

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)



Beginnings of NRCS



Dust bowl begins ~1932

Hugh Hammond Bennett, was a surveyor for the USDA Bureau of Soils. Bennett became aware of the threat posed by the erosion of soils depended on it for their livelihoods. He launched a public crusade of writing and speaking about the soil erosion crisis.

Intense and frequent storms swept the Plains in 1935. On March 6 and again on March 21, dust clouds passed over Washington and darkened the sky just as Congress commenced hearings on a proposed soil conservation law. Bennett seized the opportunity to explain the cause of the storms and to offer a solution. He penned editorials and testified to Congress urging for the creation of a permanent soil conservation agency.

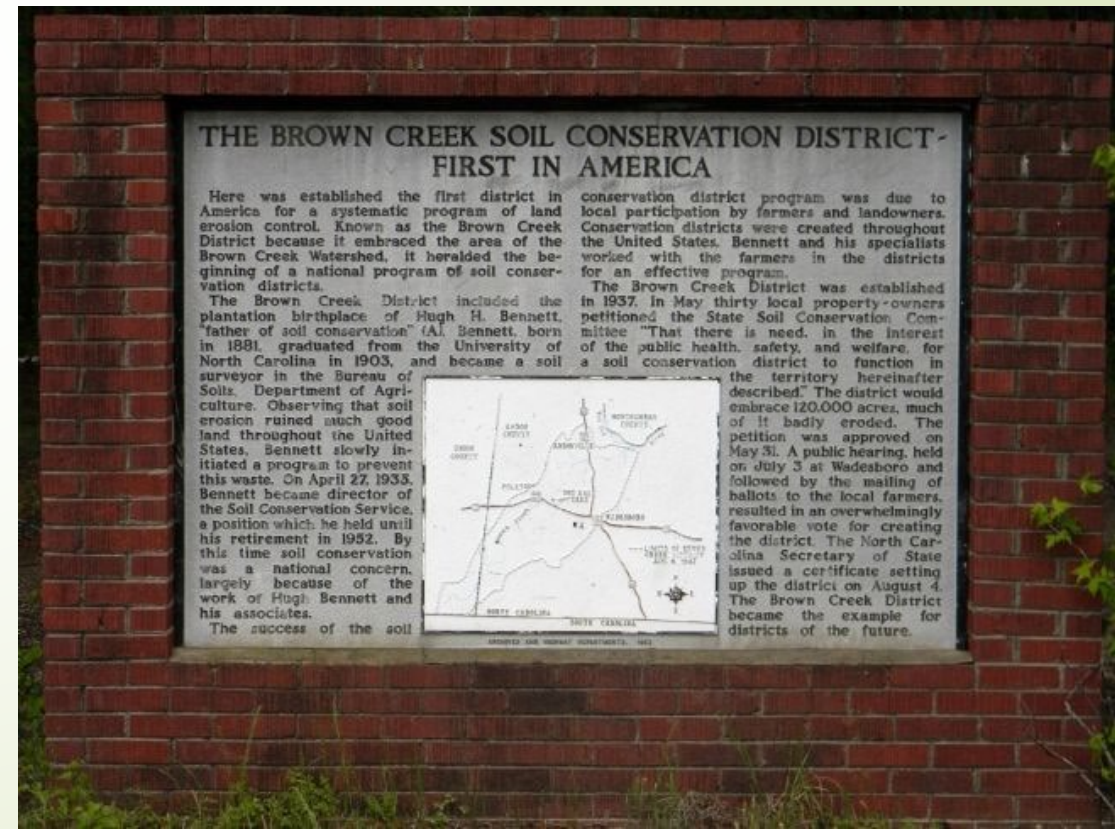


NRCS and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts



The first soil conservation district was organized in the Brown Creek watershed of North Carolina on August 4, 1937. Today, there over three thousand conservation districts across the country.

In 1935 USDA managers began to search for ways to extend conservation assistance to more farmers. They believed the solution was to establish soil conservation districts to lead the conservation planning effort at the local level.

