



United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance Resources



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

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NRCS – Who we are

NRCS works with farmers, ranchers, tribes, woodland owners, communities and other individuals and groups to conserve water, soil, wildlife habitat and other natural resources.

Working with landowners and partners, we identify natural resource concerns and develop unique and innovative conservation plans to address these issues.

NRCS financial and technical assistance Farm Bill programs are entirely voluntary.



► NRCS works directly with farmers to conserve our nation's natural resources.



NRCS Assistance

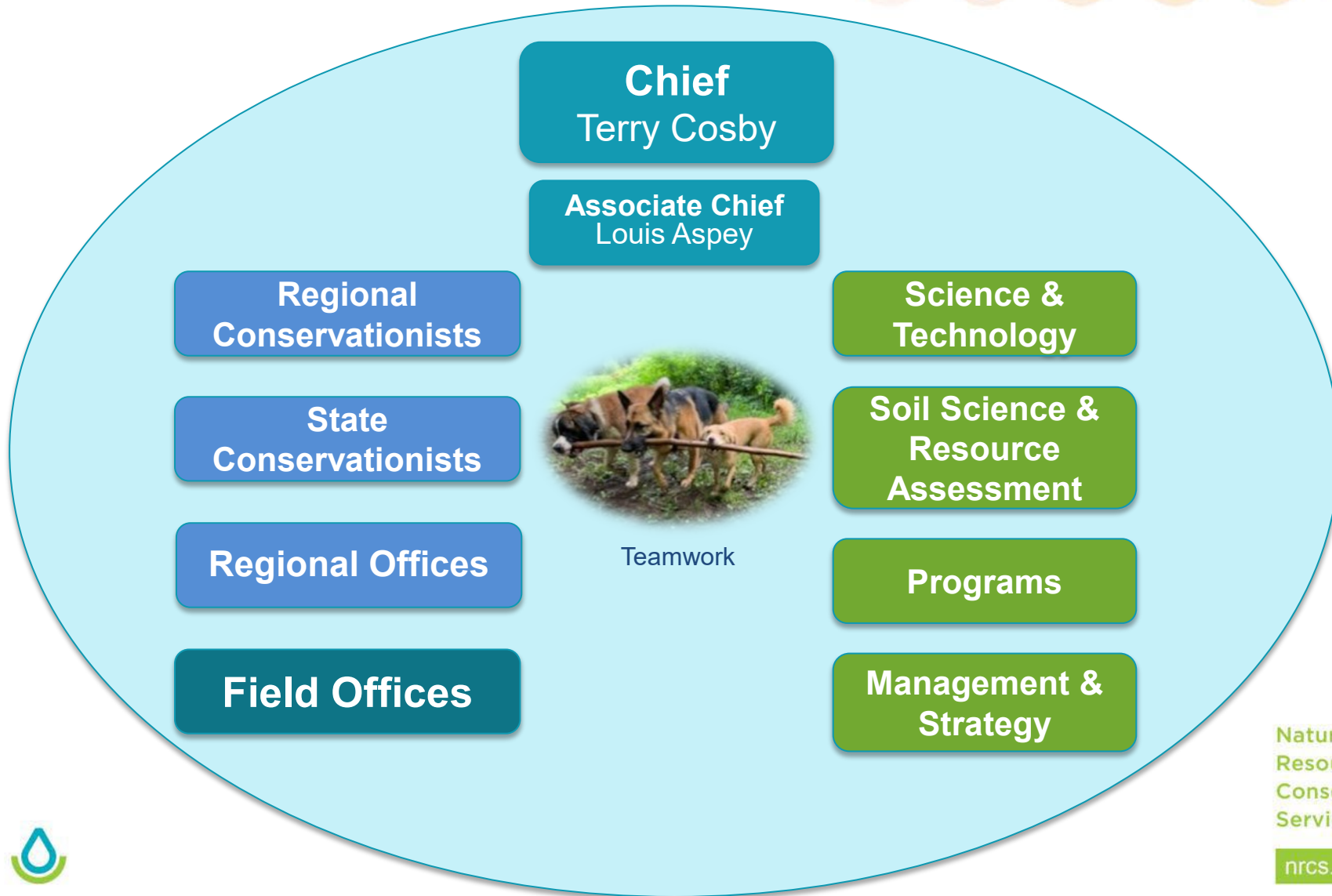


Technical Assistance: NRCS conservationists, through our conservation technical assistance program, provide science-based information to farmers, ranchers, and woodland owners in order to help identify and solve natural resource problems on privately owned working lands. Often, the result of this process is a record of decision called a Conservation Plan, which contains a suite of conservation practices selected to address the identified problem(s).

Financial Assistance: NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible landowners who choose to apply for and are selected for program funding. Financial assistance provides funding to landowners to assist with the implementation of conservation practices from their conservation plan that are included in conservation program contracts.



Technical Assistance



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Technical Assistance



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**Ecological
Sciences
Division**

**West
Technology
Support Center**

**Central
Technology
Support Center**

**East
Technology
Support Center**

**Soil Science &
Resource
Assessment**

Core Team
*Technical specialists who
provide support to the
western states*

Core Team
*Technical specialists who
provide support to the
central states*

Core Team
*Technical specialists who
provide support to the
eastern states*

**Conservation
Engineering
Division**

**National
Technology
Development
Teams**

**National
Technology
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**Soil Health
Division**

- Water Quality & Quantity
- Air Quality
- Energy & Environmental Markets

- Grazing Lands
- Wetlands

- Animal Manure & Nutrient Management

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Water Quality and Quantity Team

- **Agronomy**
- **Drainage Management**
- **Environmental Engineering**
- **Edge-of-Field Monitoring**
- **Geomorphology**
- **Hydrology**
- **Hydraulic Engineering**
- **Nutrient Management**
- **Pest Management**
- **Soil Science**
