



Conservation Planning Process

1 Contact your Local USDA Service Center

[Click HERE to view the office locator](#)

Here, you'll find the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NRCS provides assistance to agricultural producers in a manner that will promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals. The Conservation Planning process puts you in charge. It enables you to create your own conservation plan that incorporates your goals and objects. The plan itself does not include financial assistance but it can serve as a springboard for future participation in conservation programs. Your local NRCS office has conservation planning experts who will assist you.



2 Work with an NRCS Conservationist to Develop a Conservation Plan

A conservation plan addresses your entire farming operation identifying resource problems associated with soil, water, air, and other natural resources, and offers conservation solutions to address those problems. Many good solutions to common resource problems have been developed over the years and are incorporated into conservation practices. NRCS can help you to select conservation practices that best suit your operation.



3 Let the Plan be Your Guide

An organized conservation plan will provide a roadmap of resource development opportunities over the next five to ten year period. This will reduce the probability of making short-term decisions that may conflict with your long-term goals.

4 An Approved Plan Offers Many Advantages

The choice to develop a farm conservation plan is yours—it is voluntary; but developing it has many advantages. For example, certain NRCS programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), require an approved conservation plan. It will also greatly assist you in achieving sustainable farming practices.

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Natural Resources Conservation Service NRCS in Kentucky

Providing *conservation solutions* to protect your way of life

Our Mission

Guided by the mission of helping people help the land, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) collaborates with farmers, communities and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private lands. Working side by side with our partners and customers, we identify natural resource concerns, such as water quality and quantity issues, soil erosion, air quality, wetlands and wildlife habitat, and develop unique solutions for restoring and protecting these resources.

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Who We Are

Our workforce consists of a diverse group of skilled natural resource professionals. With representatives in nearly every county, we have a thorough, first-hand understanding and appreciation of the challenges, limitations and special needs unique to the Kentucky landscape. These skills enable us to develop solutions that best match our customers' goals with the needs of the land.

What We Do

As an agency, our goal is to help landowners develop conservation plans and provide advice on the design, layout, construction, management, operation, maintenance and evaluation of voluntary conservation practices. Our activities include farmland protection, natural resource improvement, urban conservation, and local community projects to improve social, economic and environmental conditions.

NRCS also conducts soil surveys and the National Resources inventory nationwide, to provide the basis for conservation planning activities and an accurate assessment of the land's condition.

How We Do It

NRCS provides both technical and financial assistance to landowner and managers through Farm Bill programs for the benefit of farm, watershed and community. Additional easement programs are also available to provide long-term management options.

How to Get Involved

Participation is voluntary. If you are interested in learning more about our conservation programs and services, contact your local NRCS service center.

Find us online at:
www.ky.nrcs.usda.gov

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

NRCS delivers technical assistance through its voluntary Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA). Through CTA, NRCS employees provide conservation options and recommendations, as well as planning and engineering assistance to farmers, local governments and urban landowners. Although CTA does not include financial or cost-share assistance, landowners may develop plans that can, in turn, serve as a springboard for future participation in conservation programs.

Programs

NRCS's natural resource conservation programs offer agricultural producers and non-industrial private forest landowners both financial and technical assistance to voluntarily conserve natural resources on privately-owned farm lands. The following is a summary of the various conservation programs funded through the Farm Bill and other federal programs:

Financial Assistance Programs	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Assistance for broad spectrum of conservation practices that promote agricultural production, forest management, wildlife habitat and environmental quality.
	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Encourages producers to embrace long-term comprehensive conservation by maintaining and improving existing practices and farming activities.
Easement Programs	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Conserves agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits.
	Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) Protects the agricultural use and conservation values of working farms. Helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture through the purchase of conservation easements.
	Wetland Reserve Enhancements (ACEP-WRE) Restores, protects, and enhances wetlands through the purchase of a wetland reserve easement.
Watershed/Community Programs	Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) Restores and enhances forest ecosystems for biodiversity and more.
	Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) Undertakes emergency measures on watersheds damaged by fire, flood, and other natural calamities to prevent erosion and runoff that could endanger lives and property.

