

Virginia NRCS Programs Report (FY21)

NRCS Virginia is currently managing 2,361 active contracts totaling over \$137 million on 513,965 acres through EQIP, CSP and RCPP Programs.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP is our largest funded Farm Bill program and allows NRCS to work one-on-one with farmers to address natural resource concerns like water quality and soil erosion on their farms. In FY2021, Virginia NRCS obligated \$23.8 million in EQIP funds for 393 participants on 53,526 acres.

Contracts by fund pool/initiative:

- 103 livestock - \$12.7 million
- 79 cropland - \$4.60 million
- 38 wildlife - \$973,000
- 69 high tunnels - \$703,000
- 25 golden wing warbler - \$2 million
- 17 aquaculture - \$302,000

Historically Underserved (HU) participants received 48 percent of the funds obligated with 196 contract participants in the following pools: Beginning Farmers (171), Socially Disadvantaged (47), Veterans (10) and Limited Resource (7).

The top conservation practices planned under EQIP in FY2021 were fencing, brush management, heavy use area protection, watering facilities, access control, livestock pipeline, prescribed grazing, pasture and hay planting and cover crop.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP offers agricultural producers and forest landowners an opportunity to earn payments for actively managing and expanding

conservation activities like cover crops and pollinator habitat while maintaining active agricultural production on their land.

Virginia offered 45 percent more funding in FY2021 to help participants build on existing conservation activities with 63,125 acres now enrolled. The agency obligated \$10.6 million for 167 contracts in the following fund pools: CSP Renewals (47), CSP Classic (105) and the CSP Grassland Initiative (15).

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

RCPP harnesses the power of public-private partnerships to coordinate conservation activities that expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed and regional natural resource concerns.

NRCS funded new partnership projects with Trout Unlimited and the Capital Region Land Conservancy that will address wildlife habitat, water quality and farmland preservation concerns in the Shenandoah Valley and the Richmond metropolitan area.

The agency also awarded six contracts for \$445K through two existing RCPP projects and finalized an agreement to renew The Nature Conservancy's Upper Clinch Powell Partnership project (a first for Virginia). Total obligations since 2015 now stand at \$9.1 million for 403 contracts tied to six projects.

Obligations and Payments

Since 2011, Virginia NRCS has obligated more than 8,615 contracts for over \$300.8 million in financial assistance to help farmers implement conservation practices on 1,501,281 acres.



Program Success By the Numbers

- Managing **2,361** active contracts with producers and private landowners
- Enrolled **513,965** acres under EQIP, CSP and RCPP
- Obligated **\$23.8 million** in EQIP funding
- Directed **48 percent** of EQIP funds to Historically Underserved participants
- Enrolled **63,125** acres under CSP
- Obligated **\$9.1 million** for RCPP projects since 2015
- Certified **5,194** contract items
- Made **\$11.2 million** in EQIP, CSP and RCPP payments

The chart at left reflects payments made (light green) and remaining unpaid obligations (dark green).

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

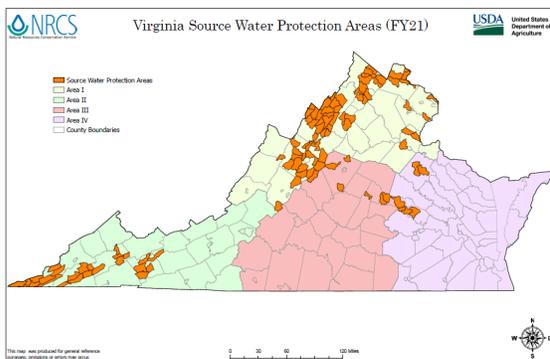
ACEP provides opportunities to protect productive working lands and to restore or enhance wetlands. In FY2021, Virginia NRCS obligated \$1.1 million in ACEP funds for two new Agricultural Land Easements (ALEs) with two partner organizations to permanently protect 839 acres of farmland.

The agency also closed three ALEs on 252 acres in Loudoun and Stafford counties and one 90-acre WRE in Northampton. Ten easements are currently in acquisition and four wetland restorations are underway. Existing recorded easements now total 144 on 16,807 acres of farm and wetland.

Source Water Protection

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized NRCS and its state technical committees to work with community water systems to identify state/local source water protection priorities. A Virginia working group convened the following year designated the towns of Luray and Woodstock as the commonwealth's first Source Water Protection Areas (SWPAs).

In FY2021, the Virginia team coordinated with EPA, the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Drinking Water, Tetra Tech and the Ground Water Protection Council to add 106 Hydrological Units (HUCs) designated in orange below.



This analysis included an assessment of risk factors such as nutrients, sediment and pathogens, karst topography, HUC12 cropland and pasture acres and livestock access to surface water. The group also incorporated comments from local work groups from each area of the state.



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The additional ranking points awarded through this effort led to higher payments for 47 contracts in 28 HUCs. Total EQIP funding of \$2.6 million helped landowners implement water quality practices on 5,073 acres.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

The CIG program enables us to work with public and private partners to evaluate and accelerate adoption of new approaches to natural resource protection. Virginia NRCS is currently managing 12 active CIG projects throughout the state.

In FY2021, the agency awarded a \$300,000 state CIG to Sustainable Chesapeake to demonstrate the effectiveness of pairing Controlled Traffic Farming (CTF) with two companion practices (tramlining and chaff lining) to improve soil health, reduce herbicide-resistant weed pressure and increase overall yields on Virginia grain operations.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

VPA-HIP is designed to improve public access for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation on private lands through leases with willing landowners.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) received a VPA-HIP grant of nearly \$3 million in 2020 to help open more private lands to public access for wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, trapping, fishing, boating and wildlife watching.

To date, Virginia NRCS has assisted DWR with 13 applications for VPA-HIP covering 385 acres in the Coalfields region of Southwest Virginia.

Learn More

For more information on these programs and activities, please contact Patrick Vincent, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, by email at patrick.vincent@usda.gov.

Program Success By the Numbers

- Obligated **\$1.1 million** in ACEP-ALE funds
- Preserved **252** acres of new ALE farmland
- Recorded **90** acres of new WRE land
- Recorded **144** existing easements.
- Protecting **16,807** acres of farm and wetlands through existing recorded easements.
- Acquiring **10** ACEP-ALEs
- Restoring **two** wetlands through WRE
- Identified **106** HUCs for SWPAs
- Managing **12** active CIGs
- Assisted with **13** VPA- HIP applications covering 385 acres

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