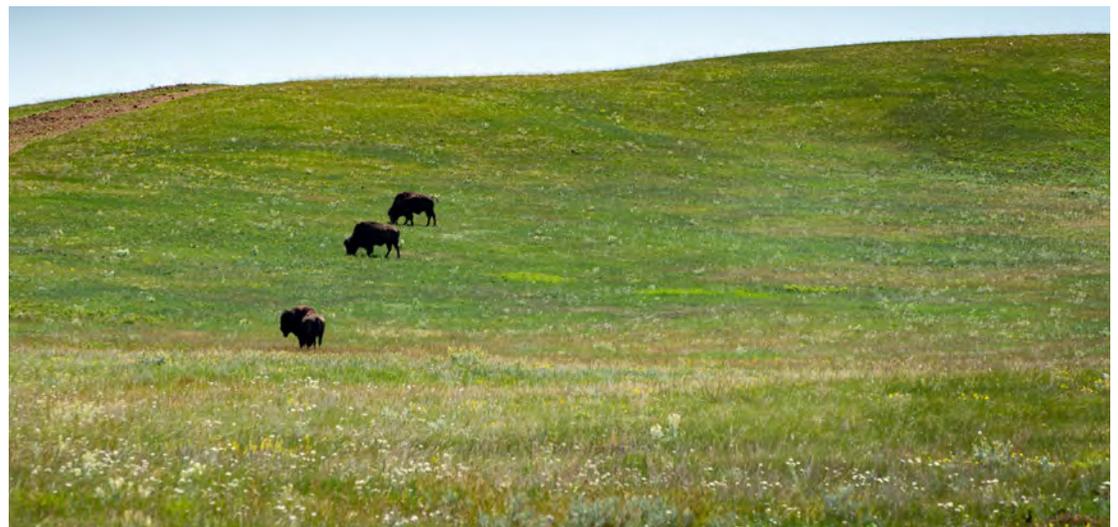
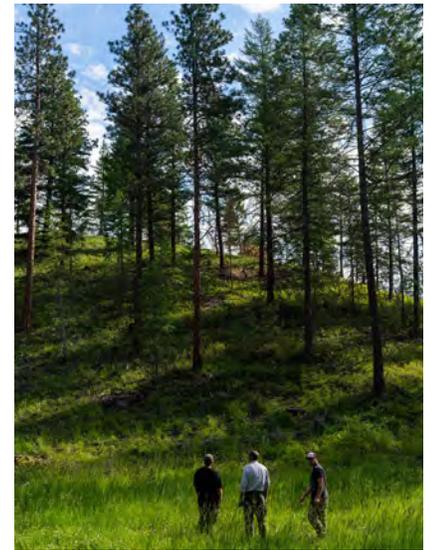




