

State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes, March 26, 2014, 1:00 p.m.

Attendees: Wade Biddix (NRCS), Jack Bricker (NRCS), Chad Wentz (NRCS), Chris Teutsch (VT), Todd Groh (VDOF), Jack Frye (CBC), Patrick Vincent (NRCS), Diane Dunaway (NRCS), Brad Copenhaver (VAC), Kendall Tyree (VASWCD), John Hutchinson (SVBF), Don Loock (PEC), Seth Coffman (TU), Wilmer Stoneman (VBBF), Jon Roller (Ecosystem Services), Bobby Grisso (VCE), Libby Norris (CBF), Emily Horsley (FSA), Gary Moore (DCR), David Dowling (DCR), Darren Marshall (VDACS), Bridgett Costanzo (VSFWS), Ben Rowe (VGPA), Kathie Hellebugh (VGPA), Dean Cumbia (VDOF), Philip Reed (VOF), Andy Sorrell (VDACS), Georgia Solseth (NRCS Recorder), and Kathleen Anderson (NRCS Recorder).

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Jack opened the meeting at 1:03, welcoming all in attendance. He stated he had a lot of information to share, and was glad to see so many partners and new faces. Though the new Farm Bill was effective February 7, however, it is still being reviewed and he would like to share what we know about the new offerings even as the rules are being written. Things are happening faster than he expected.

Overview of new Farm Bill: Jack provided a PowerPoint presentation on the new Farm Bill. Highlights and questions from his discussion include:

- 2014 FB is \$956B and is ready to roll despite being 2 years late. 20% of the total funding is for programs other than Food and Nutrition Programs; of that, 28% of the other portion is for conservation.
- Soil health – This is the future of conservation, need to go beyond sustainable, able to double and triple soil carbon thru soil health.
- Earth Team volunteer program. This is an important program for helping get conservation on the ground. VA has 1,076 volunteers who have 15,867 hours. Virginia earned three National Earth Team awards to include Georgia Solseth as a recipient of the National Volunteer Coordinator award. Jack verbally invited those present to be a volunteer to the Earth Team.
- Overview – (see slide) EQIP – doesn't see many changes. Unable to obligate dollars until rules are set and treasury is set. This year will be a mixed year because of the new and old Farm Bills. Scheduled to get the go ahead to obligate funds in late May. The backlog is \$8M or so, usually getting more money at end of FY. The initial allocation was \$17.9 M and with the additional \$665,084 for StrikeForce, the total allocation currently stands at \$18,566,509.
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – Diane will have more to share when she gives her report
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – lots of questions and interest in this new program. This folded many programs together. This is not a grant. A significant portion can be contributed by a partner (Jack guesses 50/50 match). When asked how much each state will receive, Jack replied that he did not know. The national projects will have some national selection criteria. He is not sure if the state can set its own criteria or if that will be directed. Thirty-five percent of funding for Critical Conservation areas will go to areas identified by the Secretary. Asked if rules will come out before funding, Jack stated that hopes so. Seven percent of funding comes from other programs, and will be taken straight off the top of the program budget. Wade thinks that sequestration funds may be used for this 7%. The program is for the life of the Farm Bill. Wade is concerned about getting this done by the end of the Fiscal Year, September 30, 2014, and hopes that time will be extended.
- HEL/WC compliance- not clear how involved NRCS will be – if conservation plans are required that will be very hard for NRCS – don't have the personnel to accomplish this – very time

consuming. Asked when expected to start - Jack thinks it will come out as one package. Asked if administrative costs will be part of the partner threshold - Jack does not know at this point.

- AGI - restrictions won't take effect until FY15. Everyone, even millionaires, is welcome this year. The new AGI limit is \$900,000 to include both farm and non-farm income.
- There is also a resurgence in dam rehab funding. \$250 M nationwide and \$85 M annually was authorized. VA will submit proposals to restore seven projects in the next five years. If approved, we will ramp up the engineering staff. Proposals are due April 11.

Wade expressed excitement about the future. Virginia received a nice authorization; however, getting the Farm Bill in the middle of the year is challenging.

