 million - General
  – $3.4 million - GCI
  – $8.6 million - Renewal
CSP Changes in the 2018 Farm Bill

- Allows for the extension of contracts due to expire 12/31/2019 and authorizes renewal of these contracts (does not include contracts previously renewed).

- Bases program allocations on funds rather than acres.

- Provides one-time payment to participants who agree to develop a comprehensive conservation plan.

- Adds organic producers or producers transitioning to organic as a category of producer with a targeted ranking pool.
CSP Changes in the 2018 Farm Bill

• Requires that the program be managed to enhance soil health

• Requires CSP be aligned with EQIP in applications, contracting, conservation planning, conservation practices and related administrative procedures.

• Adds advanced grazing management as another type of supplemental payment.

• Modifies “eligible land” to include public land when the land is a working component of the participant’s operation
CSP Changes in the 2018 Farm Bill

- Expands the regulatory $400,000 contract limit for all joint operations.
- Adds language to allow for contract increases due to minor adjustments made to conservation activities at the discretion of NRCS.
- Includes an eligibility restriction for renewal-eligible participants who choose not to renew in favor of competing for a new contract. 2 – year wait.
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – Building on Success

- 375 active projects
- 2,000 partners
- $1 Billion in NRCS investment
- $2 Billion in non-NRCS investments
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- Provides mandatory funding at $300 million (from $100 million)
  - 50% of available funds for state or multi-state projects
  - 50% of available funds for projects within critical conservation areas
  - Removed National funding pool
- Removes 7% funding contributions from covered programs
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- Adds CRP and Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act as covered programs
  - Land enrolled into the new CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative is not eligible

- Agreements can be for longer than 5 years if longer period is necessary to meet the objectives of the program

- A partnership agreement may be renewed for a period not to exceed 5 years.

- Provides ability to renew partnership agreements through an expedited non-competitive process if Secretary determines that a project has met or exceeded the objectives of the project and extension is requested by the partner.
• Existing Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects in Nebraska
  – Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery – CPNRD & TPNRD
  – Regional Grassland Bird & Grazing Enhancement Initiative - NGPC
  – Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife – NGPC
  – Lower Elkhorn Water and Soil Conservation Project
  – Republican Basin Conservation Partnership – LRNRD
  – Divots in the Pivots – UBBNRD/RWBJV
  – Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 & 27 – LPNNRD
  – Papillion Creek Site WP-1 Dam - PMRNRD
FY15 RCPP
Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery (5 Years, 2015 – 2019)

• CPNRD, TPNRD
• $1.7 million
Regional Grassland Bird & Grazing Enhancement Initiative (5 years, 2015 – 2019)

- Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa
- $885,000 (Nebraska allocation)
FY16 RCPP

Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife – NGPC

• $700,000
FY16 RCPP

Lower Elkhorn Water and Soil Conservation Project

- $400,000
FY16 RCPP

Republican Basin Conservation Partnership
– LRNRD, MRNRD, URNRD

• $2.1 million
Divots in the Pivots

- UBBNRD and RWBJV Partners
- Combination of ACEP-ALE, ACEP-WRE and EQIP
- $1.8 million
FY17 RCPP

Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 & 27

- LPNNRD Partner
- $1.5 million
FY18 RCPP

• Papillion Creek Site WP-1 Dam
  • P-MRN RD Partner
  • $4.4 million
RCPP APF Timeline – FY2019

• **September 3, 2019**: Announcement of Program Funding (APF) through grants.gov:
  - Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-RCPP-19-01
  - CFDA #: 10.932, Regional Conservation Partnership Program

• **December 3, 2019**: Applications due by 5:00 p.m. EST

• **Results**: 4 Proposals submitted involving Nebraska

• **Once agreements are signed, partnership activities and obligations may begin.**
Vision and Goals of the Program

- **Impact**—RCPP applications must propose effective and compelling solutions that address one or more natural resource priorities to help solve natural resource challenges. Partners are responsible for evaluating a project’s impact and results.
• Vision and Goals of the Program
  – *Partner Contributions*—Partners are responsible for identifying any combination of cash and in-kind value-added contributions to leverage NRCS’s RCPP investments. It is NRCS’s goal that partner contributions at least equal the NRCS investment in an RCPP project. Substantive and sizable partner contributions are given priority consideration as part of the RCPP application evaluation criteria.
• Vision and Goals of the Program
  – *Innovation*—NRCS seeks projects that integrate multiple conservation approaches, implement innovative conservation approaches or technologies, build new partnerships, or effectively take advantage of program flexibilities to deliver conservation solutions.
Vision and Goals of the Program