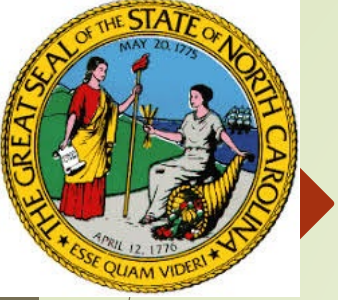


Natural Resources Conservation Service Today



As part of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, the name of the agency was changed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service to reflect its broader mission of concern for all natural resources, not just soil.

Nearly three-fourths of the technical assistance provided by the agency goes to helping farmers and ranchers develop conservation systems uniquely suited to their land and individual ways of doing business. The agency also provides assistance to other private landowners and rural and urban communities to reduce erosion, conserve and protect water, and solve other resource problems.



Who do we work with?



NRCS relies on many partners to help set conservation goals, work with people on the land, and provide assistance. Its partners include county land conservation departments, state and federal agencies, Tribal Nations, agribusiness, private industry, agricultural, commodity and environmental groups, and professional societies. The nation's 3,000 conservation are the key to the local conservation delivery system. These units of county government are organized under state law. They link NRCS with local priorities for soil and water conservation. They also complement the work of NRCS's conservationists with state and county programs and staff.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Purpose

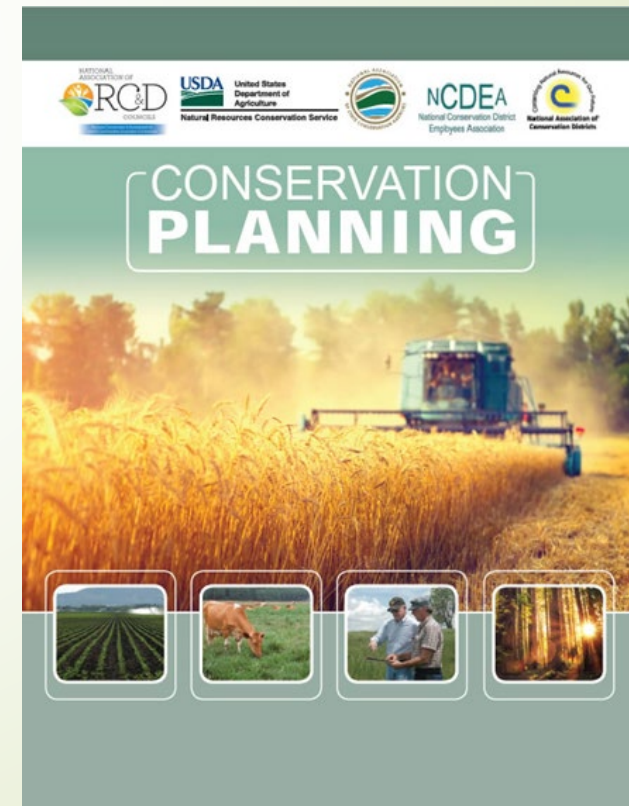
To work with landowners to protect the state's natural resources; **providing technical and cost share assistance on natural resources issues** and assisting individuals, groups, communities, and counties to implement soil and water conservation practices to protect privately owned land.



Conservation Technical Assistance

► Conservation Planning

Designed to assist field office personnel in developing the capability to provide information and planning assistance onsite, on the farm, in real time. A conservation plan can convert to a real time action plan for EQIP and/or CSP contracts.

