Overview
California has the most diverse agriculture in the United States and leads the Nation in production of high value specialty crops. Our farmers also face significant challenges with regulations, pest pressures, pollinator decline, and an unpredictable water supply to irrigate crops.

To improve California’s crop production while protecting natural resources, NRCS offers solutions to improve crop resiliency. Conservationists help farmers to improve soil conditions, reduce wind erosion, save water, and provide habitat for plant pest predators and pollinators.

Typical NRCS Conservation Activities
Cover Crops: Planting a cover crop between crop cycles can increase water infiltration, build soil organic matter, recycle soil nutrients, reduce erosion and soil compaction.

Nutrient Management: Evaluating your farm’s soil fertility and managing crop nutrition through the “4 Rs of Nutrient Stewardship” (the right fertilizer source, at the right rate, at the right time and in the right place) can keep your crops healthy, and combined with irrigation water management it can minimize the loss of nutrients, deep leaching or runoff.

GETTING STARTED...
Go to the Office
We have 54 offices across the state. NRCS will work with you to develop a conservation plan tailored to help you improve conditions on your property. This voluntary plan will be based on your priorities and solid science. The plan may also be the basis to apply for financial assistance.

Financial Assistance
The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program for farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners. EQIP shares with participants the cost of conservation practices (see sidebar on back). The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers additional opportunities for those already meeting a baseline level of stewardship.

Apply
You may apply at any time of the year. Eligible projects will be evaluated, prioritized and selected for funding as budget allocations permit.

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service can help!

Concerned with:
Drought and water conservation? Pollination?
Plant nutrients, soil fertility and soil health? Crop pests?

USDA is an Equal Opportunity Provider, Employer and Lender.
Special Programs for Cropland

NRCS California has different funding programs within EQIP to direct assistance to different initiatives or resource issues farmers face. For example, water conservation funds are targeted to save water through improved irrigation and soil management. Water quality funds are used to reduce water pollution from farms and improve crop production.

Understanding and building good soil structure is important to nourishing, watering and supporting orchards, vines and other specialty crops.

NRCS staff can help you develop resource management alternatives that fit your farming situation and objectives.

Common Conservation Activities

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance for dozens of conservation practices. Listed below are a few of those most commonly used by specialty crop producers.

**CROP RESIDUE AND TILLAGE MANAGEMENT**
Leaving last season’s crop residues on the surface after harvest and adjusting tillage operations to reduce erosion, improve soil health and save fuel.

**HEDGEROW PLANTING**
Establishing a line of dense vegetation to create a living fence, provide wildlife habitat, increase carbon storage, and provide a dust barrier. May act as a habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

**IRRIGATION WATER MANAGEMENT**
Determining and controlling the rate, amount, and timing of irrigation water in a planned and efficient manner to promote the desired crop response while minimizing soil erosion and offsite movement of pollutants, including movement to groundwater.

**NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT**
Managing the amount, form, placement, and timing of nutrient applications for optimum crop/forage yields, while minimizing the loss of nutrients to surface and groundwater, and maintaining or improving the chemical and biological condition of the soil.

**COVER CROP**
Growing grasses, legumes, and forbs for seasonal cover, erosion control, soil quality, nutrient cycling, biodiversity, and weed suppression.

**WIND BREAKS**
Linear plantings of single or multiple rows of trees or shrubs established to reduce wind erosion and protect crops from wind damage.

**MULCHING**
Using ground cover to manage soil moisture, soil temperature, erosion, and weeds. Provides vegetative cover, and improves soil condition.

About NRCS, FSA and RMA

In more than 80 years of assisting farmers, ranchers, and private forestland owners, NRCS has assembled a body of technical standards (such as those in the sidebar at right) to address natural resource concerns. The USDA’s Farm Services Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) provide other critical resources such as farm loans, crop insurance and disaster assistance.

For more information on NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ca/programs/

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