

What USDA Offers

	Program	What Land is Eligible?	Length of Agreement	Contract Payments	Easements	Program Payments	Producer Responsibilities
Financial Assistance Programs	Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program	Private or Tribal land in agricultural production including cropland, hayland, pastureland, rangeland, grassland, and non-industrial private forest land.	1-10 years			Payments support practice implementation based on incurred cost and income foregone*	Develop and follow an AMA plan that describes the conservation and environmental objectives. Contribute to installation costs.
	Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)	Private, public, and Tribal land in agricultural production including cropland, grassland, and non-industrial private forest land. Does not include land enrolled in CRP, WRP, or GRRP.	Up to 5 years for AWEP partnership agreements; 1-10 years for producer EQIP contracts			Payments support practice implementation based on incurred cost and income foregone*	Develop and follow an AWEP EQIP plan that addresses water conservation and water quality and describes the environmental objectives. Incur installation costs.
	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Private or Tribal agricultural land and non-industrial private forest land. Does not include land enrolled in CRP, WRP, GRRP, or Conservation Security Program.	5 years; 5-year renewal option, subject to funding availability	Annual payment based on level of conservation stewardship; supplemental payment available for participants who adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation			Implement a conservation stewardship plan that addresses resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by installing and adopting additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities.
	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Private, public, and Tribal land in agricultural production including cropland, grassland, and non-industrial private forest land. Does not include land enrolled in CRP, WRP, or GRRP.	1-10 years			Payments support practice implementation based on incurred cost and income foregone*	Develop and follow EQIP plan of operations that describes the conservation and environmental objectives. Incur installation costs.
	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)	Private or Tribal agricultural land. Does not include land enrolled in CRP, WRP, HFRP, or a similar program.	1-10 years, or minimum of 15 years for long-term agreements for critical habitat			Payments support practice implementation based on incurred cost*	Prepare and follow WHIP plan of operations that describes the wildlife habitat objectives to be achieved. Contribute to installation costs.
Easement Programs	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)	Private land that contains at least 50% prime, State, or locally important farmland; contains historic or archeological resources; or supports the policies of a State, local farm, or ranch protection program. Includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and forest land.	Cooperative agreements obligate funds annually to entities that acquire permanent easements		One-time, up-front payment or up to five annual payments		Continue to use the land for agricultural purposes. Comply with conservation plan for highly erodible land and terms of conservation easement deed.
	Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	Private or Tribal grassland, shrubland, land containing forbs (including improved rangeland and pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use, and land in an area that historically contained those features.	10-, 15-, and 20-year rental contracts or permanent easements	Annual rental payment based on county rate determined by FSA	One-time, up-front payment or up to 10 annual payments	50% of actual cost	Develop and comply with a grazing management plan for the easement, rental contract, or restoration agreement. Contribute to installation costs and maintain practices.
	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Non-industrial private or Tribal forest land capable of supporting habitat for a selected wildlife species.	10-year cost-share agreements, 30-year contracts, and 30-year or permanent easements		One-time, up-front payment or up to 10 annual payments	Up to 75% for cost-share agreements, 30-year contracts, and 30-year easements; up to 100% for permanent easements	Develop and implement HFRP restoration plan that promotes restoration, protection, enhancement and maintenance of forest land functions and values. Contribute to installation costs.
	Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	Private or Tribal farmed wetlands or wetlands converted prior to December 23, 1985, and adjacent lands that maximize wildlife benefits.	30-year or permanent easements, 30-year contracts, or cost-share restoration agreements		One-time, up-front payment or up to 30 annual payments for either easement option or 30-year contract	Up to 75% for restoration cost-share agreements, 30-year contracts, and 30-year easements; 100% for permanent easements	Develop and implement WRP plan of operations for the restoration and maintenance of the wetland. Contribute to restoration costs.

FAQ

frequentlyaskedquestions

How do I improve the chances of my conservation program application being accepted?

Most program applications are selected according to ranking processes specific to your area. Working with your local NRCS representative, you can develop a conservation plan for your land that provides alternatives for various levels of resource treatment relevant to application ranking considerations in your area. You can select the level of treatment that best meets your individual needs while improving your chances of being accepted for funding.

If I enroll my land in a conservation program, do I maintain ownership?

Am I required to allow public access to my land?

If you enroll land in any of our conservation programs, you retain ownership of the land. Although participation in conservation easement programs limits certain uses of the land during the term of the agreement or easement, you still maintain control of public access.

Will I be responsible for maintaining practices that I install under a conservation program?