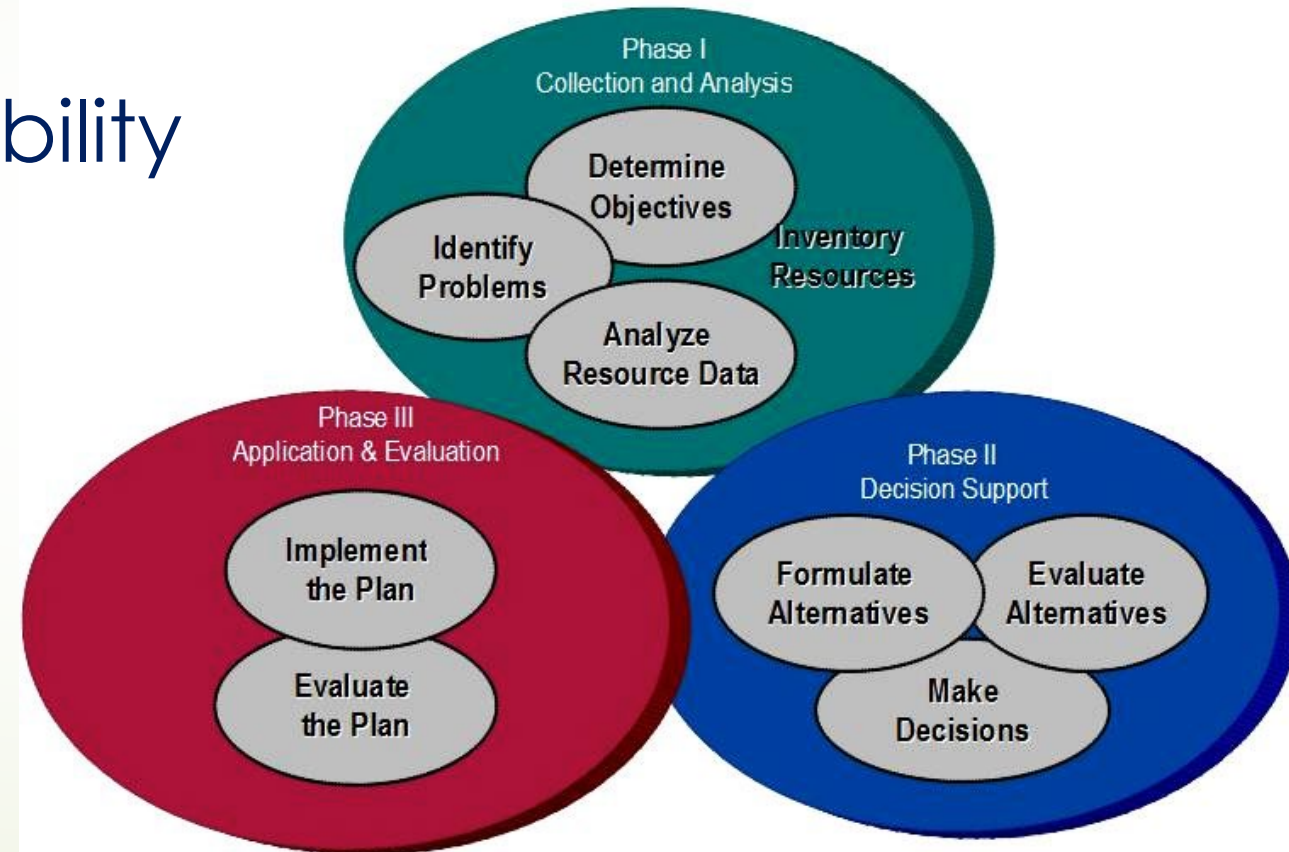


What to Expect When You Apply for a NRCs Program

5 Steps

1. Application and Eligibility
2. Planning
3. Obligation
4. The Green Light
5. Implementation and Payment

NRCs Planning Process



Application & Eligibility

Applicant Eligibility

- **Be the operator, owner or other tenant as assigned by Farm Service Agency (FSA) in the FSA farms records management system, for all land offered for enrollment in the program.**
Applicants who are not in the FSA farm records management system must establish records with FSA prior to submitting an application.
- **Document effective control of the land on Form NRCS-CPA-1200, “Conservation Program Application,” for the term of the proposed contract. Control of land must be in the form of a lease agreement, deed, etc.**
- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land (HEL) and wetland conservation (WC) provisions.
- Be in compliance with payment eligibility provisions, including the adjusted gross income (AGI) provisions (less than \$900,000 for on farm and off farm income).
- Provide a list of all members of the legal entity or joint operation, as applicable, and embedded entities along with members’ tax identification numbers and percentage interest in the entity or joint operations.
- Be within appropriate payment limitation requirements (\$200,000).

Beginning Farmer or Rancher

A beginning farmer or rancher is an applicant who meets the following criteria:

- **Has not operated a farm or ranch, or has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years**
- A legal entity or joint operation may be considered beginning farmer or rancher only if all the individual members independently qualify.
- Applicants who self-certify eligibility as a beginner farmer or rancher may be requested to provide records to justify their claim.



Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher

- A socially disadvantaged group is a **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.**
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Asians, Black or African Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics
- For an entity, at least 50-percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals



Veteran Farmer or Rancher

- ▶ Served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof
- ▶ Was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable
- ▶ **Meets the definition of beginning farmer or rancher (BFR)**
- ▶ A legal entity or joint operation may be considered VFR **only if all of the individual members independently qualify as VFR.**
- ▶ Applicants who self-certify eligibility as a veteran farmer or rancher may be requested to provide records to justify their claim.



Land Eligibility

Agricultural Operation:

- A contract application must include **all eligible land** associated with an applicant's agricultural or nonindustrial private forestland (NIPF) operation.
- An applicant's agricultural operation includes all eligible and ineligible land, whether contiguous or noncontiguous, that meets both of the following criteria: **Under the effective control of the applicant and Operated by the applicant with equipment, labor, management, and production or cultivation practices that are substantially separate from other operations.**
- An applicant may have more than one operation if they are substantially separate. The applicant must provide NRCS with a written explanation and documentation of separate operations.

Land Eligibility

Eligible Land

The following land is part of the agricultural or NIPF operation, and eligible to be offered for enrollment in the program:

- Private agricultural land (cropland and pastureland)
- Agricultural Indian lands (cropland and pastureland)
- Nonindustrial private forest land (NIPF)
- Associated agricultural land (AAL)
- Farmstead
- NIPF is rural land that has existing tree cover or is suitable for growing trees and is owned by an individual, group, association, corporation, Indian Tribe, or other private legal entity that has definitive decision-making authority over the land. (ii) The land must have existing tree cover or be suitable for growing trees. The Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) will document current management.

Land Eligibility

Ineligible Land

- Land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), unless the CRP contract expires at the end of the fiscal year in which the land is to be enrolled in CSP.
- Land enrolled in a wetland reserve easement through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) or in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP).
- Land enrolled in an unexpired CSP contract.
- Public land including land owned by a Federal, State, or local unit of government. Land owned by a public university is also ineligible.
- Land used for crop production on or after December 20, 2018 (the date of enactment of the 2018 Act) that had not been planted, considered to be planted, or devoted to crop production for at least 4 of the 6 years preceding that date.

Eligible Land Uses

- Agricultural Land - Associated Ag Lands
- Agricultural Land - Cropland
- Agricultural Land - Farmstead
- Agricultural Land - Pasture

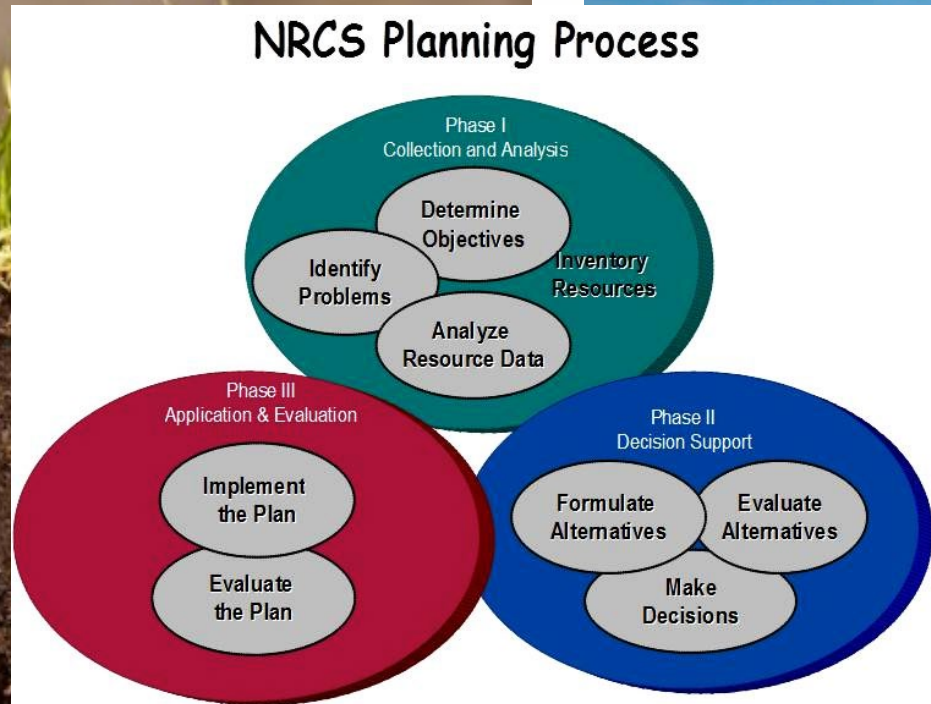
- NIPF - Associated Ag Lands
- NIPF - Farmstead
- NIPF - Forest land

- Longleaf Pine - General
 - At least 51% of enrolled land must be in/converting to Longleaf Pine to qualify.