# Getting Started with NRCS: the Basics



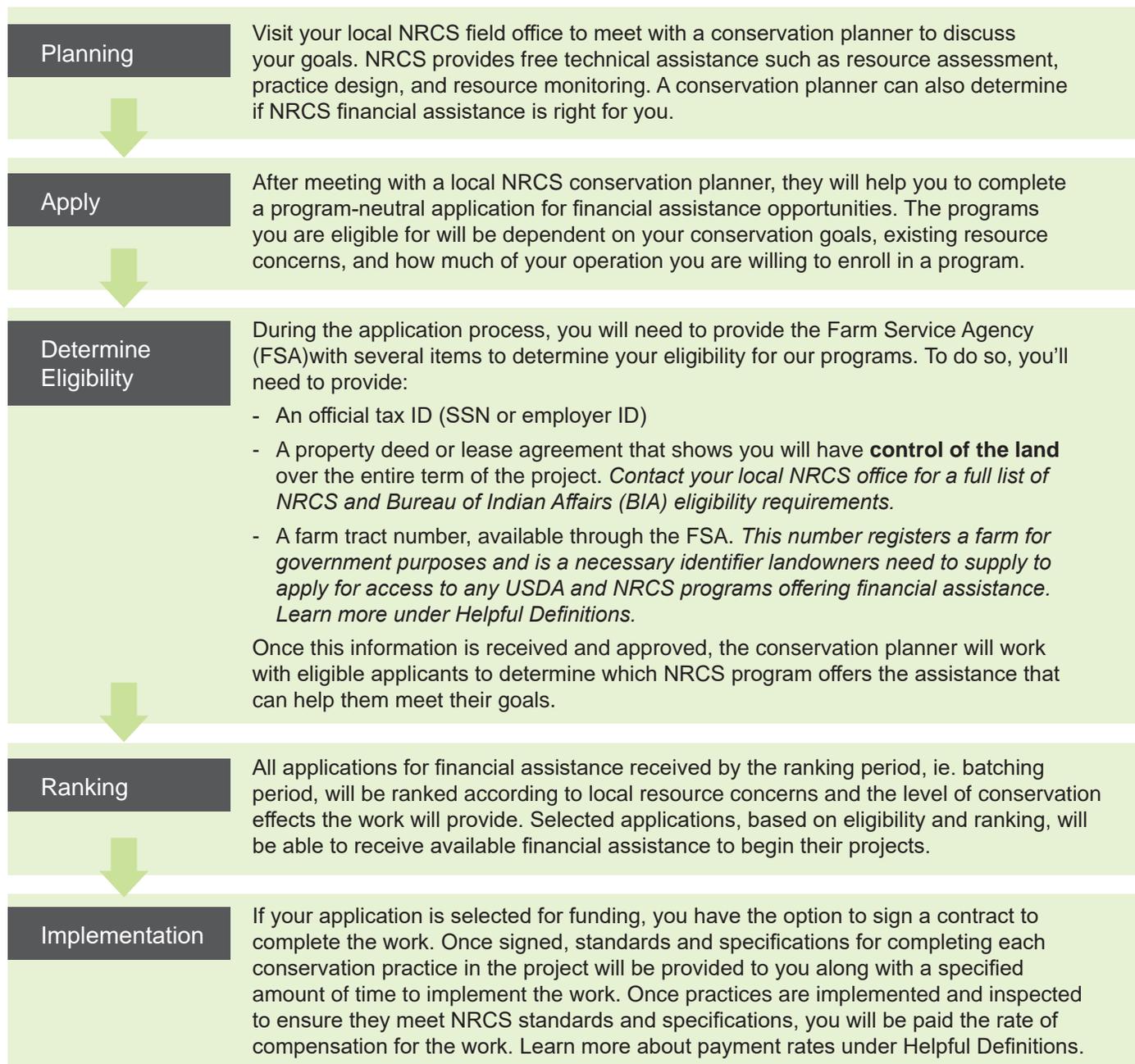
Montana

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

[nrcs.usda.gov/](https://nrcs.usda.gov/)

**What is the NRCS?** The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency within the Department of Agriculture (USDA) that helps our nation's farmers, ranchers and forestland owners protect and improve natural resources on their private working lands. NRCS *helps people help the land* by providing land managers with technical and financial assistance to address resource concerns related to water quality, grazing land health, soil erosion, wildlife habitat and forest health on their land through voluntary implementation of conservation practices.

## Steps to Assistance



**NRCS has a field office in nearly every county in the state and on every reservation. Contact your local NRCS office for more specific information on our technical assistance, programs and requirements. Visit [farmers.gov/contact](https://farmers.gov/contact) to find out where your nearest service center is located and their phone number.**



**Who Qualifies for Our Programs?** The USDA has a strong commitment to equity in our programs for producers across the state. The NRCS offers a variety of program incentives specifically available for Montana’s “Historically Underserved” producers including higher payment rates, targeted funds, and an advanced payment option. These program provisions seek to address and assist with challenges arising from the unique circumstances and concerns of socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers - parties all encompassed under the category of Historically Underserved (HU). **Read below for descriptions of who qualifies under these producer categories:**

**SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED**

The term “Socially Disadvantaged” means an individual or entity who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group, whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. For an entity, at least 50 percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals.

**These groups consist of the following:**

- American Indians or Alaskan Natives
- Asians
- Blacks or African Americans
- Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
- Hispanics

**BEGINNING FARMER OR RANCHER**

The term “Beginning Farmer or Rancher” means any participant (a person, Indian Tribe, Tribal corporation, or legal entity) who:

- Has not operated a farm, ranch, or NIPF, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. *This requirement applies to all members of a legal entity.*
- and-
- Who will materially and substantially participate in the day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch consistent with the practices in the county or state where the farm is located.