- **Technology Development**
- **Water Quality**
- **Watershed Planning**



NRCS Financial Assistance Programs

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**
 - Organic, High Tunnel, On-Farm Energy (National Initiatives)
 - Source Water Protection
 - NWQI (National Initiative in coordination with EPA)
 - WaterSmart (National initiative in coordination with BOR)
- **EOF Monitoring**
- **Conservation Innovation Grants**
 - Classic
 - On-farm
 - Alternative funding
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**
- **PL-566 – Watershed Operations**



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, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat.



Accessing Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding

- EQIP is a continuous sign-up program. Applications may be submitted at any time. However;
 - Specific application cutoff dates are set for each funding cycle.
 - Applications received after an application deadline will be deferred until the next funding period.
 - Contact your local NRCS office for current cutoff dates, funding opportunities, and application materials.
- Both the land and the applicant must be “EQIP-eligible.”
- Applicants must establish (or update) farm records with their local Farm Services Agency office
- Applicants must comply with Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Compliance provisions



National Water Quality Initiative

The National Water Quality Initiative is a partnership among NRCS, state water quality agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address impaired water bodies through voluntary conservation. NRCS provides targeted funding for financial and technical assistance in small watersheds most in need and where farmers can use conservation practices to make a difference.



NWQI funds 4 Types of Projects



- 1) Watershed assessments called “Planning Phase Proposals” for watersheds with an impaired waterbody
- 2) Implementation Phase projects for on-the-ground conservation practices to help treat water quality impaired streams.
- 3) Source Water Protection assessments or “Planning Phase Proposals” to protect groundwater or surface water sources of drinking water
- 4) Implementation Phase projects for on-the-ground conservation practices to treat Source Water Protection areas



Watershed Selection Considerations (NHQ)



What NRCS's National Headquarters watershed team looks for in a NWQI proposal;

- Is there sufficient technical capacity and producer interest to warrant a long-term investment?
- Does a network of partnering agencies already exist?
- Is there sufficient density of producers to provide the expected water quality improvement within the watershed?
- Can partners conduct monitoring to track the change in water quality attributed to NWQI practices?