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Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Is EQIP Right for Me?



Can You Answer 'Yes' to the Following?

Then EQIP may be a good fit for your operation

- I own or rent, and manage land for agricultural or forest production, such as cropland, rangeland, grassland or forestland.
- I have control of the land such as through ownership or a lease.
- I can prove irrigation history if my conservation work involves water conservation with irrigation system improvements.
- My land complies with highly erodible land and wetland conservation determination provisions (if unsure, ask your local USDA Service Center).
- I established or updated farm records with the Farm Service Agency for me and my operation.
- I have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS.
- My average gross income is less than \$900,000 (does not apply to Indian Tribes).
- If I am a member of an entity or joint operation, I have authority to make management decisions for the business.

What is EQIP?

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers technical and financial assistance for working lands, including field crops, specialty crops, organic, confined livestock and grazing, and non-industrial private forest land.

Rather than take land out of production, EQIP helps farmers maintain or improve production while conserving natural resources on working landscapes.

What Are the Benefits?

EQIP may provide many benefits, including 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 drought and increasing weather extremes.

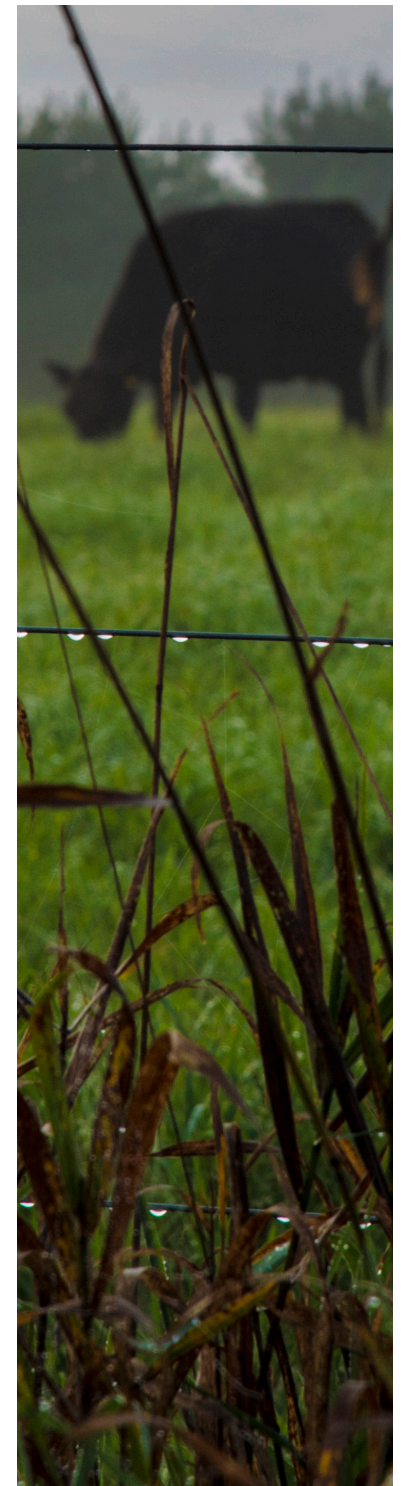
For example, EQIP can help you:

- Reduce contamination from agricultural sources, such as animal feeding operations.
- Efficiently utilize nutrients, reduce input costs and reduce non-point source pollution.
- Increase soil health to help mitigate against increasing weather volatility and improved drought resiliency.

How Does EQIP Work?

EQIP supports producers who improve and sustain natural resources on their operation by implementing structural, vegetative, and management practices.

For example, if you want to use EQIP conservation practices to improve irrigation efficiency, renovate pastureland or nutrient and pest management on your eligible land,



NRCS offers technical assistance, and EQIP offers financial assistance through a contractual agreement.

If you decide to work with NRCS, you will receive a one-on-one consultation from a local NRCS conservation planner to evaluate your current management system and conduct an assessment of natural resources on your land. You will then work with the NRCS conservation planner to develop a free conservation plan that addresses the identified resource concerns.

Once you choose the conservation practices or activities that best fit your needs, and if your application is selected for funding, EQIP offers payments for implementing these practices on your land with the expectation that you will operate while maintaining the practices for the expected lifespan.

