



United States Department of Agriculture

## Natural Resources Conservation Service

### 2018 Farm Bill: Maximizing Opportunities

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Chesapeake Bay Commission  
Quarterly Meeting

May 2 2019



Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

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

# NRCS Perspective: Private Lands Conservation

- 23% of the CB Watershed is private ag land; other is private forestland.
- Our environment depends on the decisions private landowners make every day.
- NRCS helps producers develop conservation plans >300,000 acres/year.
- Practices implemented to improve water quality >350,000 acres/year; to improve soil quality >250,000 acres/year.
- NRCS works closely with State and Local leaders and partners







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# Chesapeake Bay Action Plan summarizes NRCS Priorities

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

## CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED ACTION PLAN



Credit: Ben Longstaff, Integration and Application Network, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science



## **NRCS NATURAL RESOURCE PRIORITIES ARE:**

- **Improve water quality**
- **Improve soil health**
- **Restore and improve fish and wildlife habitat**

## **NRCS OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT PRIORITIES ARE:**

- **Training of conservation professionals**
- **Public engagement**
- **Client outreach**


## **NRCS SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES ARE:**

- **Science, Technology and Data Guides Watershed and Farm Planning**
- **Use Partnerships to Increase Capacity and Effectiveness to Improve Natural Resources**
- **Planning with Customers, Not for Customers**





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An aerial photograph of a misty, rolling landscape. The scene features green fields, dense forests, and a small farm with orange-roofed buildings. The mist is thick and white, filling the valleys and surrounding the hills. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

NRCS invests an average of \$8 million  
every day  
into conservation systems that help  
producers stay profitable and  
productive.

# 2018 Farm Bill and NRCS Conservation Programs

- The 2018 Farm Bill, like the others before it, demonstrates strong congressional support for private lands conservation.
- It will help NRCS continue its work to streamline, target and simplify our programs, and will help us fulfill the Secretary's additional goal of improving overall customer service.
- No new NRCS programs were added, and none were eliminated. RCPP especially changed.
- NRCS will continue to offer the programs and assistance producers and partners have come to expect.
- NRCS developing Rules now



# **NRCS Conservation Programs**

## **Conservation Technical Assistance**

### **Financial Assistance Programs**

AMA Agricultural Management Assistance

CSP Conservation Stewardship Program

EQIP Environmental Quality Incentives Program

### **Easement Programs**

ACEP Agricultural Conservation Easements

ALE Agricultural Land Easements

WRE Wetland Restoration Easements

HFRP Health Forest Reserve Program

### **RCPP Regional Conservation Partnership Program**





# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- Retains the \$450,000 payment cap
- Adds soil testing and soil remediation
- Expands the list of conservation activity plan types
- Raises cap for organic producers to \$140,000 over six years (v. \$80,000)
- Allows 5-10 year contracts
- Allows states to designate up to 10 high priority practices be eligible for increased payments, not to exceed 90% of the cost
- Allows for identification of new resource concerns, such as mitigating against weather volatility
- Adds feral swine control program with APHIS



## Conservation Stewardship Program



- Converts allocations from acreage to dollar allocation.
- Retains the \$200,000 total payment cap
- Increases payment rates for adoption of cover crops, rotations and advanced grazing management.
- Authorizes contract extensions to facilitate renewal under new program authority.
- Provides specific support for organic and transitioning to organic production activities.
- Includes special grassland conservation initiative for certain producers who have maintained cropland base acres.





# Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- Authorizes assistance to partners who pursue 'Buy-Protect-Sell' transactions.
- Requires a conservation plan for highly erodible land protected by an agricultural land easement.
- Increases flexibility for partners to meet ALE cost-share matching requirements.
- Water quality is now a program purpose for enrollment of wetland reserve easements.
- Expands wetland types eligible for restoration and management under wetland reserve easements.



