NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

- Established in 1933 as the Soil Erosion Service to fight soil and wind erosion, dust storms, loss of cropland.
- Technical/Scientific agency of USDA
- Field staff based in most counties throughout the Nation to serve private landowners
- Conservation delivered through local Conservation Districts
Private lands account for 70 percent of the total land in the United States.

90 percent in Arkansas.
NRCS – TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Identify Resource Needs
- Conservation planning, design and installation of conservation systems
- Program eligibility and signup
NRCS – 2014 FARM BILL (CONSERVATION TITLE)

- Basis for most USDA and NRCS conservation programs and policies
- Establishes programs and funding authorization
- State Technical Committee
- Local Work Groups
Locally-led conservation is based on the principle that local people make the best decisions for their own communities. This was recognized even 75 years ago by the establishment of county conservation districts to address natural resource concerns.
Program Changes:

- Consolidates Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) into EQIP

- Maintains that “at least” 60 percent of funds to go to address livestock resource concerns

- Establishes a priority for veterans who are beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers/ranchers or ranchers, or socially disadvantaged farmers
EQIP FUNDING AUTHORITY

- 2014: $1.35 Billion
- 2015: $1.6 Billion
- 2016: $1.65 Billion
- 2017: $1.65 Billion
- 2018: $1.75 Billion
Program Changes:

- Two priority resource concerns
- 10 million acre annual enrollment cap
- 5-year contracts with the option to renew subject to additional stewardship gains.
AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM

- Consolidates Wetlands Reserve Program, Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program and Grassland Reserve Program into a single program with two components
  - Wetland Reserve Easements
  - Agricultural Land Easements
WATERSHED REHABILITATION

• The Farm Bill authorizes $250 million in mandatory funds to remain available until expended for watershed rehabilitation efforts under the Watershed and Flood Prevention Act.
• Extends the authority to appropriate $85 million per year through 2018 (discretionary)
CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

- Administered by the Farm Services Agency with technical assistance from NRCS and state forestry agencies
- Acreage cap of 24 million acres in 2017
- Adds working grasslands option of up to 2 million acres
- One time early out option in 2015
- Provides more flexibility for cover management
- Maintains the opportunity for retiring farmers and ranchers to transition these lands to beginning or veteran farmers and ranchers
REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Combines:
- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
- Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program
- Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
- The Great Lakes Basin Program

- Locally Led
- Competitive
- Leverages federal investment
Critical Conservation Areas
For projects in eight geographic areas chosen by Secretary. These receive 35 percent of funding.

National
For nationwide and multistate projects. These receive 40 percent of funding.

State
For projects in a single state. These receive 25 percent of funding.

Applicants must identify one specific funding pool under which the application will be evaluated.
RCPP - MEASURES OF SUCCESS

NRCS will specifically measure success through the following four criteria:

1. Solutions
2. Contributions
3. Innovation
4. Participation

Due | Selected
---|---
Pre-proposals | July 14 | July 28
Full Proposal | Sep 26 | Oct 17
NRCS – CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE

- Links financial assistance in USDA programs to conservation, and NOW CROP INSURANCE
- Highly Erodible Cropland
- Wetland (Swampbuster)
RULEMAKING

- Changes in existing regulations to be published in coming weeks
  - State Technical Committee
  - Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention
  - Healthy Forest Reserve Program
  - Technical Service Providers
OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEW FARM BILL

COMMITMENT TO LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVES
GULF OF MEXICO INITIATIVE

Overall Initiative Area
Focus Areas Within Initiative
Priority Watersheds
NRCS - Helping People Help the Land

Productive Lands, Healthy Environment

Learn more
www.nrcs.usda.gov/FarmBill