What is a resource stewardship plan?

If you’re a farmer or rancher, a resource stewardship plan will provide you with a roadmap to achieve your sustainability goals and provide natural resource benefits from your working agricultural lands.

Your plan, developed using NRCS assessment tools, measures natural resource concerns like soil erosion and carbon sequestration. These tools will evaluate your farm or ranch based on current land assessments and the performance of your management techniques and conservation practices. The plan compares your conservation system against stewardship thresholds for soil, water, air, plant, ecological function and wildlife resources.

NRCS is piloting resource stewardship planning in Alabama, Arizona, California, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Vermont, and Washington as a way to make improvements to the agency’s conservation planning efforts.

NRCS set thresholds to maintain a balance between healthy natural resource conditions and efficient agricultural production. Resource Stewardship includes meeting these thresholds for multiple resource concerns as illustrated by the blue line in Figure 1.

How does it work?

An NRCS planner will help you evaluate your current conservation system against these stewardship thresholds. This will show you how your farm is currently operating, reveal the conservation value of your current efforts, and identify opportunities for greater natural resource benefits.

If needed, a resource stewardship plan will then be created for your operation, including a mix of management techniques and conservation practices that you choose to reach these stewardship thresholds.

Similar to other NRCS conservation plans, the resource stewardship plan is an optional, voluntary conservation plan developed at your request and is protected under federal privacy laws.
How is this different from a regular conservation plan?

While current conservation plans help conserve natural resources, they often center around a single natural resource concern. A resource stewardship plan achieves a stewardship level of conservation that addresses multiple resource concerns.

A cropland resource stewardship plan might look at a field, multiple fields or the whole farm. Grazing land resource stewardship plans look at the whole operation (all fields and pastures).

Looking at the farm as a whole can maximize the opportunity to achieve its full stewardship potential.

- **Resource Health** concentrates on the health of soil and grazing land resources, which includes reducing erosion, increasing soil organic matter, and improving plant health.

- **Water Quality and Quantity** focuses on decreasing nutrient and sediment run-off, reducing pesticide migration and improving water management.

- **Air Quality** emphasizes reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For more information or to get started on your resource stewardship plan, visit your local USDA Service Center or [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

**Benefits**

Resource stewardship planning will enhance conservation planning and education, establish transparent and uniform stewardship metrics, and could provide incentives by recognizing farmers and ranchers who voluntarily meet defined stewardship thresholds.

A resource stewardship plan offers a direct measure of progress for your voluntary, concerted conservation efforts.

By voluntarily adopting a NRCS resource stewardship plan, you can continue to produce high-quality, nutritious and affordable food and fiber products for your community, the nation and the world while protecting natural resources for current and future generations.

For decades, NRCS has focused on conservation planning with farmers. With more than 75 years of experience in conservation, NRCS remains committed to helping landowners conserve natural resources and providing them with the best science and information available.

**Habitat Health** focuses on improving both land and aquatic habitats for wildlife.

A resource stewardship plan directly links the level of conservation applied and conservation benefits. This creates a uniform system of measuring conservation needs and benefits.