## Regional Conservation Partnership Program



- Authorizes RCPP contracts rather than requiring enrollment through other program authorities.
- Expands flexibility for alternative funding
- Expands availability of small watershed program authorities to projects outside critical conservation areas.
- Eliminates national pool
- Funding formula changed from \$100 M to \$300 M/year; eliminates 7% set-aside from covered programs.
- Agreements may be renewed noncompetitively for up to five years.
- NOTE FOR CBC: RCPP could offer more opportunities for you and states.





## Conservation Innovation Grants



## Conservation Innovation Grants

On July 26, 2018, NRCS announced that the agency awarded \$10.6 million to 22 projects through its 2018 national CIG competition. [Learn more and view the project list.](#)

### Conservation Innovation for America's Working Lands

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that drive public and private sector innovation in resource conservation. Authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, CIG uses Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or nongovernmental organizations, American Indian Tribes, or individuals. Producers involved in CIG funded projects must be EQIP eligible.

Through the NRCS CIG program, public and private grantees develop the tools, technologies, and strategies to support next-generation conservation efforts on working lands and develop market-based solutions to resource challenges. Grantees leverage the federal investment by at least matching it.



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## Related Topics

- [CRPis30 Website](#)
- [Conservation Reserve Program](#)
- [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#)
- [CRP Grasslands](#)
- [Emergency Conservation Program](#)
- [Emergency Forest Restoration Program \(EFRP\)](#)
- [Emergency Haying and Grazing](#)
- [Farmable Wetlands Program](#)
- [Grassland Reserve Program](#)
- ["Grassroots" Source Water Protection Program](#)
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## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

### What is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program?



The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a part of the [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\)](#), the country's largest private-land conservation program. Administered by the [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#), CREP targets high-priority conservation concerns identified by a State, and federal funds are supplemented with non-federal funds to address those concerns. In exchange for removing environmentally sensitive land from production and establishing permanent resource conserving plant species, farmers and ranchers are paid an annual rental rate along with other federal and state incentives as applicable per each CREP agreement. Participation is voluntary, and the contract period is typically 10–15 years.





# Resource Concern Priorities: Water Quality

NRCS will continue to address water quality concerns through EQIP, CSP and RCPP.

This Conservation Title also requires collaboration with community water systems and state technical committees. A minimum level of 10 percent of conservation program funding, other than CRP, is to be used for source water protection.

Water quality and water quantity practices that protect source water may have increased payment rates (not to exceed 90%)



# Source Water Protection

Certain entities, such as states, irrigation districts and groundwater management districts, are now eligible for water conservation and system efficiency practices



# Soil Health



EQIP expands opportunities for Conservation Activity Plans to include soil health planning, planning for resource conserving crop rotations, and precision conservation management planning.

Soil testing was added as an eligible practice under EQIP.

CSP expands conservation activities to include soil health planning, and highlights building soil organic matter through the adoption of resource conserving crop rotations.





# Wildlife Habitat



**Wildlife** resource concerns are supported through the Working Lands for Wildlife effort, through ACEP-WRE, and through increased funding levels through EQIP (now 10% v. 5%)



# Learn about 2018 Farm Bill Conservation Programs at State Technical Committees

## Technical Resources

- ⊕ Conservation Planning
- ⊕ Data, Maps, & Analysis
- ⊕ Ecological Science
  - Engineering
- ⊕ Land Use
- ⊖ State Technical Committee
  - STC Minutes
  - STC Agenda

## State Technical Committee

### Committee Purpose and Structure

Per section 1446 of the 1990 Farm Bill, the Pennsylvania USDA established a technical committee to provide advice for technical considerations and technical guidelines necessary to implement conservation provisions of USDA legislation. The committee also helps assure that Civil Rights requirements in Program Delivery are met. The NRCS State Conservationist chairs the committee.

Additionally, the State Technical Advisory Committee provides recommendations on a number of issues within a variety of conservation programs. Although the State Technical Advisory Committee has no implementation or enforcement authority, USDA gives strong consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

Technical Committees are composed of individuals and groups who represent a diverse group with interests in a variety of natural resource sciences and occupations, including the following:

- > Soil
- > Water
- > Air
- > Plants
- > Wetlands



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### Programs

#### Virginia NRCS Programs

#### Conservation Practices and Programs for Your Land

NRCS's natural resources conservation programs help people reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters.

