For more than 80 years, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has worked with farmers and landowners to help them manage natural resource concerns on their land and improve the health of their communities. Despite the multitude of challenges 2020 presented, that work continued thanks to the extraordinary effort of our statewide staff. Even as our workforce was forced to work remotely for most of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they continued to impact and help farmers and landowners throughout the state of Indiana. More than 1,000 contracts were signed for our technical and financial assistance programs putting more than $40 million of assistance into Indiana in order to protect and improve our soil, water, forestry, energy and wildlife resources. I am pleased to provide this report of Indiana NRCS’ investments and successes in fiscal year 2020 to highlight what can be accomplished no matter the circumstances.

- Jerry Raynor, State Conservationist

AT A GLANCE:
Investments on Private Lands

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- Wetland Reserve Easements
  - Contracts: 21
  - Acres: 2,231
  - Dollars: $9,762,353

Conservation Stewardship Program

- Contracts: 122
- Acres: 74,117
- Dollars: $8,145,884

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- Contracts: 958
- Acres: 146,607
- Dollars: $25,476,808

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- Contracts: 42
- Acres: 5,531
- Dollars: $609,435
FINANCIAL & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS PROGRAM (ACEP)

Wetland Reserve Easements
- New Applications: 21 applications for 2,231 acres
- Closed Easements: 17 closed easements
- Restoration Completed: 24 easements
- Compatible Use Authorizations: 57 approved
- Onsite Monitoring Reviews: 149 easements
- Offsite Monitoring Reviews: 727 easements

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

- Ag Land Renewals: $750,605 for 6,122 acres, 9 contracts
- Beginning Farmer: $509,686 for 2,406 acres, 9 contracts
- General: $5.8 million for 62,280 acres, 45 contracts
- NIPF* Beginning Farmer: $53,984 for 172 acres, 2 contracts
- NIPF* General: $968,580 for 2,584 acres, 36 contracts
- NIPF* Renewal: $25,131 for 162 acres, 2 contracts
- Grassland Conservation: $35,255 for 391 acres, 19 contracts

TOTAL CSP: $8.1 million for 74,117 acres, 122 contracts

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

- Beginning Farmer: $1.4 million for 2,810 acres, 43 contracts
- Disaster Recovery: $1,199 for 1 acre, 1 contract
- Great Lakes Restoration: $359,733 for 5,116 acres, 27 contracts
- Limited Resource: $66,239 for 266 acres, 9 contracts
- Locally Led/Planning: $19.9 million for 125,880 acres, 681 contacts
- Mississippi River Basin: $5,529 for 107 acres, 2 contracts
- Monarch Butterfly: $106,867 for 85 acres, 10 contracts
- National Water Quality: $602,251 for 4,268 acres, 12 contracts
- On-Farm Energy: $54,155 for 208 acres, 7 contracts
- Organic: $193,961 for 1,831 acres, 9 contracts
- Socially Disadvantaged: $131,142 for 167 acres, 4 contract
- Specialty Crop: $295,213 for 207 acres, 34 contracts
- Western Lake Erie Basin: $715,747 for 3,548 acres, 23 contracts
- Wildlife: $1.6 million for 2,113 acres, 96 contacts

TOTAL EQIP: $25.4 million for 146,607 acres, 958 contracts

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

- Big Pine Watershed: $81,358 for 767 acres, 11 contracts
- Grasslands for Game/Songbirds: $21,727 for 105 acres, 2 contracts
- WLEB Phosphorus Reduction: $167,919 for 2,445 acres, 14 contracts
- Soil Health on Reclaimed Mineland: $131,205 for 1,641 acres, 9 contracts
- Southern Indiana Young Forest: $207,226 for 573 acres, 6 contracts

TOTAL RCPP: $609,435 for 5,530 acres, 42 contracts

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

- Funding obligated to Agreements: $2.9 million
- Number of Agreements: 27
- Total Plans developed for new contracts: 1,215
- Engineering Designs Completed: 1,273

Helping People Help the Land.
After retiring from the Army in 2012, Tim Adams and his wife Sandy returned to their 80-acre plot of land in Martinsville, Indiana to settle down. His more than 30-year Army career had taken them throughout the world before he retired as a brigadier general. But the plan had always been to return to Indiana at the end.