All programs require practice operation and maintenance as stated in the agreement.

What types of wildlife will I attract if I enroll in conservation programs?

The practices you implement and the plants you establish will affect the types of wildlife you attract to your land. Practices can be designed and managed to attract particular species, such as turkey, quail, deer, songbirds, and other wildlife species.



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Conservation practices and programs for your land

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2008 FARM BILL: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

Conservation practices & programs for your land

What's in it for you?

The 2008 Farm Bill offers America's agricultural producers and non-industrial private forest landowners more assistance than ever before to voluntarily conserve natural resources on our Nation's privately owned farm and ranch lands. Its provisions provide technical and financial assistance to help producers implement conservation practices that reduce erosion, protect our waters, improve fish and wildlife habitat, improve air quality, and conserve energy. This guide introduces the assistance available.

What's New?

- Increased focus on energy conservation, organic and specialty crop production, forestry, air quality, and climate change.
- New programs and initiatives that include the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Air Quality Initiative, and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).
- Set-aside funding for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Financial & Economic Incentives

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers a variety of programs to producers and landowners interested in conservation. Some programs offer annual conservation payments; others offer payments

for long-term contracts and conservation easements. Whether through an agreement or easement purchase, all programs include Federal Funds to assist with or offset costs of conservation practices and activities.

Technical Assistance

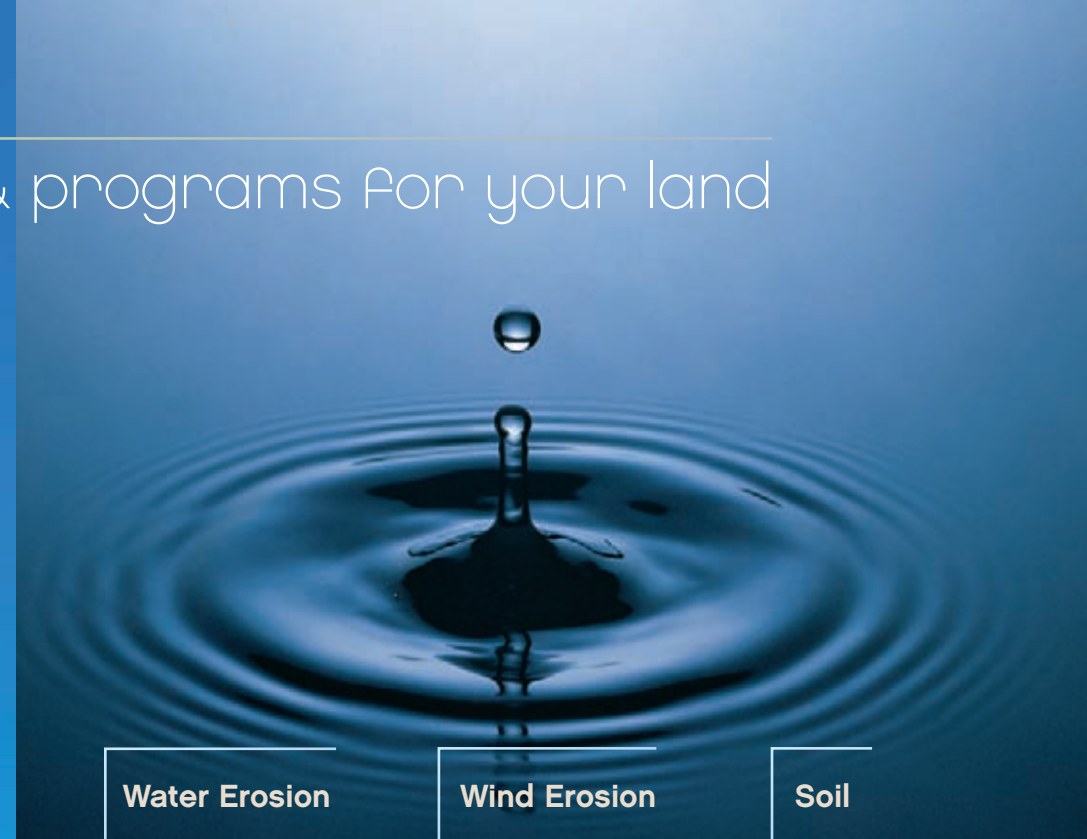
NRCS helps customers plan and implement conservation practices on private lands through technical assistance of the highest quality and standards. Technical assistance is also available through certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs).

