

USDA Conservation Programs

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USDA Conservation Assistance



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Conservation Plans

- **Identify producers' objectives and analyze the natural resources concerns on the land**
- **Include tools and resources customized specifically for each customer, such as:**
 - Land use map
 - Soils information
 - Photos
 - Inventory of resources
 - Economic costs and benefits
 - Schedule of recommended practices
 - Maintenance schedules
 - Engineering notes
- **Are a voluntary collaboration between the NRCS conservation planner and the customer**



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Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- **NRCS' flagship program for helping producers apply conservation practices on their land**
- **Provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns**
- **Benefits include:**
 - Improving air, soil and water quality
 - Conserving water
 - Preventing soil erosion
 - Enhancing wildlife habitat
 - Mitigating impacts from climate change
- **NRCS accepts applications year-round.**
 - Application Deadline for FY24 - November 3, 2023
- **In fiscal year 2020, NRCS invested \$1.3 billion to help producers implement conservation practices on 10.7 million acres**



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Conservation Stewardship Program

- **Nation's largest conservation program in terms of numbers of acres**
- **Helps producers take their conservation activities to the next level**
- **NRCS accepts applications year-round**
- **In fiscal year 2020, NRCS invested \$533 million to help producers implement conservation practices on 9.6 million acres**



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Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- **Aids landowners and eligible entities with conserving, restoring and protecting wetlands, productive agricultural lands and grasslands**
- **Footprint of more than 5 million acres**
- **Two types:**
 - Wetland Reserve Easements
 - Agricultural Land Easements
- **NRCS accepts applications year-round**
- **In fiscal year 2020, NRCS invested \$333.4 million in 430 new easements**



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Conservation Reserve Program

- **Key conservation program offered by FSA that provides yearly rental payments for farmers who maintain conservation for 10 to 15 years**
- **In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant cover species that will improve environmental health and quality**
- **Benefits of establishing cover:**
 - Help improve water quality
 - Prevent soil erosion
 - Create wildlife habitat
 - Mitigate impacts of climate change



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Conservation Innovation Grants

- **Competitive grant program that supports the development of new conservation tools, approaches, practices and technologies**
- **These innovations also help build resilience in producers' operations and improve their bottom lines**
- **All non-Federal entities and individuals are eligible to apply**
- **In fiscal year 2021, NRCS is investing up to \$25 million in CIG projects**



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Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- **Partner-driven approach to voluntary conservation that funds solutions to natural resources challenges**
- **Leverages \$1 for every \$1 invested by USDA**
- **Eligible entities include private industry, non-government organizations, Indian tribes, state and local governments, water districts and universities**
- **RCPP stats:**
 - Currently, 375 active projects with nearly 2000 partners
 - \$330 million invested in 85 projects in fiscal year 2021
 - \$75 million to be invested in additional alternative funding arrangement projects in fiscal year 2021



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Your Conservation Journey



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Conservation Practices



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Conservation Practices

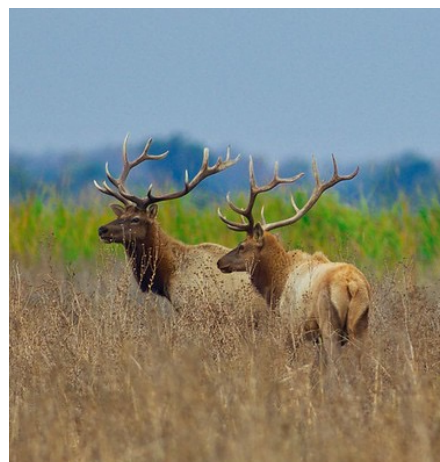
- **Land and crop management choices that producers can implement to conserve natural resources**
- **About 170+ conservation practices available through NRCS programs**
- **Practices often work in systems**
 - For example, fencing is often used in concert with prescribed grazing
- **Each practice has a conservation practice standard, which details how producers should implement to maximize benefits**
 - These standards are available on the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide, available on nrcs.usda.gov



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Benefits of Voluntary Conservation on Agricultural Lands



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Soil Health

- **Healthy soil is the foundation of productive, sustainable agriculture**
- **Benefits of soil health management systems:**
 - Reduce erosion
 - Maximize water infiltration
 - Improve nutrient cycling
 - Save money on inputs
 - Improve resiliency
- **Principles to improve soil health:**
 - Minimize disturbance
 - Maximize soil cover
 - Maximize biodiversity
 - Maximize presence of living roots
- **Key practices include:**
 - No-till
 - Cover crops
 - Rotational grazing
 - Crop rotation



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Water Quality

- **All land is in a watershed, meaning what happens on the land impacts water quality**
- **USDA offers programs and practices that help farmers improve water quality while gaining efficiencies and reducing costs**
- **Practices focus on avoiding, trapping and controlling nutrients and sediment**
- **Managing water quality:**
 - Fight erosion
 - Enhance management
 - Improve filtration
 - Manage animal waste
- **Key practices include:**
 - Cover crops
 - Grassed waterway
 - No-till