How Long is a EQIP Contract?

The length of an EQIP contract can vary depending on your goals and timeline, but cannot exceed 10 years.

EQIP Eligibility

Land Eligibility

Q. What lands are eligible for EQIP?

- A. For eligibility purposes in Farm Bill programs, NRCS considers any land on which agricultural commodities, livestock or forest-related products are produced as eligible land.

That land can include cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands.

EQIP has no minimum acreage requirement; however, EQIP is a competitive program that awards points based on resource concerns to be addressed and other factors.

Producer Eligibility

Q. Who is eligible to apply for EQIP?

- A. Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian Tribes that have control of the land and currently manage it for agricultural, forest and livestock production.

Special EQIP Initiatives

EQIP has a broad delivery system to put targeted conservation on the ground at the local level, across the entire country.



EQIP targets conservation through the following initiatives to address priority natural resource concerns on the most vulnerable lands and high priority watersheds:

- High Tunnel Initiative
- Organic Initiative
- Air Quality Initiative
- On Farm Energy Initiative

EQIP Payments

Q. What types of payments are offered through EQIP?

- A. EQIP offers payments for practices and activities which may be categorized as vegetative, structural, and management practices.

Producers may also apply for Conservation Activity Plans through a Technical Service Provider.

Historically Underserved (HU) Participants:

Historically underserved participants are eligible for increased payment rates and advanced payments to help offset the costs of purchasing goods or services. HU participants include socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran and limited resource farmers and ranchers.

- **Dedicated funds** – at least 10 percent of EQIP funds are dedicated to socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Higher payment rates** – up to 25 percent higher than the standard practice payment rates.
- **Veteran Preference** – eligible veterans who compete in the beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers funding pools, receive preference points.



Q. When are payments made?

- A. Under the general EQIP payment process, a producer is reimbursed after a conservation practice is certified as meeting NRCS standards and specifications. This process often means that producers must pay up front costs with their own funds, unless the participant opts for the advance payment option.

Q. Do I have to pay income taxes on my payments?

- A. Yes. All payments made to you by NRCS are reported to the Internal Revenue Service and should be reported as income on your tax return for the applicable tax year. You will receive a Form 1099 to report EQIP payments on your tax return.

EQIP Application and Evaluation**Q. How do I apply for EQIP?**

- A. Contact your local USDA Service Center and let them know you are interested in EQIP. A conservation planner will work with you to determine your eligibility.

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round and funding is provided through a competitive process.

State-specific application cutoff dates are set to evaluate applications for funding. Cutoff dates can be found at nrcs.usda.gov/statecutoffdates. If you apply after the application cut-off date, your application will automatically be deferred to the next funding cycle.

If you are new to working with USDA, you will need to establish your Farm Record with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Establishing a Farm Record requires several forms and documents, so make an appointment with your FSA office as soon as possible.

Q. How are EQIP applications evaluated?

- A. Once NRCS completes an assessment of your operation and you choose the conservation practices or activities that you want to implement, NRCS will rank your application to determine how well your current and future management system will address national, state, and local natural resource priorities.

NRCS will rank your application against other similar eligible applications in the same ranking pool, with the highest scoring applications receiving contract offers first.



Conservation Stewardship Program

Is CSP Right for Me?



Can You Answer 'Yes' to the Following?

Then CSP may be a good fit for your operation.

- I own or rent, and manage land for agricultural or forest production, such as cropland, rangeland, grassland or pasture.
- I have already been doing conservation work on my operation.
- I want to expand my existing conservation efforts to achieve a higher level of environmental stewardship.
- I intend or plan to maintain control of the land for at least five years.
- My land complies with highly erodible land and wetland conservation determination provisions (if unsure, ask your local USDA Service Center)
- I have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS.
- My adjusted gross income is less than \$900,000 (does not apply to Indian Tribes).
- As a member of an entity or joint operation, I have authority to make management decisions for the business

What is CSP?

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers technical and financial assistance to help agricultural and forest producers take their conservation efforts to the next level.