NWQI Watershed Assessments (Planning Phase)

Prior to requesting NWQI funding for on-the-ground projects, a *completed assessment is required*.

The assessment:

- Can be funded with NWQI as a Planning Phase project
- Helps to identify critical source areas needing treatment
- Meets EPA/NRCS agreed upon minimum assessment requirements
- Identifies conservation systems amenable to producers
- The assessment includes treatments needed at the field level

The assessment should include:

- Description of the source water protection area characteristics
- Primary resource concerns (NRCS specific)
- Identification of critical source areas
- Conservation systems that will be used and list of practices
- Metrics to demonstrate progress in meeting SWPA goals
- Proposed budget by year
- Outreach plan

FY23 priorities and funding have not yet been announced



Source Water Protection in the 2018 Farm Bill

Section 1244(n): Source Water Protection Through Targeting of Agricultural Practices

NRCS shall encourage the protection of drinking water sources through the following methods:

- Collaborate with State Technical Committees (STC) and Community Water Systems in each state to;
 - Identify local priority areas for drinking water protection
 - Address water quality or quantity concerns
- Provide increased incentives for practices that relate to water quality and quantity
- Protect drinking water sources in a manner that also benefits producers
- Dedicate at least 10% of the total funds available for all conservation programs (with the exception of the Conservation Reserve Program), each year beginning in FY 2019 through FY 2023, to be used for source water protection.



Edge of Field Monitoring

NRCS's Water Quality Monitoring Activity Standards

In 2013, NRCS developed Conservation Activity Standards:

- Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring Data Collection and Evaluation (201)
- Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring System Installation (202)



NRCS's Water Quality Monitoring Activity Standards

Objectives:

- 1) Evaluate conservation system performance;
- 2) Validate and calibrate NRCS models, and
- 3) Help the farmer make the best conservation investments possible



Why NRCS EOF Monitoring?

- It provides a complete perspective of nutrient and sediment movement within a watershed, when combined with instream monitoring, and watershed level monitoring
- NRCS monitoring data is confidential
- From a conservation perspective, it is the direct link to the planning process and subsequent adaptive management