#### State Technical Advisory Committee

The State Technical Advisory Committee provides recommendations to the State Conservationist on NRCS-related issues in Virginia. These issues include: implementation of NRCS programs, advice and comments on NRCS practice standards, and others.

#### How to Apply for USDA-NRCS Conservation Programs

Learn what steps you will need to take to prepare for, and submit, your application to [become a USDA-NRCS Conservation Program participant](#).

More information on the criteria required to [become an eligible applicant](#).

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[usda.gov/newfarmers](http://usda.gov/newfarmers)

USDA Resources for New Farmers

# Challenges of Implementation

1. Permits needed before enrollment (e.g., CREP for stream crossings)
2. Variation of implementation across states due to state laws
3. Counting voluntary conservation practices in Bay model and privacy constraints



# Chesapeake Bay Executive Order Strategy: Accelerate Conservation Adoption

**Develop a system of accountability for tracking and reporting conservation practices.** Full accounting of conservation practices applied to the land is a necessary data input for improving the quality of information and ensuring that the practices are properly credited in the Bay model. In development of this system, USDA will uphold all privacy requirements as called for in Section 1619 of the 2008 Farm Bill.





# 2008 Farm Bill: Section 1619 Information Gathering

(2) PROHIBITION.—Except as provided in paragraphs (3) and (4), the Secretary, any officer or employee of the Department of Agriculture, or any contractor or cooperator of the Department, shall not disclose—

(A) information provided by an agricultural producer or owner of agricultural land concerning the agricultural operation, farming or conservation practices, or the land itself, in order to participate in programs of the Department; or

(B) geospatial information otherwise maintained by the Secretary about agricultural land or operations for which information described in subparagraph (A) is provided.

(3) AUTHORIZED DISCLOSURES.—

(A) LIMITED RELEASE OF INFORMATION.—If the Secretary determines that the information described in paragraph (2) will not be subsequently disclosed except in accordance with paragraph (4), the Secretary may release or disclose the information to a person or Federal, State, local, or tribal agency working in cooperation with the Secretary in any Department program—

(i) when providing technical or financial assistance with respect to the agricultural operation, agricultural land, or farming or conservation practices; or

(ii) when responding to a disease or pest threat



# 2008 Farm Bill: Section 1619 Information Gathering

Under section 1619 of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 8791), USDA is *generally prohibited* from releasing information collected to those outside of USDA that:

- \*Is provided by an ag producer or owner of ag land
- \*provides info about the ag operation, farming and conservation practices or the land itself
- \*is information the producer provides in order to participate in a USDA program

The prohibition also extends to geospatial information about agricultural land or operations



# 2008 Farm Bill: Section 1619 Information

**There are four exceptions:**

- \* payment information....if you receive payments then it becomes public info**
- \* statistical or aggregated info**
- \* with consent of producer**
- \* authorized disclosure to cooperator if...**
  - \*the partner is working in cooperation with USDA**
  - \*partner provides technical or financial assistance under a USDA program**
  - \*the Sec determines the info will not be subsequently disclosed.**





# MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

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*Between  
U.S. Geological Survey  
AND  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service*

## I. PARTIES

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered into by the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

## II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this MOU is to continue the existing cooperation between USGS and NRCS for the evaluation of conservation practices and systems for improving water quality throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The USGS and NRCS will work collaboratively to develop geospatial conservation data sets that preserve the value of the conservation actions, but do not reveal privacy information about individual farms or ranches.

## III. BACKGROUND AND MUTUAL BENEFITS

USGS and NRCS have a mutual interest in meeting responsibilities identified in the Presidential Executive Order (13508) on the Chesapeake Bay, and in determining the benefits and impacts of agricultural conservation systems on water quality. Understanding the sources of nutrients and sediment and how these nutrients move into streams and groundwater is critical to design effective nutrient management and erosion control strategies.





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***Thank you!***

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