For Adams though, the land is more than a home. It is his heritage that he feels compelled to be a good steward of and protect.

Adams' great-great-grandfather settled in what is now Green Township and in 1875 he bought an 80-acre tract of land there. Three years later he bought another 80 acres on the other side of the road. That second track, which has been continuously in the family ever since, is where Adams now lives making it 142 years his family has lived and worked on the tract.

As a young Army major in the early 1990s, Adams worked out a deal with his grandmother to buy the 80 acres still owned by the family in three segments.

After buying the acres, Adams brought in a forester to see what needed to be done and held a timber harvest of mostly walnut. Once he retired from the Army, Adams again asked a forester to check out the woods. This time, the recommendation wasn’t just about harvesting timber but doing a full management of the forest including removing invasive species, opening clearings for wildlife and cutting back the grapevines that were strangling the trees.

The invasive Asian honeysuckle that once covered the forest floor and strangled out the native species is mostly gone. He also had a timber stand improvement harvest in 2018 which created openings for turkeys, songbirds and bats to flourish in. The open areas will now allow hardwoods such as oak and hickory to take root and replenish the woods.

“It’s not like the good Lord is going to make more land. It is important that we leave our land better than we found it so that our kids and grandchildren have a valuable resource.”

"STEWARD OF THE LAND"

Adams’ great-great-grandfather settled in what is now Green Township and in 1875 he bought an 80-acre tract of land there. Three years later he bought another 80 acres on the other side of the road. That second track, which has been continuously in the family ever since, is where Adams now lives making it 142 years his family has lived and worked on the tract.

As a young Army major in the early 1990s, Adams worked out a deal with his grandmother to buy the 80 acres still owned by the family in three segments.

After buying the acres, Adams brought in a forester to see what needed to be done and held a timber harvest of mostly walnut. Once he retired from the Army, Adams again asked a forester to check out the woods. This time, the recommendation wasn’t just about harvesting timber but doing a full management of the forest including removing invasive species, opening clearings for wildlife and cutting back the grapevines that were strangling the trees.

The forester recommended Adams contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to get help managing the woods. By working with NRCS, Adams was able to enroll in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to receive financial and technical assistance for managing his forests. From 2017-19 the program reimbursed Adams’ costs as he hired a forester to manage the woods.

The invasive Asian honeysuckle that once covered the forest floor and strangled out the native species is mostly gone. He also had a timber stand improvement harvest in 2018 which created openings for turkeys, songbirds and bats to flourish in. The open areas will now allow hardwoods such as oak and hickory to take root and replenish the woods.
Tending to his 20,000 turkeys spread throughout three houses is a seven day a week job for Kenny Lecocq, as it has been for the past 24 years.

It started as a second job, but after retiring from his toolmaker position, Lecocq, whose farm is in Pike County, Indiana, switched to turkey farming full-time and grew his operation from 12,500 brooding turkeys to 20,000 birds per flock in the finishing stage of their development. A calendar year will see him raise about three and a half flocks of turkeys, raising them from just under 6-weeks-old to about 20-weeks-old. His son Dewayne has joined the business too, raising 6,500 brooding turkeys per flock in the first stages of their life. His cycle is shorter, so he goes through four flocks a year.

As the two operations grew and more than 100,000 birds started coming through the farm each year, waste storage became an issue for the Lecocs. The cycle of their flocks required that some of the turkey houses had to be cleaned out during the winter when it wasn’t possible to immediately turn the manure into fertilizer and spread it on a field. He found his answer through the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

“It seems like they’re always here to help whenever we have a problem,” Lecocq said. “So, it’s worked out great I think.”

Lecocq started his relationship with the NRCS by enrolling in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). His first EQIP contract was signed under the 2002 farm bill and helped him build the first of his manure storage facilities as part of a comprehensive waste management plan. The storage facility was completed in 2007 and can hold the waste from one and a third of his turkey houses. The facility enabled Lecocq to store manure over the winter.