The program is designed to compensate agricultural and forest producers who agree to increase their level of conservation by adopting additional conservation activities and maintaining their baseline level of conservation. CSP is for producers who are passionate about conservation and environmental stewardship.

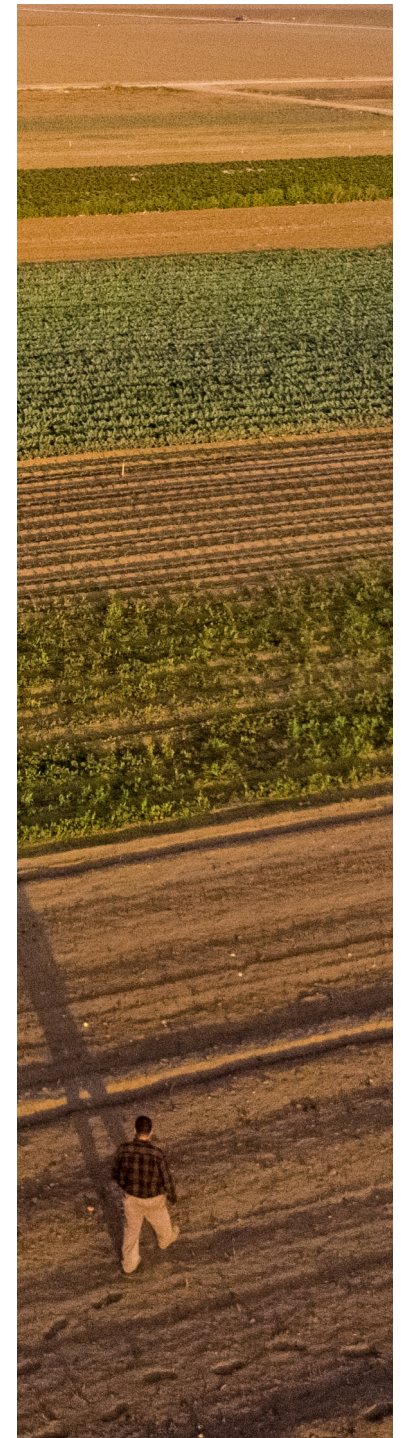
What are the benefits?

CSP may provide many benefits, including increased crop productivity, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements and increased resilience to weather extremes. CSP also encourages adoption of new technologies and management techniques.

For example, CSP can help you:

- Schedule timely planting and management of cover crops
- Develop a grazing plan that will improve your forage base
- Implement no-till to reduce erosion or manage forested areas in a way that benefits wildlife habitat

If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals.



How Does CSP Work?

CSP offers opportunities for producers to expand on existing conservation efforts by applying new conservation practices, enhancements, and bundles. These new activities will help enhance natural resources and improve the operation.

For example, if you have been planting a cover crop, you may decide to try an enhancement for a multi-species cover crop or implement a deep rooted cover crop to break up soil compaction.

If you decide to apply for CSP, the local NRCS conservation planner will have a one-on-one consultation with you to evaluate your current management system and the natural resources on your land. You will then work with the NRCS conservation planner to select new CSP conservation activities based on your management objectives for your operation.

Once you choose the conservation practices or activities that best fit, and if your application is selected for funding, CSP offers annual payments for implementing these practices on your land, and operating and maintaining existing conservation efforts.

Want to take it a step further? CSP also offers bundles where you can select a suite of enhancements and receive a higher payment rate.

How Long is a CSP Contract?

Five years, with the potential to renew for another five-year period if you successfully complete your first contract term, and if your renewal application ranks high enough (CSP renewals are a competitive process).

CSP Eligibility

Land Eligibility

Q. What lands are eligible for CSP?

- A. Eligible lands include private agricultural lands, agricultural Indian lands, nonindustrial private forest land, farmstead, associated agricultural lands and public land that is under the control of the applicant and part of their operation. There is no minimum acreage requirement. CSP enrolls your entire operation into the program, not just one specific field or tract. All land must be in compliance with USDA highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions to be eligible for CSP.

