



United States Department of Agriculture

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

DELAWARE

2014

Accomplishments Report



Helping People Help the Land

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State Conservationist's Message

Fellow Conservationists and Friends,

I am proud to present the 2014 Accomplishments Report for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Delaware. This was another remarkable but challenging year of conservation for us as we began the meticulous process of administering conservation programs within the new 2014 Farm Bill. Remarkable because we were able to demonstrate the strength and cohesiveness of our technical leadership through our employees and partners as we addressed the comprehensive resource needs of our agricultural customers.

However, it was also a challenging year for us as we experienced the government shutdown in the beginning of fiscal year 2014, the adoption of new planning tools, and budget sequestration. But, I am pleased to say our staff worked through them to help customers apply sound conservation measures.

As we move into 2015, we recognize that we cannot be fully successful without first understanding and addressing the natural resource conservation priorities and concerns of our partners, customers and the state. This is why my priorities for the upcoming year include: Soil Health, Resource Assessment and Conservation Planning, Long Term Planning and Employee Development.

Soil Health management is a key to the long-term production and sustainability of our farmers' working lands. Without the proper care of soil, farmers would not be able to efficiently produce the crops that provide food and nutrients to all.

Resource Assessment is critical because accurate soils information is the foundation on which NRCS bases their resource initiatives. **Conservation Planning** is arguably the most important piece to a successful agricultural operation of any kind. Our technical experts work with landowners to identify problems and opportunities, determine objectives, analyze resource data, and then formulate and evaluate alternatives to achieve their desired goals.

Long-Term Planning will allow us to ensure that we are effectively helping farmers address their conservation goals not only today and in the near future, but over the long-haul. I want to ensure that we stay connected to farming changes into the future.

Employee Development is needed to meet the complexities that arise with technology advancements to keep our technical leadership strong. This ensures we continue being a subject-matter expert for our customers in technical assistance and resource planning.

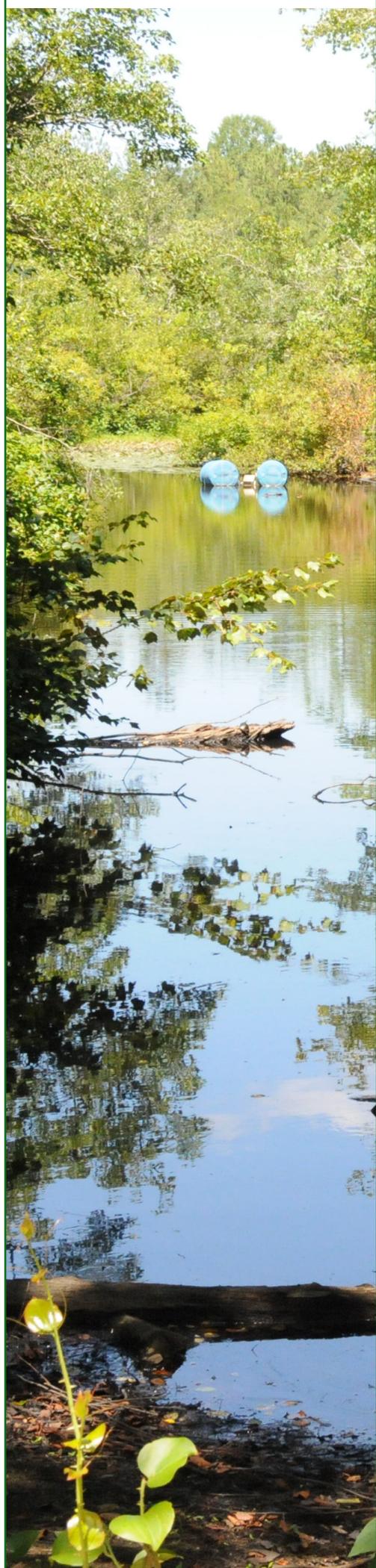
I encourage you to review this report to gain a better insight of the delivery of technical and financial assistance of our programs and services and its beneficial gain to all Delawareans.

Yours in conservation,

Kasey Taylor, Delaware State Conservationist

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Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits.

Under the **Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP - ALE)** component, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land.

The program was established by the Agricultural Act of 2014, commonly known as the 2014 Farm Bill. NRCS partners with approved state or local units of government, and certain nongovernmental organizations who arrange for the purchase of development rights through conservation easements on private lands. The entity holds and manages these conservation easements in perpetuity.

NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement on approved parcels. All parcels are ranked individually on their own merit. Funds will be awarded to the highest ranked eligible parcels through a statewide competitive process. Entities must bear the cost of appraisals, surveys when needed, title search, legal and closing costs, and monitoring and enforcement of the easement.

2014 Accomplishments **

In Fiscal Year 2014, ACEP-ALE funds totaling \$3.2 million dollars, were awarded to New Castle County, Delaware to assist in purchasing conservation easements on two farms.

Under the **Wetlands Reserve Easements (ACEP - WRE)** component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands. Through the wetlands reserve enrollment options, NRCS may enroll eligible land through:

Permanent Easements – Permanent easements are conservation easements in perpetuity. NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement. Additionally, NRCS pays between 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs.

30-year Easements – 30-year easements expire after 30 years. Under 30-year easements, NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement. Additionally, NRCS pays between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

Term Easements - Term easements are easements that are for the maximum duration allowed under applicable State laws. NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the term easement. Additionally, NRCS pays between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

2014 Accomplishments **

In Fiscal Year 2014 NRCS funded two ACEP-WRE applications totaling \$200,000 on 80 acres.

(** See page 9)



Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) provides financial and technical assistance to farmers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations.

Farmers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices (including soil erosion control, integrated pest management or transition to organic farming).

Historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged producers) may be eligible for a higher practice payment rate for the implementation of conservation practices and conservation

plans.

AMA is available in 16 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

2014 Accomplishments *

Delaware received eight AMA applications in 2014. Delaware approved one contract covering 25 acres for a financial assistance total of \$13, 288. The one approved contract was entered into by a beginning farmer.

(*See page 9)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities, and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems. CSP participants are maintaining and enhancing the treatment of soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plants, animals and energy. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, improved pasture land and nonindustrial private forestland.

CSP is available to all producers nationwide, regardless of operation size or crops produced. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis with announced ranking cut-off dates when the ranking and funding of applications on file will occur. Applications need to include the applicant's entire operation and are evaluated and ranked relative to other applications that address similar resource concerns in Delaware. In the ranking

process, applicants receive credit for both--conservation measures they have already implemented and for new measures they agree to add. The applications addressing the most resource concerns to the highest degree will receive the highest rankings.

2014 Accomplishments *

In FY 2014, Delaware NRCS provided \$152, 247 in financial assistance through 14 new contracts during the 2014 sign-up period. Overall, DE NRCS currently is providing technical and financial assistance through 75 active CSP contracts on 57,365 acres totaling \$1.75 million annually.

(Note: CSP payments are administered on an annual basis.)

(* See page 9)



Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program provides technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. The CTA program provides the technical capability, including **conservation planning**, design and implementation assistance, that helps people plan and apply conservation on the land. This assistance is provided to individuals, groups and communities who make natural resource management decisions on private, tribal and other non-federal lands.

NRCS, through the CTA Program, provides conservation technical assistance that addresses natural resource conservation issues at the local level that are of State and national concern.

The CTA Program provides the local delivery system and the foundational technical expertise for other NRCS programs. The CTA Program is unique because it provides a substantive level of technical expertise, background and support for Federal, State and local conservation programs. The working relationships that landowners and communities have with their local NRCS staff are unique. One-on-one help through flexible, voluntary programs occurs every day in local NRCS offices. It is the way that NRCS does business and it works.