**LIMITED RESOURCE FARMER OR RANCHER**

The term “Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher” means a participant:

- With direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years
- and-
- Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.

**VETERAN FARMERS**

The term “Veteran Farmer or Rancher” means a producer who served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve component thereof; was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable

- and-
- has not operated a farm or ranch or has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 years total.
- or, who first obtained status as a veteran during the most recent 10-year period.
- \* A legal entity or joint operation can be a Veteran Farmer or Rancher only if all individual members independently qualify.

**What is financial assistance?** The NRCS offers a variety of financial assistance opportunities through several program options. Financial assistance can cover part of the costs to plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns or opportunities to help save energy, improve soil, water, plant, air, animal and related resources on agricultural lands and non-industrial private forest land. To see a full list of eligible practices for Montana, visit the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) website at [efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov](http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov) > Montana > Section 4 or ask your local NRCS conservationist for a full list.

**What is technical assistance?** The NRCS provides landowners with the knowledge and tools you need to conserve, maintain, and restore the natural resources on your lands and improve the health of your operations for the future. NRCS offers this assistance at no cost. Our goal is to give our customers personalized advice and information, based on the latest science and research, to help you make informed decisions. If you choose to take the next step towards improving your operation, NRCS can work with you to develop a conservation plan, with suggested conservation practices that can help you reach your production and conservation goals.

## Additional Helpful Definitions:

**Resource Concern** - A natural resource concern or problem that— (A) is identified at the national, state, or local level as a priority for a particular area of a state; and (B) represents a significant concern in a state or region. Any condition of the soil, water, air, plant, animal, or energy resource base that does not meet minimum acceptable standards established by NRCS and impairs the sustainability or intended use of the resource is considered a resource concern.

**Farm Tract Number** - A farm tract number is a way you identify yourself as a farmer for government purposes, and how USDA identifies your farm for all our programs, including NRCS programs. The farm tract number is associated with the land, not the farmer. Similarly, the history of production remains connected to the farm number. So, if you decide to sell the land, the farm number and production history remain part of the value of the land. It is important to register your farm with the USDA to apply for FSA farm loans, disaster assistance, crop insurance and all NRCS assistance programs. With a farm number, your farm will also be counted in the Agricultural Census and makes you eligible to elect FSA County Committee members, which can help prioritize programs and bring more financial and technical resources to support farms in your area.

**To obtain your farm tract number, make an appointment at your local FSA office. Find contact information at [farmers.gov/contact](http://farmers.gov/contact).**

**Conservation Plan** - a management tool that is created by the NRCS conservation planner and you – the customer. A conservation plan identifies your conservation objectives and assesses and analyzes current natural resource issues related to soil, water, plants, air, energy, animal, and human interaction, as well as the opportunities on your land. The plan determines conservation practices designed to address management objectives and concerns, offers alternatives, documents all decisions, outlines a schedule for applying those systems, records progress and successful completion of conservation practices and systems, and provides guidance and direction for continued maintenance of implemented conservation systems.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider,  
employer, and lender.

**Payment Rate** - Each year, NRCS re-evaluates the amount of financial assistance available for each practice in each state. These evaluations consider the current costs for materials and labor within the state, and the fair marketplace compensation for opportunity costs that may arise (e.g., conversion of productive land). If necessary, the amount of financial assistance is adjusted to keep pace with actual costs.

**To find the current fiscal year's payment schedule for each program in Montana, visit [www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov) > [Programs](#) or talk to your local NRCS conservationist.**

**Advanced Payment Option** - HU participants may elect to receive an advance payment for a portion of the anticipated costs associated with purchasing materials or services to implement a conservation practice. Please note, an advance payment may only be made if authorized by program authority. Talk to your local NRCS conservationist to discuss opportunities to qualify for advanced payments.

**Payment Schedule** - Each fiscal year, NRCS releases an updated listing of all eligible practice and/or activity payment rates for our conservation programs in Montana.

**Visit [www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov) > [Programs](#) to download the current payment schedule for each NRCS program or reach out to your local NRCS conservationist.**

