2014 FARM BILL: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

What's in it for you?

The 2014 Farm Bill provides America's farmers, ranchers, and non-industrial forest landowners a package of voluntary programs for conserving natural resources. Technical and financial assistance helps agricultural producers implement conservation practices and activities that protect our waters, promote soil health, enhance wildlife habitat, improve air quality, and conserve energy. This guide introduces the conservation assistance available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Farm Bill.

What's new?

- Easement programs are consolidated into a single new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) with separate components for protecting wetlands and agricultural lands.
- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) includes more opportunities for wildlife habitat development and conservation and continues support for organic producers.
- The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) expands enrollment eligibility to Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land that is in the last year of a CRP contract and lands enrolled in ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (formerly Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program); and removes acreage limitations for forest land.
- Local expertise and partner networks extend conservation dollars further through the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
- The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State governments and Indian tribes to increase public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing, or birding.

Your Conservation Plan

The NRCS staff is available to help you define resource concerns on your land and identify assistance opportunities available through Farm Bill programs. NRCS conservation professionals are available in nearly every county across the country and can help you develop a conservation plan based on your natural resource and operation goals. Through the conservation planning process, NRCS staff can identify and explain the Farm Bill programs that best match your natural resource objectives.

Financial Assistance

All programs include Federal funds to assist with the costs associated with conservation activities. This assistance ranges from payments for conservation easements to financial assistance to help participants implement specific conservation practices on the land.

Power of Partnerships

NRCS works with many partners to deliver conservation services and programs, such as local conservation districts, State natural resource and agriculture departments, producer cooperatives, and nongovernmental conservation organizations. These partners provide technical assistance, leverage the Federal investment, and help accelerate getting conservation on the ground.

Conservation programs for your land, watershed, and community

For More Information
Visit www.nrcs.usda.gov,
or find your local USDA Service Center at
http://offices.usda.gov

Curbing erosion

To reduce soil movement and nutrient runoff, and mitigate the effects of erosion from agricultural lands, consider:
- Grassed waterways
- Residue management
- Grassed riparian buffers
- Grade stabilization structures
- Contour buffer strips
- Shelterbelts
- Windbreaks
- Field stripcropping
- Prescribed grazing

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, AMA, CSP

Conserving and improving soil health

To make a positive impact on your soil health, consider:
- Residue management
- Cover crops
- Prescribed grazing
- Nutrient management
- Crop rotations

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, AMA, CSP

Conserving water resources

To protect and improve water quality, consider:
- Nutrient management
- Integrated pest management
- Crop rotation
- Filter strips
- Riparian buffers
- Wetland restoration

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, AMA, CSP, ACEP

Protecting waterways from erosion and degradation

To protect your streams and rivers, as well as wildlife habitat, consider:
- Riparian buffers
- Filter strips
- Stream crossings
- Stream bank stabilization/ Shoreline protection
- Wetland restoration, creation and protection

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, AMA, CSP, ACEP

Managing manure

To maximize crop production, prevent nutrient loss and protect natural resources and water quality, consider:
- Waste storage structures and lagoons
- Nutrient management
- Compost facilities
- Waste treatment
- Prescribed grazing

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP

Managing grazing lands

To improve forage quality, control invasive species, and conserve habitat, consider:
- Prescribed grazing
- Pest management
- Prescribed burning
- Watering facilities
- Brush management

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, CSP, CRP, ACEP

Establishing wildlife habitat

To enhance, restore, manage, and protect fish and wildlife habitat, consider:
- Upland/Wetland habitat management
- Wetland creation and restoration
- Forest stand improvement
- Stream habitat improvement
- Prescribed grazing
- Tree/Shrub establishment

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, ACEP, CSP, HFRP

Managing forest lands

To restore and protect forest resources and improve habitat, consider:
- Tree planting
- Forest stand improvement, thinning
- Prescribed burning
- Tree/Shrub establishment

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, HFRP, CSP

Improving air quality and conserving energy

To improve air quality and conserve energy, consider:
- Residue management
- Dust control
- Cover crops
- Conservation buffers
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt planting
- Tree planting
- Energy audits