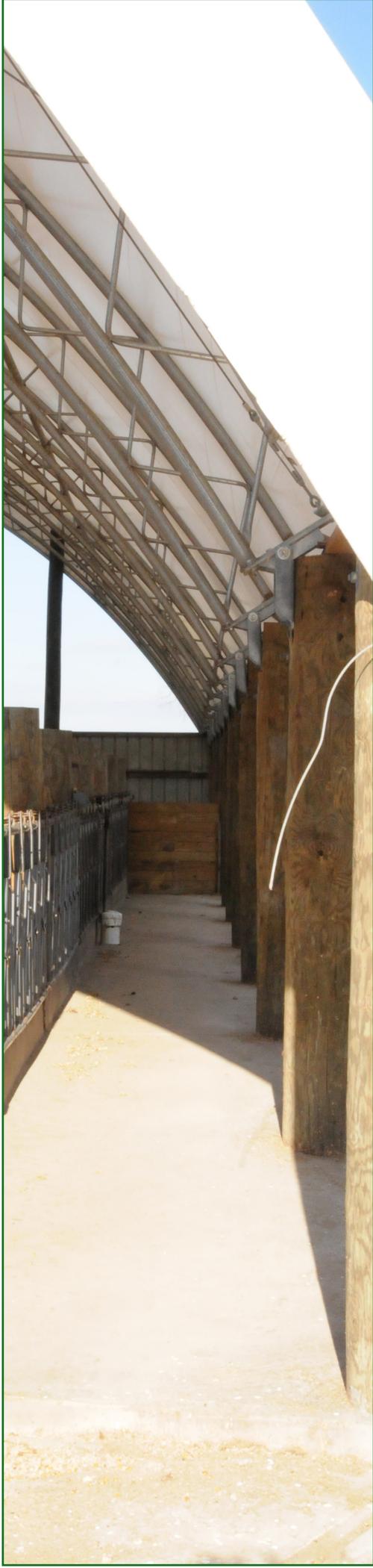
What Exactly is Conservation Planning?

Conservation planning is a process from which conservation plans are developed by first understanding the resource needs and the landowner's desired land use goals. Based on sound scientific practices, NRCS provides hands-on assistance to help the landowner develop a conservation plan.

The benefits for the producer to develop a conservation plan are many. Conservation plans provide a strategic guide for reaching land-use and natural resource goals and provide a complete assessment/inventory of a landowner's resources. Implemented conservation plans can have a positive impact on the bottom line and improve the condition of their natural resources.



The technically sound experts of NRCS bring their expertise to the table to help farmers reach their operational and environmental goals.



Engineering

The Delaware NRCS Engineering Staff provides sound technical leadership and principles to producers and customers to implement conservation systems and practices on the land. Assistance is provided through evaluation, survey, design, and construction layout and supervision of practices implemented to address natural resource concerns.

Quality assurance is an important role of the Delaware Engineering team. Engineering oversight of projects implemented through public funding assures they meet NRCS Standards and Specifications and function properly to solve the resource concern as intended.

The engineering team is also responsible for training field staff as new technology emerges, new conservation practices are introduced, or as new employees are hired. Advances in survey equipment, computer-aided design and drafting, and engineering software require that

the staff master this technology and be able to train field personnel so they can most efficiently implement conservation programs.

All of the implementation accomplishments included in this report have, in some way, been assisted by the Delaware NRCS Engineering Team. One such example is the development of consistent standards. Standards are provided for many practices such as Irrigation Water Management and Sprinkler Systems. Engineers review and approve the designs so that more efficient systems may be installed resulting in water savings and improved crop use. Another example is the design of structures for waste management systems which allow livestock producers to maximize nutrient use and improve water quality downstream.

The engineering staff helps get the conservation on the ground.



Structural practices, such as this sprinkler system, require the development of an engineering Standard and Design prior to being approved for use on any agricultural operation.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through contracts up to a maximum term of ten years in length. These contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. In addition, a purpose of EQIP is to help producers meet Federal, State, Tribal and local environmental regulations.

EQIP provides financial assistance payments to eligible producers based on a portion of the average cost associated with practice implementation. Additional payments may be available to help producers develop conservation plans which are required to obtain financial assistance.

Historically underserved (HU) producers (limited resource farmers, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged producers, Veterans) may be eligible for a higher practice payment rate for the implementation of conservation practices and conservation plans. HU producers may also be eligible for advance payments up to 50 percent of the cost needed to purchase materials or contracting services to begin installation of approved conservation practices.

Producers may use a certified Technical Service Provider (TSP) for technical assistance needed for certain eligible activities, services and the development of conservation plans.

Delaware's EQIP incorporates environmental priorities as identified at the state level (State Technical Committee) and local levels (Local Work

Groups) into the selection of what specific program options will be offered, and what factors, questions and screening tools will be used in the application ranking process. Ranking worksheets for each program option include evaluation questions that reflect national, state and local priorities.

2014 Accomplishments *

Delaware received 459 EQIP applications in 2014.

Delaware approved 224 contracts covering 22,020 acres for a total financial assistance of \$6,046,088. Included in these numbers are 75 approved contracts covering 1,174 acres assisting beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers with financial assistance totaling \$3,049,079.