Q. I am new to farming? Am I eligible for CSP?

- A. Not yet. The land must be actively used for producing an agricultural or forest product. Lands being cleared or prepped for future agricultural production are not eligible for CSP until an agricultural operation has been established and crops, food or fiber have been successfully produced. Be sure to check with your local USDA service center before clearing any land to ensure that you will not violate the highly erodible land conservation or wetland conservation requirements. Failing to have NRCS complete proper determinations may impact your ability to participate in USDA programs.

Producer Eligibility

Q. Who is eligible to apply for CSP?

- A. Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian Tribes that own or rent and currently manage land for agricultural or forest production. The applicant must have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS and must maintain control of the land for the entire span of the 5-year CSP contract. The applicant must have an adjusted gross income of less than \$900,000. The adjusted gross income requirement does not apply to Indian Tribes.

Stewardship Threshold Eligibility

Q. What is the stewardship threshold?

- A. Stewardship threshold is a term NRCS uses to determine if a CSP applicant is currently meeting or exceeding an adequate level of conservation criteria for a particular natural resource concern. CSP applicants must currently be meeting the stewardship threshold for at least two priority natural resource concerns on every land use included in the operation. They must also agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional resource concern by the end of the contract on at least one land use. Don't worry if you are unsure of your threshold because an NRCS planner will assist you.

Practice Enhancements and Bundles

Q. What is a conservation practice?

- A. Conservation practices can improve soil, water, plants, air, wildlife habitat, and related natural resources. Each conservation practice must be performed using NRCS practice standards developed by each state.

Q. What is an enhancement?

- A. Enhancements are conservation activities used to treat resource concerns and improve conservation performance.

Q. What is a bundle?

- A. Bundles are land-use specific and consist of at least three enhancements, for which implementation as a group improves conservation performance and addresses multiple resource concerns in a comprehensive and cost-effective manner.

Each bundle has three or more required enhancements, and for some bundles, the applicant has the option to pick additional enhancements from a select list that addresses specific resource concerns.



Producers interested in implementing enhancements or bundles on their property can visit with their local NRCS conservation planner to learn more about them.

CSP Payments

Q. What types of payments are offered through CSP?

- A. There are three types of payments available through CSP.
1. **Annual contract payments** which are based on two components:
 - Payments to maintain the existing level of conservation based on the land uses included in the contract
 - Payments to implement additional conservation practices and activities.
 2. **Supplemental payments** for producers willing to implement a resource conserving crop rotation, improve an existing resource conserving crop rotation, or implement advanced grazing management
 3. **Minimum contract payments** for most contracts.

Q. When are payments made?

- A. NRCS makes payments as soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous fiscal year and completed before September 30.

Q. Do I have to pay income taxes on my payments?

- A. Yes. All payments made to you by NRCS are reported to the Internal Revenue Service and should be reported as income on your tax return for the applicable tax year. You will receive a Form 1099 to report CSP payments on your tax return.

CSP Application and Evaluation

Q. How do I apply for CSP?

- A. Contact your local NRCS field office and let them know you are interested in CSP. A conservation planner will work with you to determine your stewardship threshold eligibility.

If you are new to working with USDA, you will need to establish your Farm Record with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Establishing a Farm Record requires several forms and documents, so make an appointment with your FSA office as soon as possible.

In addition to your Farm Record documents, you will also need to submit to NRCS:

1. NRCS CPA-1200- Conservation Program Application
2. A map showing all land uses and acres in the operation.
3. A map or other documentation identifying any known ineligible land and associated acreage amounts.

Q. How are CSP applications evaluated?

- A. Once NRCS completes an assessment of your operation and you choose the conservation practices or activities that you want to implement, NRCS will rank your application to determine how well your current and future management system will address national, state, and local natural resource priorities.

NRCS will rank your application against other similar eligible applications in the same ranking pool, with the highest scoring applications receiving contract offers first.

CSP Grassland Conservation Initiative

CSP offers the new Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI) that aids eligible producers with protecting grazing lands, conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources, and achieving related conservation values through a five-year grassland conservation contract. Eligibility is limited to producers with recorded grass on their FSA acreage report from 2009 through 2017.