- *Partnerships and Management*—Partners must have experience, expertise, and capacity to manage the partnership and project, provide outreach to producers, and quantify the environmental (and when possible, economic and social) outcomes of an RCPP project. RCPP ranking criteria give priority consideration to applicants that meaningfully engage historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
## RCPP FY 19/20 Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RCPP Action</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCPP FY 2019 funding announcement released</td>
<td>September 3, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP renewals awards announced</td>
<td>By November 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application period closes</td>
<td>December 3, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP review process initiated</td>
<td>December 4, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP Interim Final Rule released</td>
<td>Late 2019/Early 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFA funding announcement released</td>
<td>Soon after IFR release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP review process complete</td>
<td>January 15, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP award announcement</td>
<td>Week of March 9, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2019 RCPP partnership agreements (including renewals) executed</td>
<td>By mid-June 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next funding announcement released</td>
<td>July 1, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFA awards announced</td>
<td>Summer 2020</td>
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</tbody>
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Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Funding: $9.1 Billion (increase of $1.17 billion)
  - $1.75 Billion for FY19
  - $1.75 Billion for FY20
  - $1.8 Billion for FY21
  - $1.85 Billion for FY22
  - $2.025 Billion for FY23
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Proportion of EQIP funding:
  - **Livestock**: 50% (reduced from 60%) of the funds under the program shall be targeted at practices relating to livestock production and grazing management practices.
  
  - **Wildlife Habitat**: At least 10% (increased from 5%) of the funds under the program shall be targeted at practices benefitting wildlife habitat.
    - Clarifies that contracts entered into solely for wildlife practices can be up to 10 years in length.
Source Water Protection Program

– Dedicate at least 10 percent of the total funds available for conservation programs (with the exception of CRP), each year, to be used for source water protection.

– STCs working with the State Technical Committee, public water utilities and the State drinking water agency must select initial local priority areas where we can anticipate targeting approximately 10 percent of conservation program funding to benefit source water protection.
Source Water Protection Program

– Addresses excessive nutrients, and other impairments of drinking water sources (ground water or surface water).

– Addresses the conservation of water to advance drought mitigation.

– Practice incentive payments for this initiative will go to EQIP eligible owners/operators of agricultural land who install conservation practices relating to water quality and quantity.

– States can select up to 10 conservation practices to be eligible for 90% practice payment rate.
Source Water Protection Program

– Is geographically located to address a national resource concern in a specific watershed.

– Focus of initiative is the protection of community water systems that is defined by 25 people or more, 15 or more service connections, year-round.

– In Nebraska, 99% of municipalities use ground water as their source of drinking water.

– Groundwater Management Areas – may be eligible if they encompass several community water systems.
The Phase 2-4 and Quantity Management Areas that intersect a Wellhead Protection Area define the medium priority level.

Total Medium & High Priority Areas: 8,006,050 acres
Source Water Protection Practice List

*High priority practices with potential up to 90% c/s rate

- 327 Conservation Cover
- *328 Conservation Crop Rotation
- 332 Contour Buffer Strips
- *340 Cover Crop
- 342 Critical Area Planting
- 355 Well Water Testing
- 386 Field Border
- 390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
- 393 Filter Strip
- 412 Grassed Waterway
- *449 Irrigation Water Management
- *590 Nutrient Management
- 635 Vegetated Treatment Area
- 656 Constructed Wetland
Source Water Protection Practice List

*High priority practices with potential up to 90% c/s rate

- 351 Water Well Decommissioning
- 430 Irrigation Pipeline
- *441 Irrigation System, Micro irrigation
- *442 Sprinkler System
- 512 Forage and Biomass Planting

- 550 Range Planting
- *595 Integrated Pest Management
- 657 Wetland Restoration
- 659 Wetland Enhancement
EQIP Allocation Formula

FY 2020
2020 Statewide Fund Pools

- Source Water Protection – 10%
- Wildlife Initiative – 10%
- Historically Underserved – 10%
- Livestock – 50%
FY2020 STATEWIDE FUND POOLS

– Seasonal High Tunnel
– Organic
– Energy
– Conservation Activity Plans
– Animal Feeding Operations
– Tribal
– HEL Treatment
FY2020 STATEWIDE FUND POOLS

➤ Working Lands For Wildlife
  • Target Species
    – Greater Prairie Chicken
    – American Burying Beetle
  • Project Goal
    – Use EQIP to modify current livestock grazing infrastructure to achieve desired habitat conditions and increased profitability

➤ Forestry Service Partnership
  ○ UNWNRD, MNNRD, ULNRD

➤ National Water Quality Initiative
National Water Quality Initiative

- Wahoo Creek - Saunders
- Bazile Creek – Antelope, Pierce, Knox
- Big Sandy Creek – Little Blue NRD
- Turkey Creek – Lower Big Blue NRD

➢ Readiness Phase Project
Wahoo Creek HUC 12s
Selected for the
2016 National Water Quality Initiative
in Nebraska