- Referred to handouts with charts to give everyone an idea of the previous FB and how it grew. It was noted that contracts doubled - asked if NRCS was able to handle the load. Jack informed group that FTE went 200+ to 150 but workload increased. FB was good to conservation so there should be some improvement but NRCS may never get back to original staffing levels. Seth mentioned that they are doing a great job. Currently there are 2,400-2,800 active contracts in Virginia with thousands of practices at any given time.
- Addressed the no-year term provision in the new FB - in past if funds were not spent in the first year it was taken away and given to other states. Now we get to carry over into the next year. Makes things easier administratively. Also as money becomes available with cancellations or terminations, we can immediately fund a new contract. Will make contracting more effective. Wade added that we aren't sure if no-year means for the agency or the state. Virginia NRCS will not stockpile - we want to use what we have. But it does give us some flexibility. Agency has set two reassessment dates (May 16 and July 11), for states to request additional funding if needed.
- Easement Chart Handout - previously lost some available funding in FRPP. In WRP, did not get funds obligated and lost money. Don't feel like there will be many changes in Easements. Jack said struggling to find nonfederal funding for match. Spoke with VDACS Commissioner Todd Haymore and Secretary of Natural Resources Molly Ward about keeping all federal funds in Virginia. Diane added that is why we are trying to get the tax credit to serve as nonfederal match. Not been successful so far.

Conservation Reserve Program

Emily Horsley (FSA) - The Farm Bill has reauthorized CRP - reduction in the acreage limit. The framework is there and there shouldn't be many changes. No authority to begin signup at this time. Website has high-level information on all FSA programs. Expect to continue with CREP program signups when they get authority to start under CRP. Expect sign-ups to begin mid-April. Expiring contracts at the end of FY14 - 500 acres will expire - usually have provision to re-enroll but not sure what we are going to do about that. There are listening sessions in DC on the Commodity programs.

Gary Moore (DCR) - The state hasn't had much action since there is nothing new coming from FSA. No state budget at this time.

Status of FY-14 Program Funds

Easements - Diane Dunaway (see handout on easements) - New ACEP Easement Program has two major components: 1) Agricultural land Easements, and 2) Wetland Reserve Easements. Reiterated the need for matching funds - ALE shortages. The current WRE application is 20 documents - those probably won't change much so basic eligibility will be the same. WRE will allow easements on land where there is CRP - believe it will require a state level waiver. Remote sensing lab - aerial photography

– can compare land from year to year – makes sure that nothing has been done to the land that would make it prohibited from program.

EQIP and CSP - Patrick Vincent (see handout on these topics) -- \$18.5m has been allocated thus far. The handout shows how the funds have been broken down by program and initiative specific accounts such as Aquaculture, conservation activity plans, cropland and livestock, farm energy, Golden-winged warbler, etc. There are a total of 56 approved contracts for over \$1M. 548 contracts have been pre-approved – they are ranked and funds are set-aside but not contracted – \$15.2 million allocated for this. There is a Backlog of 596 eligible or pending applications – DCs have loaded them but are still developing cost estimates. Will move some existing preapproved applications to the StrikeForce fund pool and not hold a new sign-up period for StrikeForce since we have such a huge backlog already. Hopefully we can ask for additional funding. May 26 will be the earliest that we can obligate new Farm Bill funds in new contracts. We are continuing to accept applications. Doing planning to develop contract documents needed. NRCS is approving waivers to allow farmers to start their practices before signing a contract. This will enable us to make payments to them later even though they started without a contract. The new Farm Bill allowed us to take old FB applications without changes. Some applications will need to be updated as we receive guidance on the Veteran provision. NRCS did a statewide early start waiver for all forestry and aquaculture applications. Others can submit individual waivers. Libby asked if funding will just be limited to existing funds – Wade was not even sure if we will get any more EQIP funding this year.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) - Wade Biddix (NRCS) – Provided a copy of the first eight pages of the State CIG grant request – not full package – just key pieces. There is \$350K available for grants. The pre-proposals are due by May 2. They should be ranked and evaluated three weeks later and applicants will be contacted if they have been selected for full-proposals. CIG grant request copy includes this year's priorities.

Key Farm Bill Dates - Wade Biddix (see handout on this topic). Wade added potential FB dates to the packet. Set a batching date of May 2nd for accepting WRE applications. Also there are Program handouts as information to share with farmers.

