



BACKGROUND: NRCS provides leadership and technical assistance for the conservation of natural resources to ensure the continued production of food and fiber. The agency regularly seeks field level input from our conservation partners to continuously improve our Farm Bill program offerings. Local Work Groups (LWGs) play a critical role in this information gathering process. Each LWG includes representatives from the SWCD Board of Directors, FSA County Committee, the FSA County Executive Director, the NRCS District Conservationist, members of Tribal governments and other local and state agency representatives. The NRCS State Office staff, the FY25 Farm Bill Program Advisory Committee and the State Technical Committee will use feedback obtained from District Conservationist-facilitated discussions with these representatives to develop recommendations for the FY25 program offerings.

The LWGs' responsibilities to support locally led conservation include:

- Ensuring a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input.
- Utilizing the conservation needs assessment to help identify program funding needs and conservation practices.
- Identifying priority resource concerns and high-priority areas needing assistance (as appropriate).
- Recommending USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units) and payment rates.

In FY19, the State Office developed a questionnaire that was sent to all State Technical Committee members and Local Work Groups, via our local staff, to obtain input from these groups regarding our 2018 Farm Bill Program priorities. For the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the results established our 2018 Farm Bill EQIP resource concern priorities, they are, and will remain for the remainder of this Farm Bill: (1) Water Quality, (2) Soil Erosion, and (3) Soil Quality.

For the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the results established Soil Quality as our 2018 Farm Bill CSP resource concern priority.

A partial list of statutory funding requirements for Farm Bill programs is provided below along with questions to help facilitate your discussions.

EQIP (funding and mandatory offerings)

- Funding Targets:
 - a. 50 percent for livestock-related practices
 - b. 5 percent for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers
 - c. 5 percent for beginning farmers and ranchers
 - d. 10 percent for wildlife habitat related practices
 - e. 5 percent for EQIP-CIC



United States Department of Agriculture

f. Remaining funds for:

- i. High Tunnel Systems, Energy, Strike Force, Organic, Transitioning to Organic and Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs), which are mandated national priorities that do not receive earmarks.
- ii. Cropland, Forestry, CIG, Urban Ag are state priorities.

• Earmarks (dedicated funding that cannot be used elsewhere)

- a. Golden-winged Warbler
- b. National Water Quality Initiative
- c. Longleaf Pine Initiative
- d. Joint Chiefs Initiative
- e. Northern Bobwhite

CSP (funding targets)

- 5 percent for beginning farmers and ranchers
- 5 percent for socially disadvantaged farmers
- 5 percent for organic and organic transition

ACEP

- ALE applications must be from eligible entities that can hold easements
- WRE applications must be from private landowners and Indian tribes

RCPP

- The 2018 Farm Bill expanded the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to a standalone program. Partners develop project applications to address specific natural resource objectives in a proposed area or region and submit them during the annual announcement of program funding. Through RCPP, NRCS works with partners to provide a combination of financial and technical assistance to help producers implement conservation practices. RCPP federal assistance is delivered through land management/restoration, rental, easements, public works/watershed structures activities.

The programs listed above are our “standard” programs, and funding has remained consistent over the last several Fiscal Years (FY). We will continue with those target allocations for FY25.

Inflation Reduction Act: On August 16th, 2022, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) into law. With the passage of the IRA, approximately \$20 billion of IRA funds will support USDA’s conservation programs during Fiscal Years (FY) 2023-2026. For the current FY, FY24, Virginia NRCS has been allocated the following amounts for our Conservation Programs.

Mandatory targets of IRA funds:

- 5 percent Beginning Farmer
- 5 percent Socially Disadvantaged Farmer
- 10 percent Wildlife
- 10 percent Source Water
- No mandatory target for Livestock



United States Department of Agriculture

IRA conservation funds may only be used to fund one 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. At this writing, we do not have the specific FY25 primary practices that will be eligible to support IRA contracts; however, we anticipate that they will closely match the attachment to this bulletin, *Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List for FY24*.

CSP-IRA and EQIP-IRA: IRA funds are authorized only for contracts with one or more conservation practices or activities, identified by NRCS, that directly improve soil carbon, reduce nitrogen losses, or that reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions, associated with agricultural production.