Planning

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- ▶ The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop resiliency, or develop wildlife habitat, we can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. We can help you **identify natural resource problems in your operation and provide technical and financial assistance to solve those problems or attain higher stewardship levels in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.**



NC Priority Resource Concerns

Ag Land (Crop and Pasture)

- Degraded Plant Condition
- Field Sediment
- Nutrient and Pathogen Loss
- Livestock Production Limitation
- Soil Quality Limitations
- Wind and Water Erosion

Nonindustrial Private Forest Land (NIPF)

(Forestry and LLP)

- Degraded Plant Condition
- Field Sediment
- Nutrient and Pathogen Loss
- Soil Quality Limitations
- Wind and Water Erosion
- Terrestrial Habitat

Conservation Activity Ranking Tool (CART)

- NRCS tool consisting of various questions used to determine compliance with the resource concern stewardship threshold eligibility according to the land use.
- The resource concerns meeting the stewardship threshold eligibility requirement may be different between land uses depending on the land use type being evaluated.

Stewardship Threshold Requirement

- The stewardship threshold means the level of management required to conserve and improve the quality and condition of a natural resource.
- NRCS will use the CART to determine whether or not the applicant is addressing resource concerns in order to meet the stewardship threshold eligibility requirement.
- Applicants must meet or exceed the stewardship threshold on all land uses for **both** of the following:
 - (i) **At least two resource concerns at the time of contract** offer on all land uses included in the operation and on each management system within a land use.
 - (ii) **At least one additional resource concern by the end of the conservation stewardship contract on one land use.**

CSP Activities

- Applicants may adopt an activity in order to meet or exceed a new resource concern by the end of the contract that was not met at the time of application.
- Applicants may choose to adopt a conservation activity in order to exceed a resource concern by the end of the contract that was met but not exceeded at the time of application.
- A conservation practice may be planned in order to meet a resource concern not met at time of application and/or to increase the level of conservation on the land use.
- **Conservation practices are funded at 10% of the original cost share.**
- **Enhancements are funded at 100% of the original cost share.**

Common CSP Practices

Common Agland (Crop and Pasture) Practices and Enhancements:

Code	Practice
314	Brush management
328	Conservation Crop Rotation
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till
590	Nutrient Management
E327A	Conservation cover for pollinators and beneficial insects
E328A	Resource conserving crop rotation
E328L	Leaving tall crop residue for wildlife
E329D	No till system to increase soil health and soil organic matter content
E512B	Forage plantings that help increase organic matter in depleted soils
E512C	Cropland conversion to grass for soil organic matter improvement
E512G	Improved grazing management on pasture for plant productivity and health with monitoring activities
E528S	Soil Health Improvements on Pasture
E590C	Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses on pasture

Common CSP Practices

► Common Forestry (NIPF and LLP) Practices Enhancements:

Code	Practice
327	Conservation Cover
338	Prescribed Burning
394	Firebreak
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
666	Forest Stand Improvement
E338B	Short-interval burns to promote a healthy herbaceous plant community
E338C	Sequential patch burning
E612B	Planting for high carbon sequestration rate
E612C	Establishing tree/shrub species to restore native plant communities
E612G	Tree/shrub planting for wildlife food
E666A	Maintaining and improving forest soil quality
E666D	Forest management to enhance understory vegetation
E666O	Snags, den trees, and coarse woody debris for wildlife habitat

E612B

Planting for carbon sequestration and storage

CONSERVATION PRACTICE: 612 - Tree/Shrub Establishment

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Forest

RESOURCE CONCERN: Air

ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 15 years

Enhancement Description

Plant tree species and/or shrubs to sequester and store carbon. Forest stands will be managed for longer rotations and/or enhanced composition diversity to improve carbon storage.