Partnerships Enhance Assistance to NRCS Private Land Programs

NRCS works with many partners to deliver conservation services and programs. Partners such as local conservation districts, Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils, Cooperative Extension, State natural resource agencies, and nongovernmental conservation organizations all play important roles. Professionals in each organization provide technical help. Additional educational and financial assistance for establishing conservation practices on farms and ranches may be available.

For More Information

Contact your local NRCS Office, USDA Service Center, or local conservation district, or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.



Water Erosion	Wind Erosion	Soil	Waterways	Manure	Grasslands	Wildlife	Forest Lands	Air, Energy & Climate Change
<p>Curbing water erosion</p> <p>To reduce soil movement and nutrient runoff, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassed waterways • Residue management • Grassed riparian buffers • Grade stabilization structures • Contour buffer strips <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, AMA, WHIP, CSP</p>	<p>Curbing wind damage</p> <p>To mitigate the effects of wind on farm and ranch lands, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residue management • Shelterbelts • Windbreaks • Field stripcropping <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, WHIP, CSP</p>	<p>Conserving soil and water resources</p> <p>To improve soil and water quality, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrient management • Pest management • Crop rotation • Filter strips • Riparian buffers • Surface water management <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, AWEP, AMA, WHIP, CSP</p>	<p>Protecting waterways from erosion and degradation</p> <p>Consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riparian buffers • Filter strips • Stream crossings • Stream bank stabilization/Shoreline protection <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, WHIP, AMA, CSP, CRP</p>	<p>Managing manure</p> <p>To prevent nutrient loss and protect air, soil, water, fish, and wildlife resources, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste storage structures and lagoons • Nutrient management • Compost facilities • Waste utilization <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, CBWI</p>	<p>Managing grasslands</p> <p>To improve forage quality, control invasive species, and conserve fish and wildlife habitat, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescribed grazing • Pest management • Prescribed burning • Watering facilities • Brush management <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, GRP, WHIP, WRP, CSP, CRP</p>	<p>Establishing wildlife habitat</p> <p>To enhance, restore, manage and protect fish and wildlife habitat, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upland/Wetland habitat management • Wetland restoration • Forest stand improvement • Stream habitat improvement • Prescribed burning • Tree/Shrub establishment <p>Begin with a look at these programs: WHIP, WRP, GRP, EQIP, HFRP, CSP</p>	<p>Managing Forest lands</p> <p>To restore and protect forest resources and improve fish and wildlife habitat, consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree planting • Forest stand improvement, thinning • Prescribed burning • Controlling invasive plants <p>Begin with a look at these programs: HFRP, WHIP, EQIP, CSP</p>	<p>Improving air quality, conserving energy, and mitigating climate change</p> <p>Consider these or similar practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residue management • Dust abatement • Cover crops • Conservation buffers • Windbreak/Shelterbelt plantings • Tree planting • Conversion of cropland to grassland <p>Begin with a look at these programs: EQIP, AMA, HFRP, GRP, CSP</p>



Air Quality

2008 Farm Bill conservation programs can help landowners and producers improve air quality. Financial and technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps producers and landowners plan and implement conservation practices to improve air quality while ensuring sustainability of agricultural operations. Emphasis is placed on assisting producers and landowners who manage the land to conserve natural resources.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the primary program providing financial and technical assistance that address air quality concerns. EQIP helps producers and landowners plan and implement conservation practices that will result in improved air quality.

High-priority conservation practices to address air quality resource concerns may include:

- Residue and tillage management;
- Cover crops;
- Surface irrigation;
- Nutrient management;
- Integrated Pest Management; and
- Windbreaks, shelter belts, and biofilters.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides technical and financial assistance to producers and landowners who already have applied basic conservation practices but want to achieve a higher level of conservation on their operations. Participating producers and landowners receive payments to maintain existing practices and implement additional conservation treatment.

NRCS offers a Comprehensive Air Quality Management Plan (CAQMP) to help producers identify air quality concerns and develop alternative solutions. A CAQMP provides a comprehensive and complete air quality analysis of operations and strategies to address identified issues.

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Forestry & Agroforestry Assistance

The 2008 Farm Bill features many opportunities for non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners, such as State forestry agencies and other Technical Service Providers (TSPs), provide forestry-related assistance to private landowners and Tribes to plan and implement conservation practices and address resource concerns on their forest, woodland, farm, or ranch.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is available to help participants address a wide range of resource concerns on forest land and other land uses.