The facility worked for a while, but as his turkey operation continued to grow, Lecocq began looking for another way to store the manure. So, much like when he ran into his first waste management issue, Lecocq turned to the NRCS to help. Working with the district conservationist and agricultural engineer, he signed another EQIP contract which was used to build a new, larger manure storage facility. Completed in 2018, the new facility can hold two full barns worth of waste and still have room for equipment to move around. In all, he estimates the new facility can hold upwards of 800 tons of manure, which they then use to fertilize the roughly 300 acres of farmland surrounding the turkey operation.

“Constructing the barn and having a safe, legal way to store the manure would not have been possible without the help of the NRCS and the EQIP contract, Lecocq said, because a project of that scale is unaffordable on his own.

“What I’ve seen is it’s just a big circle. That’s really helpful for the farmer,” Lecocq said. “It’s just been great to work with them.

WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS

NRCS is proud of the dedicated Earth Team volunteers and staff who have committed their time and talents to conserving and protecting our natural resources.

During FY20, Indiana NRCS had the following:

• 1,366 volunteers as individuals or in groups
• 6,613.25 hours valued at $179,880.40 ($27.40/hr)

Time dedicated by these volunteers to educational efforts, conservation planning and clerical services saved Indiana NRCS approximate $296,895 and supported conservation in 76 of the 78 USDA Service Centers in Indiana.
At NRCS, we serve all agriculture – large to small, conventional to organic, rural to urban. As American agriculture continues to grow in new directions, NRCS conservation assistance is growing along with it. By bringing cultivation and opportunity to both rural and urban areas, we address many needs - restoring the health of the environment and people.

Agricultural production in Indiana is rapidly being transitioned into urban/suburban lands and smaller-scale or specialty crop farming operations. These farms can pose a threat to water quality, native habitat and healthy, productive soils the same as traditional farms. NRCS recognizes the unique needs of this growing sector and we are working with our conservation partners to address them throughout Indiana.

Indiana NRCS has a history addressing the challenges of conservation and supporting urban farmers in their efforts to achieve a healthy environment and local, healthy, sustainable food for their communities. While many of our programs support all farmers, regardless of how long they have been in the business, NRCS also offers special provisions just for beginning farmers. USDA considers anyone who has operated a farm for less than 10 years to be a beginning farmer.

In addition to our on-going technical and financial assistance, Indiana NRCS has recently funded over $2.4 million, with non-federal partnership match of over $1 million, to help meet the needs of urban agriculture. These agreements will bring an additional nine professional conservationists, targeted outreach and technical assistance funding to help local conservation and agricultural leaders best address the needs of the farmers in urban communities.

**URBAN ASSISTANCE**

**CCSI SOIL HEALTH CAMPAIGN**

Soil is quite literally the foundation of where we live, work and play. We believe that by pulling together and pitching in, we can all make a significant difference in improving its quality – and the quality of life for everyone.

The Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI) created a brilliant billboard campaign titled "#LovINsoil" to provide awareness and education about soil health for everyone across our state.

If you’ve seen this billboard, maybe you’ve been curious about “dirt” that might be in your yard or mixed in with your mulch - and the deep, rich healthy SOIL that’s been cultivated with rich nutrients and is good for so many purposes.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD), NRCS, the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), the Indiana State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB), and Purdue University Extension Service provides the framework to jointly carry out the CCSI program.

**2020 NACD GRANT RECIPIENTS**

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS**

As with previous years, in 2020 NRCS entered into an agreement with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) to provide funding to enhance conservation district technical assistance across the nation, with a significant portion of the granted funds awarded directly to conservation districts to hire staff where additional capacity is needed to improve customer service and reduce workload pressure. Congratulations to the following recipients:

- Allen County SWCD
- Benton County SWCD
- IASWCD
- LaPorte County SWCD
- Parke County SWCD
- Putnam County SWCD
- Tippecanoe County SWCD
- Washington County SWCD

**URBAN AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION GRANT INITIATIVE**

In addition to the Technical Assistance grants, NACD and NRCS also administered the Urban Agriculture Conservation (UAC) Grant Initiative in 2020. This grant is designed to enhance districts’ urban agriculture conservation technical assistance activities in developed and developing areas of both urban and rural communities. Congratulations to the Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District for receiving a 2020 UAC grant.