Legend
Selected HUC12s

D. Griffith - 1/2016
2020 Local Work Group Fund Pools

- Allocation provided to 23 Local Work Groups
  - Allocations to local work groups are based on Resource Concern Critical Acres
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Concern</th>
<th>Nebraska Derived Critical Ac based on Statewide Datasets (w/Fert Ac)</th>
<th>% of Nebraska Derived Critical Acres</th>
<th>Manual Adjustments</th>
<th>Ex: $15,967,994 to distribute based on Nebraska Derived Critical Ac %’s</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soil Erosion</td>
<td>13,921,289</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
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<td>$3,687,204</td>
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<td>Soil Quality Degradation</td>
<td>1,458,536</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
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<td>$386,309</td>
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<td>Excess Water</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water Quality Degradation</td>
<td>15,372,612</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
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<td>$4,071,602</td>
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<td>Degraded Plant Condition</td>
<td>6,879,003</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,821,978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air Quality</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Livestock Production Limitation</td>
<td>15,000,505</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,973,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife</td>
<td>7,656,306</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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<td>$2,027,855</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insufficient Water</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals for Local Pools</td>
<td>60,288,250</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>$15,967,994</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Resource Concern – Soil Erosion on Cropland
Resource Concern – Soil Erosion on Grassland
Resource Concern
Degraded Plant Condition on Grassland/Pasture
Undesirable plant productivity & Excessive Plant Pest Pressure

The map to the left represents all factors listed below by the overall percentage that each NRD has of the individual resource factors. Those factors are: Total number of cattle, Total acres of grassland/pasture, and Total number of instances of unique noxious weed occurrences.
Resource Concern - Livestock Production Limitation On Grassland/Pasture

Inadequate livestock shelter

This map represents all factors listed below by the overall percentage that each NRD has of the individual resource factors. Factors: Total number of cattle, Total acres of grassland/pasture.
Resource Concern – Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water on Cropland

This map represents all factors listed below by the overall percentage that each NRD has of the individual resource factors. Factors: Total Taxed Irrigated Acres, Irrigation Wells, USGS 2005 Acres Surface Irrigated, NASS 2013 Total Cropland Ac.
Resource Concern Water Quality Degradation
Excess nutrients & Pathogens in surface & ground waters
Resource Concern Soil Quality Degradation
Organic matter depletion, Cropland/Grassland/Pasture

SSURGO Soils Organic Matter 0.9 or less

2013 NASS Cropland, Grassland & Pasture

Cropland
Grassland/Pasture
Environmental Quality Incentives Program

• Local Work Groups
LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETINGS

• Meetings completed in January/February 2020

• LOCAL WORK GROUP AGENDA ITEMS:
  o Priority Resource Concerns
  o Fund Pool - Ranking Tools – Screening Tools
    • Revised ranking process for FY2020 – CART
  o Practice Payment Schedule
  o Local issues
SUMMARY: Priority Resource Concerns

1) Soil Erosion
2) Water Quality degradation
3) Soil Quality Degradation
4) Insufficient Water
5) Degraded Plants
6) Livestock Production Limitation
7) Fish and Wildlife
8) Excess Water
9) Air Quality
10) Inefficient Energy
Resource Concern Priorities - Statewide Results

- Soil Erosion: 8.57
- Water Quality Degradation: 7.67
- Soil Quality Degradation: 7.29
- Insufficient Water: 6.96
- Degraded Plants: 6.62
- Livestock Production Limitation: 6.17
- Fish & Wildlife: 4.85
- Excess Water: 4.48
- Air Quality: 2.30
- Inefficient Energy: 1.71
- Forestry (only unw reported): 1
FY2020 EQIP State Policy Decisions

- FY2020 LWG/NRCS Recommended and Approved by STC
  - Revised policy on EQIP payments for Eastern Red Cedar
  - End option for irrigated to dry re-enrollment
  - EQIP application cutoff date - TBD
  - Applications ranked/Preapproved - TBD
- Multiple adjustments to practice scenarios and payment rates
  - Integrated Pest Management (595) – Develop new scenario for a non-atrazine alternative for corn to protect surface water quality and assist with managing herbicide resistance
  - Brush Management (314) – Develop “Ultra Low Density” scenario
FY2020 EQIP State Policy Decisions
• FY2020 LWG/NRCS Recommended and approved by STC
• Practice Payment caps
  • Establish $10,000 payment cap for Nutrient Management (590)
  • Establish $80,000 payment cap for Waste Storage Facility (313)
  • Establish $10,000 payment cap for Integrated Pest Mgmt. (595)
• Retain existing payment caps:
  • (340) Cover Crop - $7,500
  • (329) No Till - $5,000
  • (528) Prescribed Grazing, Adaptive Mgmt - $15,000
  • (327) Conservation Cover - $7,500
  • (645) Upland Wildlife Habitat Mgmt. - $7,500
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