Criteria

- States will apply criteria from the NRCS National Conservation Practice Standard Tree/Shrub Establishment (Code 612), and any additional criteria as required by the NRCS State Office.
- Species will be selected for their rate of growth, lifespan, historic range, mature size, suitability for retention as wildlife or legacy species, and/or suitability for use in long-lived sustainable wood products as well as their adaptability to current and future site conditions, including soil type.
- To support forest-level carbon sequestration and storage, native plant communities, soil organic matter, standing and down woody material should be properly maintained.
- Selection of species should also be chosen according to the site's natural disturbance regime. Species should be selected based on traits, successional status, structure, and composition.
- Build forest resilience by favoring existing species that are better adapted to projected future climate conditions, and by enhancing relative compositional and structural diversity.
- Do not plant species on the Federal or State invasive species or noxious weed lists.

- Only viable, high-quality, and site-adapted planting stock or seed will be used.
- A precondition for tree/shrub establishment is appropriately prepared sites. Refer to criteria in NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (Code 490).
- Implementation and timing of planting will be appropriate for the site and ensure successful establishment.
- Planting must be protected from unacceptable adverse impacts from insects, disease, wildlife, and/or fire. Apply supporting practices and treatments to protect establishing trees and shrubs, as necessary.
- Each site will be evaluated to determine if mulching, supplemental water, or other treatments (e.g., tree protection devices, shade cards, weed mats) will be needed to assure adequate survival and growth.
- The enhancement will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and with States' Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality.

Documentation and Implementation Requirements

Participant will:

- Prior to implementation:
 - provide an updated Forest Management Plan that documents intended objectives for carbon sequestration and storage.
 - select a combination of species with longer life spans that are suitable for their rate of growth, historical range, mature size, suitability for retention as wildlife or legacy species, and/or suitability for use in long-lived sustainable wood products as well as their adaptability to current and future site conditions, including soil type.
 - select planting technique, arrangement and spacing design, and timing appropriate for the site conditions.

Species	Note selected species characteristic(s)

- During implementation:
 - install and maintain erosion control measures as needed for the site.
 - protect the planting(s) from plant and animal pests and fire.
 - notify NRCS in writing of any planned changes to verify changes meet NRCS enhancement criteria.

TASK	Species	Species	Species
Planting date			
Planting Technique			
Arrangement/Spacing			

NRCS will:

- Prior to implementation:
 - provide and explain NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (Code 490) as it relates to implementing this enhancement. Verify the enhancement is planned for acres that have been appropriately prepared for tree/shrub establishment.
 - verify the enhancement is planned for the appropriate land use.
 - provide and explain NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Tree/Shrub Establishment (Code 612) as it relates to implementing this enhancement.
 - verify no plants on the Federal or state noxious weeds list are included.
 - NRCS will provide Technical Assistance, as needed, in the following:
 - Selecting a combination of species to meet enhancement criteria.
 - Selecting planting techniques, arrangement and spacing design, and timing appropriate for the site and soil conditions.
 - Planning the use of additional erosion control, as needed for the site.
- During implementation:
 - evaluate any planned changes to verify they meet the enhancement criteria.
- After implementation:
 - verify the planned trees and shrub species were established to specifications developed for the site.
 - verify all erosion control needed for the site is functioning and is maintained to specifications developed for the site.

Annual Payment and Contract Limitations

- ▶ **Each conservation stewardship contract will be limited to \$200,000** over the term of the initial contract, except that conservation stewardship contracts with joint operations will be limited to \$400,000 over the term of the initial contract.
 - ▶ Additionally, a person or legal entity may not receive payments that in aggregate exceed \$200,000 for all CSP contracts obligated during the 2018 Farm Bill.
- ▶ Contract limitations applied at the time of enrollment will be maintained for the entire contract period. **CSP contracts are for a duration of 5 years.**
- ▶ Contract modifications will not increase the financial obligation, including transfer modifications to Joint Operation business type.
- ▶ **Minimum payment for an awarded contract is \$20,000 or up to \$4000 per year.**

Payment Requirements

To earn payments:

- ▶ A participant must schedule, install and adopt:
 - ▶ at least one additional conservation activity on each land use included in the contract.
 - ▶ at least one additional conservation activity on any land use within the first 12 months of the contract.
- ▶ A program participant may not schedule the installation of new conservation activities for payment under CSP that are also earning payment through any other USDA conservation program.