For example:

- Thin dense stands of trees;
- Control invasive and noxious weeds/brush/trees;
- Develop, protect, or enhance wildlife habitat;
- Reduce the threat of wildfire by treating slash and installing fire breaks;
- Plant trees and other grasses/shrubs to restore forest ecosystems;
- Improve water quality by installing riparian forest buffers; and
- Reduce soil erosion and energy usage by establishing windbreaks/shelterbelts on cropland and building sites.

Before applying for financial assistance through EQIP for your forest or woodland, you should develop a forest management plan. To get started, contact your State forestry agency or local USDA service center to find a forester near you. Your State forestry agency may be able to help you develop a Forest Stewardship Plan (a type of forest management plan). The Forest**A**Syst Web site (www.forestasyst.org) can also help you locate a professional forester, as well as provide valuable information about managing your forest. If you already have a forest management plan, contact your forester or local NRCS office to learn if additional information is needed.

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) helps private landowners restore and enhance forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, improve biodiversity, and enhance carbon sequestration.

Farm and ranch owners may apply to the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) to protect forest land from development. The forested land must contribute to the viability of the agricultural operation and cover up to two-thirds of the land.

Other NRCS programs that may be helpful for private forest landowners include the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

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The 2008 Farm Bill places additional emphasis on providing technical and financial assistance to producers who want to reduce the use of fossil fuel energy. Financial and technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will help eligible producers plan and implement conservation practices that help improve energy efficiency, utilize renewable energy, and sustain production.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps producers:

- Address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy conservation concerns;
- Obtain financial and technical assistance to plan and implement basic conservation practices;
- Conserve and improve natural resources for a sustainable farming operation; and
- Develop a Conservation Activity Plan for energy conservation.

High-priority conservation practices that address energy conservation may include:

- Energy audits;
- Residue and tillage management;
- Conservation crop rotations;
- Cover crops;
- Nutrient management;
- Pest management;
- Irrigation water management (and related practices); and
- Anaerobic digesters.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides technical and financial assistance to producers who already have applied the basic conservation practices but want to implement a higher level of conservation. Eligible producers participating in CSP would receive payments for additional conservation treatment (such as energy conservation) on their operations.

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Organic Farming

The 2008 Farm Bill places additional emphasis on providing technical and financial assistance to producers who want to transition to organic farming as well as current certified organic producers. Financial and technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will help producers plan and implement conservation practices to sustain their organic operations.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is available to help farmers and ranchers:

- Address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy conservation concerns;
- Obtain financial and technical assistance to plan and implement basic conservation practices (\$80,000 payment limitation);
- Meet the requirements needed for National Organic Program certification;
- Maintain an existing organic certification; and
- Conserve and improve natural resources for a sustainable farming operation.

High-priority conservation practices to address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy conservation concerns may include:

- Conservation crop rotations;
- Cover crops;
- Nutrient management (organic);
- Pest management/Integrated Pest Management;
- Prescribed grazing; and
- Forest harvest management.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides technical and financial assistance to producers who already have applied basic conservation practices, but want to implement a higher level of conservation. Eligible producers participating in CSP could receive payments for additional conservation treatment on their operations.

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Historically Underserved Individuals & Groups

The 2008 Farm Bill addresses the unique circumstances and concerns of historically underserved individuals and groups. These groups include socially disadvantaged, beginning, and limited-resource farmers and ranchers. Financial and technical assistance and improved access to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and services, including those of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), are available for voluntary program participants.

Many 2008 Farm Bill programs provide up to 90 percent of costs for socially disadvantaged, limited-resource, and beginning farmers or ranchers associated with planning and implementing conservation measures. Up to 30 percent of such payments may be made in advance for purchasing materials or contracting.

Up to 5 percent of available Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds may be used to assist beginning farmers or ranchers and 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. Five percent of available Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) acres may be set aside to assist beginning farmers or ranchers and 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. Unused funds and acres may be “repooled” for these groups and made available to all applicants.

A Beginning Farmer or Rancher is defined as an individual or entity who has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10 consecutive years. All members of an entity must fit this description for the farm or ranch to qualify for USDA aid under this program. Furthermore, the individuals must materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

A Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher is a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group, defined as one whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of the group, without regard to their individual qualities. These groups include:

- American Indians or Alaska Natives
- Asians
- Blacks or African Americans
- Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
- Hispanics

At least 50 percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals for an entity to qualify. Gender alone is not a covered group under NRCS programs in the 2008 Farm Bill.

A Limited-Resource Farmer, Rancher, or Forest Owner has:

- Direct or indirect gross farm sales of not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years;
- A total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four; or
- Less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years.

An entity or joint operation can be a limited-resource farmer, rancher, or forest owner if all individual members independently qualify.