Agency Updates

Gary Moore (DCR) – The new director, Clyde Christman, starts 1 April. His department has a new name - Division of Soil and Water Conservation. The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board will take over authority for the State BMP program. DCR will be briefing them at their next meeting. Dave Dowling added the Governor has signed executive amendments – allocated \$7.1 M for Virginia Land Conservation. States Governor must have heard Jack's request -- hopefully it will make it into budget. Working with VASWCD about cost share – \$6 M jump in funds if budget is approved.

Libby Norris (CBF) – Libby thanked Chris for the Grazers' project in Shenandoah – this will continue through summer. They are busy with buffers in the Valley and Eastern Shore through the month of March, using lots of volunteers.

Diane Dunaway (NRCS) – Diane wants to work up backlog in Easements like the one in EQIP. Diane recognized Andrew Sorrell for his agencies work funding several projects.

Bobby Grisso (VCE) – The agency has been busy working on Federal Reports for Extension, and is also working to get agents up to speed to work with SWCDs.

Jon Roller (Ecosystem Services) – recently rewarded grant for developing plans.

Seth Coffman (TU) – He has been busy fighting the snow and hard ground to plant trees with volunteers. He is also working on stream restoration project in Smith Creek with NRCS.

Don Loock (PEC) – They have been working with SWCD and NRCS with stream crossings, fencing, etc. Have a CIG grant on grazing management – recently had an outreach event on soil health and grazing. The grant has helped identify new grazing producers in the area; they have 40 but hope to double that number. They worked with Clarke County providing funds for FRPP easements .

John Hutchinson (SVBF) – He is currently working on three FRPP projects – deed approval on 175 acres in Shenandoah County, dairy farm in Rockingham County and a 324 acre farm.

Dean Cumbia (VDOF) – There is an ongoing search for a new State Forester. There have been some fires in NW VA, and tree planting has been difficult. Longleaf Pine Cooperators have met and he has reports if anyone wants a copy.

Todd Groh (VDOF) – This agency is 100 years old this year. Employees will wear a special star pin this year. Reforestation of timberland - \$1.6 M to landowners – is funded through tax on processed wood – matched by government funds. Seedlings are available online, and are sold out on many varieties. Many were bought by contractors. Funding for site preparation is available.

Kendall Tyree (VASWCD) – There will be an upcoming quarterly meeting where the association is requesting stakeholder input. Districts still need to work out how they will handle things in FY15.

Andy Sorrell (VDACS) – There is \$1 M in state funding for easement programs, and they are conducting farm transition workshops throughout the state.

Philip Reed (VOF) – He is working on a FRPP project with Diane. He would like to see more matching funds. In the Northern Piedmont this is not difficult, but south of James River it is difficult. It would be helpful to push tax credit incentive as a match. He will apply for certification to help expedite things. He would love to see Diane get some more help with management of the Easement Programs in VA.

Ben Rowe (VGPA) – \$1,000 scholarships are available for students. April 1 is deadline.

Bridget Costanzo (USFWS) – They have received restoration grants from Hurricane Sandy money. They are working on restoring the Great Dismal Swamp to mitigate flooding and fire control. Dave Byrd has been reassigned. They have partnered with NGOs with Sandy grants – looking at one project in SE and a dam removal project near Roanoke. They will soon have a GIS specialist so they can be involved in bigger landscape planning.

Darrell Marshall (VDACS) – They are waiting on a decision on who will be their new Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry.

Jack Bricker thanked everyone for attending and for their input, and said that he was glad to be able to share the Farm Bill information. He stated that there was an aggressive timeline and we will do our best to implement the policies, rules and regulations we are given to administer.

Wade Biddix announced that the next meeting will be on May 27, 2014 at 10 a.m.