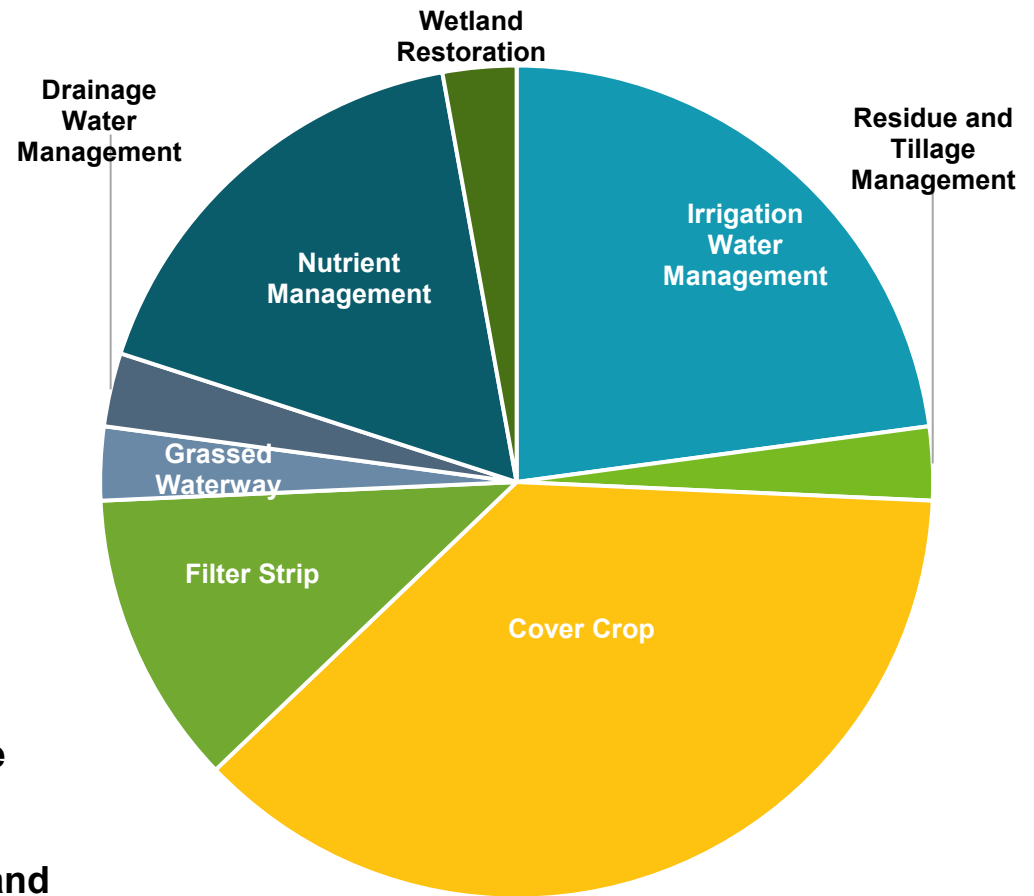
EOF Monitoring Status

- Approximately 40 sites across the nation
- Many have shown water quality benefits with tested conservation practices or systems

ONGOING IMPROVEMENTS

- Update Activity Standards to utilize new, low-cost technology
- Develop Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA) to increase flexibility
- Improve reporting and data storage

FY23 funding has not yet been announced. If interested, contact your local field office *and* Karma Anderson or Jason Roth.



Conservation Innovation Grants

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a competitive program that supports the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands.

National CIG

- A CIG funding notice is announced each year, through nationwide competitive grants process.
- Funds for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years
- Projects may be watershed-based, regional, multi-state or nationwide in scope

State CIG

- The CIG state component emphasizes projects that benefit a limited geographical area
- Participating states announce their funding availability for CIG competitions through their state NRCS offices

On-Farm Trials

- Up to \$25 million annually is available for On-Farm Trials
- Funding goes directly to partners, which provides technical assistance and incentive payments to producers to implement innovative approaches on their lands

FY23 priorities and funding have not yet been announced

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns.

- RCPP will provide up to \$225 million in FY22 for public-private partnerships to address natural resource challenges on agricultural land
- Enhanced Alternative Funding Arrangement provision—NRCS may award up to 15 AFA projects, which are more grant-like and rely more on partner capacity to implement conservation activities
- Emphasis on project outcomes—all RCPP projects must now develop and report on their environmental outcomes
- Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to work with local NRCS staff during the development of a proposal
- The deadline for FY22 RCPP was April 13, 2022
- For more information about RCPP or how to apply, go to <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/rcpp/>



PL-566: Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566) provides technical and financial assistance to public entities for planning and implementation of projects that:

- Protect watersheds
- Mitigate floods
- Improve water quality
- Reduce soil erosion
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat
- Create opportunities for hydroelectric power production.

Project sponsors provide a portion of the funding and have commitments throughout the process and after implementation.

PL-566 funding is available for: planning and implementation of large projects (<250,000 acres).

To learn more about NRCS's Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program, please [contact your state's Program Manager.](#)



USDA Funding for Climate-Smart

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities

- In FY22, USDA is investing \$1 billion in partnerships to support America's climate-smart farmers, ranchers and forest landowners
- The new [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#) opportunity will finance pilot projects that create market opportunities for U.S. agricultural and forestry products that use climate-smart practices and include innovative, cost-effective ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas benefits
- Funding will be provided in two funding pools:
 - **May 6, 2022**, for the first funding pool (proposals from \$5 million to \$100 million),
 - **June 10, 2022**, for the second funding pool (proposals from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999).

Visit www.usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities for additional information, including details on Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities and resources to support your application.



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Questions?

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