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Water Quantity

- **Agriculture is one of the largest users of water**
- **Producers can manage excess water, conserve limited supplies of water, and build resilience to mitigate drought**
- **Managing water quantity:**
 - Control drainage
 - Improve irrigation infrastructure
 - Improve water supply
 - Improve moisture management
- **Key practices include:**
 - Irrigation water management
 - Pumping plant
 - Micro-irrigation



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Wildlife

- **America's privately-owned farms, ranches, and forests don't just provide us with food and fiber—they also support lots of wildlife**
- **USDA offers practices to help producers integrate wildlife friendly practices on croplands, rangelands, pastures and forests**
- **Key practices include:**
 - Brush management
 - Prescribed or rotational grazing
 - Forest stand improvement
 - Wetland restoration

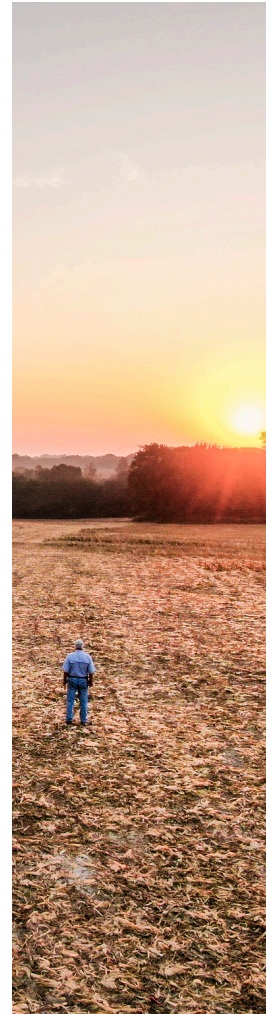


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Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry

- **Agricultural producers play a key role in mitigating climate change**
- **Benefits of climate-smart practices**
 - Conserve natural resources
 - Build healthier soils
 - Sequester carbon
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O)
- **Focus areas include:**
 - Soil health
 - Nitrogen stewardship
 - Livestock partnerships
 - Conservation of sensitive lands
 - Grazing and pasture lands
 - Private forest growth and retention



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Local Work Groups

Leading Conservation
at a local Level

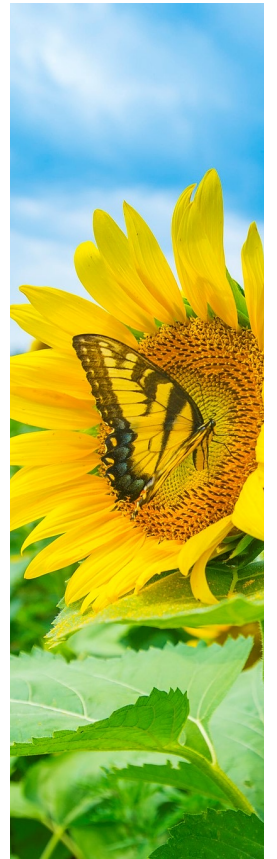


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Locally Led Conservation

- **Conservation program delivery decisions are made at the local level**
- **Serve the local people and improve local communities**
- **Local work groups facilitate this partnership**
- **Build local program capacity and participation**
- **Transparency on use of Farm Bill funds**



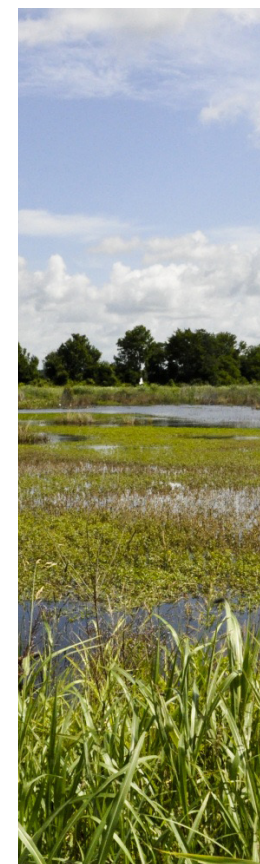
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Local Work Groups

Provide recommendations to NRCS:

- Identification of natural resource priorities; how to best address them
- Farm Bill program implementation at local level
- Criteria for conservation activities
- Best melding of local partnerships; technical and financial resources



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How Local Work Groups Function

- **Convened by the Resource Conservation District (RCD)**
- **Chaired by the NRCS District Conservationist**
- **All stakeholders invited**
- **Agendas and public notice provided 14 days prior to meeting.**
- **Meetings held as often as needed (monthly to annually)**
- **No voting or officers; advisory capacity**



Partnership

Community stakeholders invited, including (but not limited to):

- USDA agencies
- Cooperative Extension
- County weed and pest organizations; county government
- Federal and state agencies
- Tribes and underserved groups
- Nonprofit conservation groups
- Agriculture organizations
- Citizens/landowners



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Successful Local Work Groups

- **Build trust through open communication and active listening**
- **Include diverse local partners**
- **Prioritize resource concerns, set achievable conservation goals and target funding**
- **Accomplish more using creative partnership resources**
- **Receive feedback from customer base**
- **Analyze how to improve conservation efforts and celebrate accomplishments**



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NRCS Elk Grove Service Center Staff

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