Consider these programs for assistance:
EQIP, AMA, CSP

What USDA Offers

Program	Eligible Land	Length of Agreement/Contract	Payments	Easements	Producer Responsibilities	What's New?
Financial Assistance						
Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program	Private or tribal agricultural land including cropland, hayland, pastureland, rangeland, grassland, and non-industrial private forest land. Limited to 16 States.	Up to 10 years	Payments support conservation that helps manage risk and address natural resource concerns.		Develop and follow an AMA plan of operations that describes the conservation and environmental objectives. Contribute to installation costs.	
Conservation Stewardship Program	Private or tribal agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. Does not include land enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Easement component of ACEP or the Conservation Security Program.	5 years	Annual payments are based on the level of conservation stewardship. A supplemental payment is available for participants who adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation.		Implement a conservation stewardship plan that addresses resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by installing and adopting additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities.	Raises eligibility requirements to at least two priority resource concerns. Forestland cap removed. CRP land may be enrolled in last year of CRP contract. Additional term for renewal if threshold for two additional priority resource concerns met or two existing priority resource concerns exceeded by end of contract.
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Private, public, and tribal land in agricultural production including cropland, grassland, and non-industrial private forestland. Does not include land enrolled in CRP or WRE component of ACEP.	Up to 10 years	Payments for undertaking new conservation management systems or to cover a portion of the cost of installing specific conservation practices.		Develop and follow EQIP plan of operations. Incur installation and maintenance costs. Additional requirements for animal feeding operations and forestland contracts.	Incorporated the objectives of the former Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.
Easements						
		AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENT COMPONENT				
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) NEW!	Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) must be on private and tribal land in agricultural production including cropland, grassland, and non-industrial private forestland. Wetland reserve easements (WRE) must be farmed wetlands or wetlands converted prior to December 23, 1985, and adjacent lands that maximize wildlife benefits.	Permanent or the maximum duration authorized by State law.	Payments to assist the eligible entity to purchase the ALE. Eligible entities remain responsible for other costs associated with easement purchase, including survey and closing costs.	Available to eligible entities. The Federal share is up to 50% of fair market value or up to 75% in cases of special environmental significance.	ALE cooperating entities must provide a share equal to NRCS contribution. Qualified charitable donations from the landowner are allowed to provide up to 50% of that requirement. Develop and implement an ALE easement plan for ALE enrollment.	Reduces length of prior land ownership for WRE eligibility. Authority for easement subordination, modification, exchange, and termination.
		WETLANDS				
		Permanent, 30-year or the maximum authorized by State law. 30-year contracts only on acreage owned by an Indian tribe.	Payments for easement purchase and restoration costs. Up to 100% of permanent easement value; up to 75% for 30-year easements/contracts/State-maximum duration easements. Also, payments for up to 100% of restoration costs for permanent easements; up to 75% for restoration costs of 30-year easements/contracts.	Easement compensation based upon the lowest of an appraisal or area-wide market analysis, a geographic area rate cap or a landowner offer.	Comply with a wetlands reserve easement plan that provides for the restoration and maintenance of the wetland. Contribute to restoration costs for 30-year easements and contracts, and State-maximum duration easements.	
Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)	Forestland capable of supporting habitat for a selected wildlife species.	10-year restoration agreements, 30-year contracts, and 30-year or permanent easements.	Payments for both easement purchase and restoration costs. Up to 100% of value for permanent easements and up to 75% of value for 30-year easements/contracts. Restoration costs - up to 100% for permanent easements, up to 75% for 30-year easements/contracts, and up to 50% for 10-year restoration agreements.	One-time, up-front payment or up to 10 annual payments for either easement option or 30-year contract.	Develop and implement HFRP restoration plan that promotes restoration, protection, enhancement and maintenance of forestland, aiding the recovery of endangered and threatened species, improving plant and animal biodiversity and enhancing carbon sequestration.	Funding is discretionary and will be decided on an annual basis. Expanded land eligibility to Indian trust lands.
Partnerships						
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) NEW!	Eligibility rules for CSP, EQIP, HFRP and ACEP apply.	Partner agreements up to 5 years; possible 12-month extension.	There are three funding pools: State, National, and Critical Conservation Areas. Funding for projects through CSP, EQIP, HFRP, and ACEP through selected partner proposals.		Partners conduct outreach and may act on behalf of eligible producers in applying for and leveraging financial or technical assistance and assess project's effects.	Combines former partnership programs - Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, and Great Lakes Basin Program.