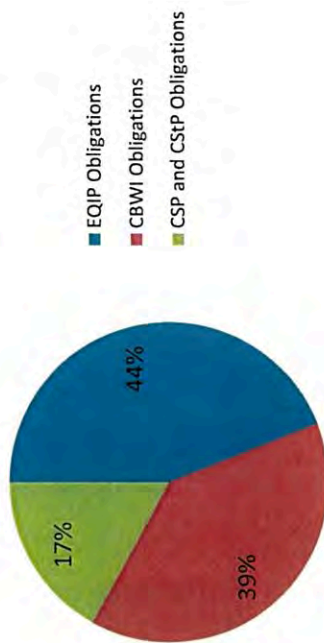
Farm Bill 2008

Financial Assistance Programs

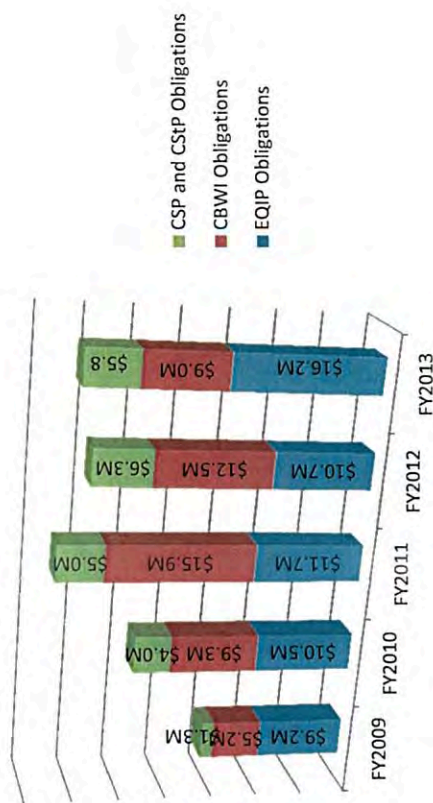
Year	EQIP Obligations	Contracts	CBWI Obligations	Contracts	CSP and CstP Obligations	Contracts	Total Obligations	Total Contracts
FY2009	\$9,225,671.61	330	\$5,185,188.64	237	\$1,326,733.00	209	\$15,737,593.25	776
FY2010	\$10,487,725.31	357	\$9,301,064.74	267	\$4,027,083.50	361	\$23,815,873.55	985
FY2011	\$11,650,478.45	336	\$15,859,730.31	755	\$5,045,655.50	449	\$32,555,864.26	1540
FY2012	\$10,655,068.00	440	\$12,510,388.00	508	\$6,342,125.00	575	\$29,507,581.00	1523
FY2013	\$16,181,650.00	613	\$8,967,000.00	141	\$5,799,329.00	533	\$30,947,979.00	1287
Total	\$58,200,593.37	2076	\$51,823,371.69	1908	\$22,540,926.00	2127	\$132,564,891.06	6111

