

What's New: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the 2018 Farm Bill



Conservation Overview
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthens and expands support to producers who address significant natural resource concerns through adoption of conservation practices and activities. • Ensures that voluntary conservation programs balance farm productivity with conservation benefits so the most fertile and productive lands remain in production while land retired for conservation purposes favors more environmentally sensitive acres. • Supports conservation programs that ensure cost-effective financial assistance for improved soil health, water and air quality, and other natural resource benefits. • Encourages entry into farming through increased access to land and capital for young, beginning, veteran, and underrepresented farmers.
Environmental Quality Incentives Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds potential resource concerns related to beneficial cost-effective operation changes. • Raises cap for organic producers to \$140,000 over six years. • New enrollment option through incentive contracts to address priority resource concerns. • Requires advance payment option be offered to historically underserved producers. • Authorizes direct program assistance to irrigation districts, including acequias and other entities, for purposes of improving water use efficiencies.
Conservation Stewardship Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases payment rates for adoption of cover crop rotations and advanced grazing management activities. • Authorizes contract extensions to facilitate renewal under new program authority. • Transforms funding mechanism for program contracts, authorizing specified annual funding levels. • Provides specific support for organic and transitioning to organic production activities. • Includes special grassland conservation initiative for certain producers who have maintained cropland base acres.
Agricultural Management Assistance Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains support for conservation practices that reduce crop risk.

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Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorizes assistance to partners who pursue 'Buy-Protect-Sell' transactions. • Requires a conservation plan for highly erodible land that will be protected by an agricultural land easement. • Increases flexibility for partners to meet cost-share matching requirements. • Identifies water quality as a program purpose for enrollment of wetland reserve easements. • Expands wetland types eligible for restoration and management under wetland reserve easements.
Healthy Forests Reserve Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands enrollment options for Indian tribes.
Regional Conservation Partnership Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifies funding authorities for program implementation. • Authorizes Regional Conservation Partnership Program contracts rather than requiring enrollment through other program authorities. • Expands flexibility for alternative funding arrangements with partners. • Expands availability of watershed program authorities to projects outside critical conservation areas.
Other Farm Bill Programs
<p>Strengthens conservation assistance framework through support for—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program • Conservation Innovation Grants • Technical Service Providers • Veteran Farmers • Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program • Conservation Compliance for Highly Erodible Lands and Wetlands • Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program • Emergency Watershed Protection Program