All programs are subject to final USDA regulations. *Historically underserved participants may be eligible for increased payment rates up to 90%; EQIP offers up to 30%.

FAQ

frequentlyaskedquestions

When can I apply and how will my conservation program application be evaluated?

Most conservation program applications are accepted on a continual basis, with specific cutoff dates for NRCS to rank and make funding decisions. All applications received in your area will be ranked following specific criteria for your location. Working with a local NRCS staff member, you can develop a conservation plan that provides alternatives for natural resource treatments relevant to the application ranking considerations in your area. You can select the level of treatment that best meets your individual needs, while improving your chances of being selected for funding.

If I enroll land in a conservation program, do I maintain ownership? Am I required to allow public access to my land?

Yes, you retain ownership of your land, and you are not required to allow public access to your land. The only exception is the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, which provides grants to States and Indian tribes to compensate landowners who allow the public to access their land for recreational uses.

What types of wildlife habitat can I develop on my land?

Practices and activities can be designed and managed to create habitat for specific species, such as turkey, quail, pheasants, songbirds, pollinators, bats, and other wildlife species. Applications that address habitat needs for threatened, endangered, or other species of concern may be given priority.

I don't own the land I farm but would like to apply for conservation assistance. Can I still get help?

Yes. Visit your local USDA Service Center, and our "5 Steps to Assistance" on the website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.

Are there other NRCS Farm Bill Conservation Programs that don't fall under the categories of Financial Assistance, Easements or Partnerships listed on the chart?

Yes. Other Farm Bill programs include: Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP); Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program (ACES); Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG); and Technical Service Providers (TSP).

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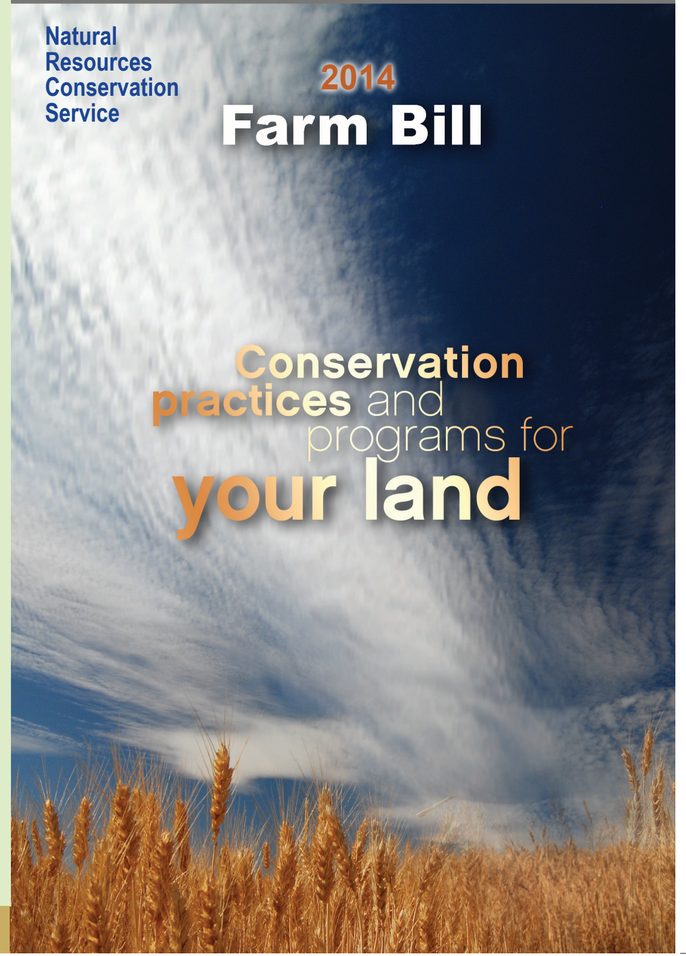
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