Payment Requirements cont.....

- ▶ **Annual Payments are made after October 1 of each calendar year during the contract period.**
- ▶ ***Additional activity payments will be made for the units of the activity actually completed in a given year.***
- ▶ Existing activity payments will be the same each year and can be made in years when there are no new activities scheduled (stewardship payments).

Participant Responsibilities

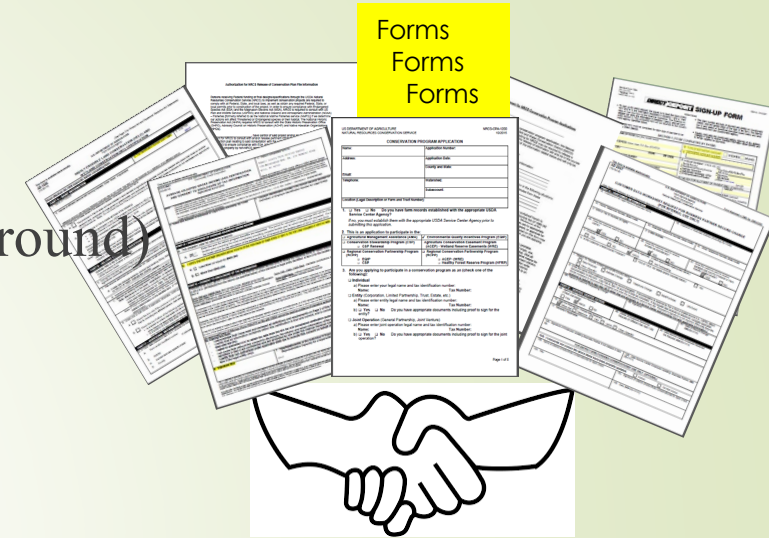
- **Install and/or locate a contractor to install the practices agree to in the conservation program contract**
- **Ensure that practice are installed according to NRCS standards and specifications**
 - NRCS will provide guidance on practice installation through conservation practice job sheets when provided a copy of your contract
 - Notify the appropriate Field Office when an activity has been installed so that timely inspection may be made.

Participant Responsibilities continued:

- ▶ Participants should contact their local NRCS staff for questions pertaining to practice installation
- ▶ **All NRCS programs are reimbursable, and landowners are responsible for initial cost of practice installation.**
- ▶ NRCS contracts for CSP are encouraged to be implemented as soon as possible. Contracts may not be extended to exceed 5 years.

Application and Approval Process

- Apply for all programs at your local NRCS office (year-round)
- Together we will identify your resource concerns
- All applications will be ranked based on your identified resource concerns
- Applications are preapproved based on the ranking score and the availability of funding.
- A contract will be developed upon approval
- Program approval is not a guarantee (it is competitive)



Final Steps

Obligation

Congratulations! Your contract has been funded!

But.....

do not start yet.

Cultural Resources Review and Endangered Species Review must be completed and complete packet of Job Sheets presented to producer.

The Green Light

Ready, set, go! Keep in contact with your planner.

Implementation and Payment

Planner will certify your activities. Then, relax and enjoy your hard work!

Inflation Reduction Act Funding

- On August 18, 2022 President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act into law.
- The Inflation Reduction Act represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history.
- This is a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for this country and for the rural and agricultural communities that USDA serves.
- *The Inflation Reduction Act will help producers stay on the farm, prevent producers from becoming ineligible for future assistance, and promote climate-smart agriculture by increasing access to conservation assistance.*
- *The law approximately \$20 billion to support USDA's conservation programs that yield climate-related benefits while building resilience in agricultural operations.*

Subject to the condition on the use of the funds that the funds shall only be available for 1 or more agricultural conservation practices, enhancements, or bundles that the Secretary determines directly improve soil carbon, reduce nitrogen losses, or reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions, associated with agricultural production;

Proposed FY2024 CSP Deadlines

- Application Cutoff
- Eligibility Determination
- Assessment/Ranking
- Pre-Approvals
- CSP Fund Obligation

January 12, 2024
March 8, 2024
June 14, 2024
July 15, 2024
August 16, 2024



Contact Information

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“If we take care of the land, it will take care of us.”

- Hugh Hammond Bennett, first Chief of NRCS



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Questions?