To learn if you qualify, use the Limited Resource Farmer Self-Determination Tool at www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov.

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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service



Specialty Crop Producers

The 2008 Farm Bill places additional emphasis on assistance for specialty crop producers. Specialty crops are intensively cultivated plants including fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture, and floriculture and nursery crops; wild plants are not considered specialty crops. Financial and technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps producers plan and implement conservation practices resulting in sustainable specialty crop operations.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps producers:

- Address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy conservation concerns;
- Obtain financial and technical assistance to plan and implement basic conservation practices; and
- Conserve and improve natural resources for a sustainable farming operation.

High-priority conservation practices that are tailored for specialty crops to address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy conservation may include:

- Conservation crop rotations;
- Cover crops;
- Conservation cover;
- Contour farming and strip cropping;
- Nutrient management;
- Pest management/Integrated Pest Management;
- Field borders and filter strips;
- Irrigation water management;
- Grassed waterways and diversions; and
- Agri-chemical handling facility.

The new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is available to provide technical and financial assistance to producers who already have applied basic conservation practices but want to achieve a higher level of conservation. Eligible producers participating in CSP would receive payments to provide for additional conservation treatment on their operations.

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Conservation Opportunities for Federally Recognized Tribes

Indian Tribes and Indian producers are eligible for all 2008 Farm Bill programs. Special incentives address the unique circumstances and concerns of Indian Tribes through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs.

The 2008 Farm Bill:

- Provides Tribal farmers and ranchers equal opportunity to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), with cost-share assistance for conservation practices up to 90 percent. Advance payments may be available.
- Provides option to enroll acreage owned by Indian Tribes in 30-year contracts, 30-year easements, or permanent easements in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP). Tribes may also enter into 10-year restoration cost-share agreements, under either WRP or HFRP.

- Provides funding, through Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), for up to 50 percent of projects carried out by Tribal, State, and/or local governments or private organizations or individuals.
- Exempts Tribes (but not individuals) from adjusted gross income limitations and program payment limitations that apply to other groups.

Contact your local NRCS office for more information, including official definitions of the terms “Indian Tribes,” “Acreage owned by Indian Tribes,” and “Indian Lands,” or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.



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Climate Change

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to help producers mitigate the effects of climate change.

NRCS provides incentives and supports voluntary actions by private landowners to manage greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and carbon sequestration through a portfolio of beneficial conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). A wide range of conservation efforts can result in sequestration of carbon in soils and woody biomass, reduction in GHG emissions, substitution of fossil fuel with renewable energy sources, and provide additional ecosystem benefits.

NRCS works with partners to develop new technologies and tools to enable producers to make appropriate adaptive management decisions and to prepare for environmental stresses such as drought, changes in disease or pest prevalence, and floods. These efforts are critical for conservation of natural resources, continued production, and food security.

The table on the reverse of this insert illustrates just a few of the approaches that producers may want to consider in their conservation plans.

Conservation Effort	GHG* Objectives	Additional Ecosystem Benefits
Crops		
Conservation tillage and reduced field pass intensity	Sequestration Emissions reduction	Improves soil, water, and air quality. Reduces soil erosion and fuel use.
Efficient nutrient management	Sequestration Emissions reduction	Improves water quality. Saves expenses, time, and labor.
Crop diversity through rotations and cover crops	Sequestration	Reduces erosion and water requirements. Improves soil and water quality.
Livestock		
Manure management	Emissions reduction	On-farm sources of biogas fuel and possibly electricity for large operations. Provides nutrients for crops.
Rotational grazing and improved forage	Sequestration Emissions reduction	Reduces water requirements. Helps withstand drought. Increases long-term grassland productivity.
Feed management	Emissions reduction	Reduces quantity of nutrients. Improves water quality. Increases efficient use of fuel.
Agroforestry		
Windbreaks for crops and livestock	Sequestration Emissions reduction	Improves crop and livestock protection and wildlife habitat. Provides alternative income source (specialty crops, hunting fees).
Silvopasture with rotational grazing and improved forage	Sequestration Emissions reduction	Provides annual income from grazing and long-term income from wood products.
Riparian forest buffer	Sequestration	Improves water quality and wildlife habitat. Provides alternative income source (specialty crops, hunting fees).
Land Use Change		
Conversion of cropland to grassland, wetland, or forest land	Sequestration Emissions reduction	Improves soil, water, and air quality. Reduces soil erosion and fuel use. Improves wildlife habitat.

* Greenhouse gas

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