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# Farm/Ranch Conservation Issues: NRCS Assistance

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## About the NRCS

- Agency overview
- Service Center Locator:  
<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>



The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's principal agency for providing free conservation technical assistance to private landowners, conservation districts, tribes, and other organizations. All owners, managers, and others who have a stake and interest in natural resource management are eligible to receive technical assistance from the NRCS. To receive technical assistance, the individual may contact their local NRCS office or the local conservation district. 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 across the country.

When contacting your local NRCS office, you will speak directly with a conservationist or conservation partner who will work with you. NRCS delivers conservation technical assistance through its voluntary Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA). CTA is available to any group or individual interested in conserving natural resources and sustaining agricultural production in this country. The CTA program functions through a national network of locally-based, professional conservationists located in nearly [every county of the United States](#).

## Conservation Technical Assistance

- What is Conservation Technical Assistance
- Who needs Conservation Technical Assistance
- Conservation Technical Assistance can lead to program assistance



Conservation technical assistance (CTA) is the help NRCS and its partners provide to land users to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources and to help land users make sound natural resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands.

This assistance can help land users: Maintain and improve private lands and their management, Implement better land management technologies, Protect and improve water quality and quantity, Maintain and improve wildlife and fish habitat, Enhance recreational opportunities on their land, Maintain and improve the aesthetic character of private land, Explore opportunities to diversify agricultural operations and Develop and apply sustainable agricultural systems. This assistance may be in the form of resource assessment, practice design, resource monitoring, or follow-up of installed practices.

Although the CTA program does not include financial or cost-share assistance, clients may develop conservation plans, which may serve as a springboard for those interested in participating in USDA financial assistance programs. CTA planning can also serve as a door to financial assistance and easement conservation programs provided by other Federal, State, and local entities.

Anyone can come in for technical assistance. NRCS and its partners use the CTA program to provide technical assistance to: farmers, ranchers, local units of government, citizen groups, recreation groups, Tribal governments, professional consultants, State and Federal agencies, and others interested in conserving natural resources.

## 5 Steps to Program Assistance

- Step-by-step assistance can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted>.
  - Planning (Conservation Technical Assistance)
  - Application
  - Eligibility
  - Ranking
  - Implementing



Financial assistance programs provide cost share, but only fund infrastructure. An example of this would be an interior fence for paddocks. Conservation technical assistance can help with designing an exterior fence, but would not provide cost-share for it.

5 Steps to Program Assistance: 1) Start by visiting your local NRCS field office to discuss your goals and work with staff on a conservation plan. 2) With the help of NRCS, complete an application for financial assistance programs. 3) As part of applying, the NRCS will file paperwork to ensure you're eligible for assistance. 4) NRCS ranks applications according to local resource concerns. 5) Put conservation to work by signing a contract and implementing conservation practices.

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Who can apply
- How EQIP works
  - Eligible land
  - Eligible producers
  - Compliance
  - Conservation Activity Plan
- How to apply
- Payments
- EQIP website:  
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/>



The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to plan and implement conservation practices. These practices can improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related natural resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. EQIP may also help producers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

Owners of land in agricultural or forest production or persons who are engaged in livestock, agricultural or forest production on eligible land and that have a natural resource concern on that land may apply to participate in EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands. Eligible applicants must:

Be an agricultural producer ( which is defined as a person, legal entity, or joint operation who has an interest in the agricultural operation, or who is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management). Control or own eligible land. Comply with adjusted gross income (AGI) of less than \$900,000. (Note: Federally recognized Native American Indian Tribes or Alaska Native corporations are exempt from the AGI payment limitations.) Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements. And Develop an NRCS EQIP plan of

operations that addresses at least one natural resource concern.

A Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) can be developed for producers to address a specific natural resource concern on their agricultural operation. Each CAP is developed by a certified Technical Service Provider (TSP), who is selected by the EQIP participant.

Financial assistance payments through EQIP are made to eligible producers, to implement approved conservation practices on eligible land or to help producers develop Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) to address specific land use issues. Payments are made on completed practices or activities identified in an EQIP contract that meet NRCS standards. Payment rates are set each fiscal year and are attached to the EQIP contract when it is approved. Payment rates for each conservation practice can be found at the NRCS State Program website.

Historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers/ranchers, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged producers, Indian Tribes and veteran farmers or ranchers) who self-certify on Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application are eligible for a higher practice payment rate to support implementation of contracted conservation practices and activities. Historically underserved producers may also be issued advance payments up to 50 percent of the established payment rate for purchasing materials or contracting services to begin installation of approved conservation practices. Self-certified socially disadvantaged farmers/ranchers, beginning farmers/ranchers, and veteran farmer/rancher producers may elect to be evaluated in special EQIP funding pools. More information can be found on the State Programs website or from your local NRCS office.

Payments received by producers through EQIP contracts currently may not exceed \$450,000 for all EQIP contracts entered into during the period 2014 to 2018.

To apply for EQIP, visit your local NRCS field office, in your [local USDA Service Center](#). Download and [complete the EQIP application form](#) (Form NRCS-CPA-1200) to establish or update "farm records" with the Farm Service Agency, and submit all other required information to the local NRCS field office prior to application deadlines. Application Periods May Differ By State. NRCS accepts and processes EQIP applications on a continuous basis.

## Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- Program overview
- Sustainable production
- CSP enhancements
- CSP website:  
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/>



The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps build on existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop yields, or develop wildlife habitat, the NRCS can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. The NRCS can help you schedule timely planting of cover crops, develop a grazing plan that will improve your forage base, implement no-till to reduce erosion or manage forested areas in a way that benefits wildlife habitat. If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals.

CSP is for working lands. It is the largest conservation program in the United States with 70 million acres of productive agricultural and forest land enrolled in CSP. Thousands of people have made the choice to voluntarily enroll in the program because it helps them enhance natural resources and improve their business operation. CSP participants are seeing benefits such as: Improved cattle gains per acre, Increased crop yields, Decreased inputs, Wildlife population improvements, and Better resilience to weather extremes.

Through CSP, the NRCS can help you build your business while implementing conservation practices that help ensure the sustainability of your entire operation.



Good land stewardship not only conserves the natural resources on your farm, ranch or forest, it also provides multiple benefits to local communities, including better water and air quality and wildlife habitat, as well as food and fiber.

Enhancements are management activities that go above and beyond the minimum conservation practice standard requirements helping the producer achieve a higher level of conservation.

Applications are accepted throughout the year. Specific deadlines are set for ranking and funding opportunities. Contact your [local NRCS field office](#) for more information.

## Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)

- Program overview
  - EWP-Recovery
  - EWP-Flood Plain Easement (FPE)
- Who is eligible?
  - EWP-Recovery - Public and Private landowners with sponsor
  - EWP-FPE
- How do I request assistance?
- EWP website:  
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/ewp/>



The Emergency Watershed Protection Program is designed to help people and conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, drought, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

### **EWP - Recovery**

Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance, but must be represented by a project sponsor such as a city, county, township or conservation district, and Native American Tribes or Tribal governments.

### **EWP - Flood Plain Easement**

To be eligible, lands must meet one of the following criteria: Lands have been damaged by flooding at least once within the previous calendar year or have been subject to flood damage at least twice within the previous 10 years. Other lands within the floodplain are eligible, provided the lands would contribute to the restoration of the flood storage and flow, provide for control of erosion, or would improve the practical management of the floodplain easement. Lands that would be inundated or adversely impacted as a result of a dam breach are also eligible.

If your land has suffered severe damage that may qualify for the EWP Recovery program, you should contact your local sponsoring authorities and request

assistance.

Landowners interested in enrolling their land in a permanent EWP-FPE easement should contact their local USDA Service Center for more information. For additional information regarding EWP, please visit their website.

## Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

- Agricultural Land Easements
- Wetland Reserve Easements
- Eligibility
- ACEP website:  
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/easements/acep/?cid=stelprdb1242695>



The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

Land eligible for agricultural easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land. Land eligible for wetland reserve easements includes farmed or converted wetland that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored.

To enroll land through agricultural land easements, eligible partners may submit proposals to the [NRCS state office](#).

To enroll land through wetland reserve easements, landowners may apply at any time at the [local USDA Service Center](#).

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## Summary

- Locate your nearest Service Center at:  
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You may go online to locate your nearest Service Center.

The NRCS provides America's farmers and ranchers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily put conservation on the ground, not only helping the environment, but agricultural operations too. Programs to help improve natural resources on agricultural land using EQIP, programs to improve grazing conditions and increase crop yields through CSP, and helping people through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program to conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property are all ways the NRCS can assist producers.