EQIP funding options:

- Beginning Farmers
- Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)
- Energy Initiative
- Limited Resource Farmers
- National Water Quality Initiative
- Organic Initiative
- Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative
- Socially Disadvantaged Producers
- Veterans

Top Practices:

- Heavy Use Area Pads
- Waste Storage Structures
- Energy
- Irrigation (Water Management)
- Cover Crops

(*See page 9)



Soil Sciences

The main goal of the soils staff in Delaware is to provide scientifically defensible and timely delivery of technical soil information to internal and external partners to meet their ever changing resource challenges. As everyone knows, accurate soils information is the foundation on which NRCS and most of our partners base their resource initiatives on.

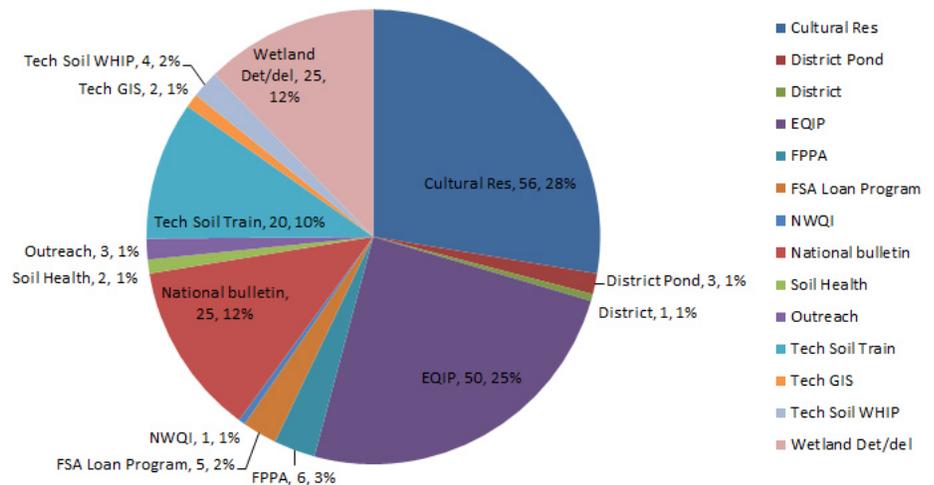
Although soil mapping is no longer a principal workload in Delaware, the soils staff maintains an intermit relationship with the Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) office in Morgantown WV and Raleigh NC. The staff provides critical insight into the correlation, classification and interpretation of our soils for national initiatives.

Soils information for the whole state is currently available online through Web Soil Survey, Geo-Spatial Data Gateway and the eFOTG (electronic Field Office

Technical Guide). This year, all three counties were refreshed and made available through our web delivery systems. New to this most recent statewide download are interpretations that are based on “national” calculations. They have been developed to provide uniformity and consistency in the population of various soil factors and to assist soil survey staff in efficient population of the soils database. Values for K-factor; T-factor; Wind Erodibility Group (WEG) and Index (I-factor); Hydrologic Soil Group (HSG); Steel Corrosion; and Concrete Corrosion have all been calculated.

The aforementioned tasks are typical duties carried out by the soils staff in most states. However, NRCS in Delaware is not typical in that we have a small staff, and must leverage our expertise in other areas, resulting in atypical collateral duties making up a large portion of our workload.

2014 Workload Distribution -Soils, GIS and Other



Detailed Key Explanations:

Cultural Res-Cultural Resources

District Support- Soil conservation district assistance

EQIP- Environmental Quality Incentives Program

FPPA - Farmland Protection Policy Act

National Bulletin -Addressing national mandates/instructions

Soil Health- National NRCS Initiative

Outreach -Outreach specific to soils, GIS or related activities

Tech Soils Support- Soils training/GIS/Wetland/HEL

Wetland Det/del - Conservation Technical Assistance wetland delineation

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Note:

* All data marked with this symbol has been pulled by NRCS' program specialists through the Program Contracts System, known as ProTracts. This web-based system is used to manage program data for AMA, CSP and EQIP.

** All data marked with this symbol has been pulled by NRCS' program specialists through the National Easement Staging Tool (NEST). This web-based system is used to manage program data for NRCS' easement programs including ACEP-ALE and ACEP-WRE.

