



Conservation Cost-Share for Farmers and Ranchers

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is made up of 29 agencies and nearly 100,000 employees at more than 4,500 locations across the country and abroad. Here's a link to learn more about each of the agencies:
<https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/agencies>.

Two of those 29 agencies directly help farmers and ranchers improve the productivity, health, and sustainability of their land: the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA)

The FSA has its origins in the Great Depression of the 1930s. Although not named "Farm Service Agency" until 1995, this branch of the USDA has been responding to the changing needs of farmers and ranchers for nearly 90 years. To read a fascinating, short history of the FSA, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/about-fsa/history-and-mission/agency-history/index>.

The FSA administers about 20 different programs that fall into five categories. One of those categories is conservation.

Conservation Reserve Program

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program/index>

CRP is a land conservation program administered by FSA. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers and ranchers enrolled in the program remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length. The long-term goal of the program is to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

Farmers and ranchers love their land.

Anyone who has ever made their living from the land knows that the health of your land affects the productivity of your land. And at the end of the day, productivity is what makes or breaks a business.

Anyone who has ever made a living from the land also knows that making improvements to your land often comes with a hefty price tag.

If you are interested in learning how to improve the health and productivity of your land without breaking the bank, this series will help you do it.

There are federal, state, local, and independent programs specially designed to help farmers and ranchers protect and improve the health of their land.

The majority of the programs are federally funded and administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Interesting facts about CRP:

- CRP was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1985.
- CRP is one of the largest private-land conservation programs in the United States.

The Emergency Conservation Program

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/emergency-conservation/index>

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) provides funding and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to repair damage to agricultural land caused by natural disasters and to install methods for water conservation during severe drought.

Interesting facts about ECP:

- Up to 75% of the cost to implement emergency conservation practices can be provided.
- Qualified limited resource producers may earn up to 90% cost-share.

The Farmable Wetlands Program

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/farmable-wetlands/index>

The Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) works to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers to improve both vegetation and water flow. FWP is a voluntary program to restore up to one million acres of farmable wetlands and associated buffers.

Interesting facts about FWP:

- Landowners enrolled in FWP receive an annual rental payment for their enrolled acres. Contracts last for ten to fifteen years
- Additional cost-sharing and other incentives are available to help offset the costs associated with putting these practices in place.

Want to Learn More?

Make an appointment with your local FSA officer to learn more about which FSA conservation programs are a good fit for your farm or ranch.

If you are a Florida farmer or rancher, find your local FSA office here: <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=fl&agency=fsa>.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The NRCS also has its origins in the Great Depression of the 1930s –specifically amidst the Dust Bowl years. Originally called the Soil Conservation Service, it was renamed Natural Resources Conservation Service in 1994 to better reflect the agency's broadened scope. When first established, the agency's primary aim was to decrease the severity of extreme soil erosion, persistent drought, and crop failures by helping farmers implement better soil conservation practices.

To read a full and fascinating 85-year history of the NRCS, visit https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021392

The NRCS has about two dozen programs that fall into four categories: financial assistance, technical assistance, conservation easements, and landscape planning for watersheds. All NRCS programs help producers manage natural resources as sustainably as possible.

The NRCS administers five financial assistance programs. Not all programs are available in every state. Talk to your local NRCS agent to learn which programs you are eligible for. This short video explains how to get started with the NRCS: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4HPCZubEEA>



Here are two programs available to farmers and ranchers in Florida:

Environmental Quality Incentive Program

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip>

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against increasing weather volatility.

Interesting facts about EQIP:

- The EQIP program provides funding for a wide diversity of practices including prescribed burning of pastures, upgrading to highly efficient irrigation systems, using cover crops, and planting strips of wildflowers for pollinators.
- The NRCS provides you with money to implement your project and the technical assistance you need to do it well.

Conservation Stewardship Program

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp>

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. CSP pays participants for conservation performance— the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Interesting facts about CSP:

- Eligible lands include private and tribal agricultural lands, cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland, and nonindustrial private forest land.
- CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or type of operation, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Caribbean and Pacific Islands.