Farm Bill 2008

Program Fund Distribution

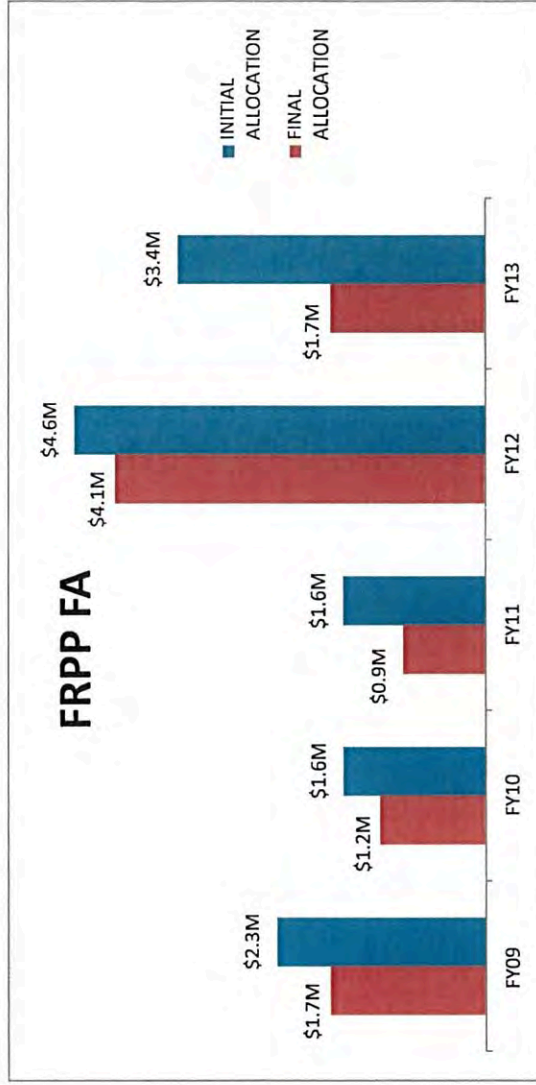


Financial Assistance Programs

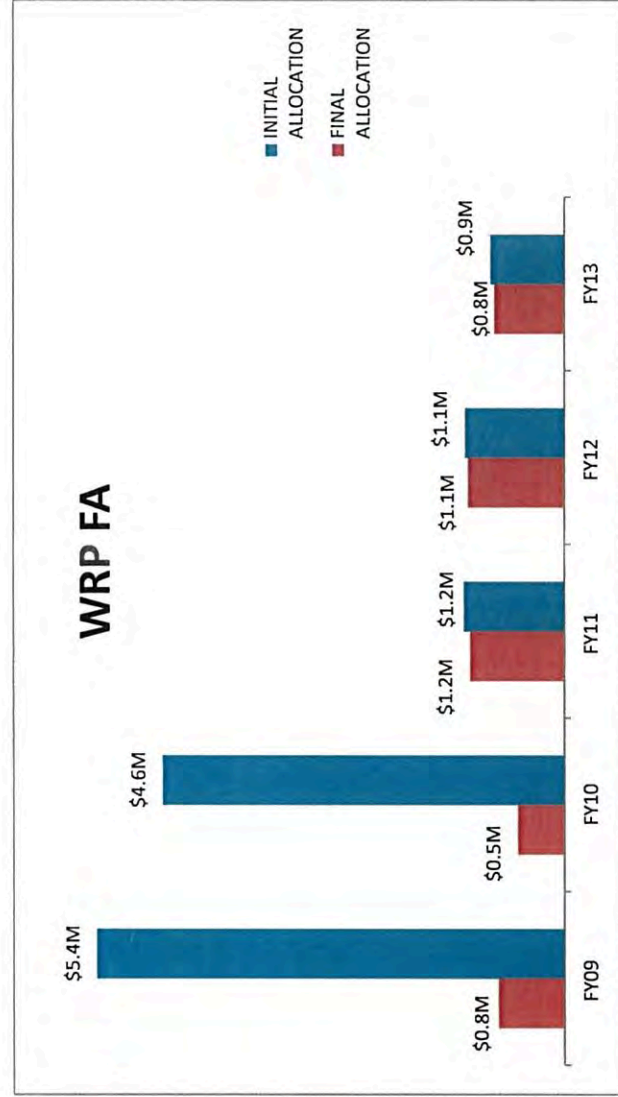


Easement Allocations Farm Bill 2008

FRPP FA		
YEAR	FINAL ALLOCATION	INITIAL ALLOCATION
FY13	1,733,700	3,436,976
FY12	4,142,393	4,589,047
FY11	917,070	1,587,170
FY10	1,177,500	1,587,170
FY09	1,735,371	2,327,781



WRP FA		
YEAR	FINAL ALLOCATION	INITIAL ALLOCATION
FY13	800,000	850,000
FY12	1,099,135	1,139,022
FY11	1,078,357	1,155,642
FY10	531,907	4,622,569
FY09	753,670	5,379,282



FY-14 EQIP Budget Allocation - 3/26/14

Fund Code	Account Name	Allocated	# of Contracts	Contract Approval	# of Preapprovals	Preapprovals	Funds Remaining	Eligible/Pending Applications Remaining	No Cost	Total Estimated Cost
76F 51	Virginia	\$18,566,509.00	56	\$1,020,284.30	548	\$15,261,257.93	\$2,284,966.77	596	265	\$7,555,687.99
76F 51 AQ	Aquaculture	\$125,000.00	0	\$0.00	16	\$86,975.00	\$38,025.00	5	2	\$32,000.00
76F 51 BF	Beginning Farmer	\$892,656.00	0	\$0.00	15	\$892,656.00	\$0.00	40	14	\$776,608.40
76F 51 CA	CAPS-Conservation Activity Plans	\$150,880.00	2	\$7,200.00	61	\$136,800.00	\$6,880.00	21	10	\$20,630.00
76F 51 CC	Cropland - Christiansburg	\$100,000.00	1	\$5,815.00	4	\$29,683.00	\$64,502.00	2	0	\$11,053.00
76F 51 CF	Cropland - Farmville	\$362,713.00	1	\$585.00	11	\$341,998.00	\$20,130.00	4	1	\$43,510.00
76F 51 CH	Cropland - Harrisonburg	\$1,076,802.60	0	\$0.00	30	\$1,076,802.60	\$0.00	26	17	\$250,191.00
76F 51 CS	Cropland - Smithfield	\$1,579,846.00	3	\$102,300.00	61	\$1,329,146.80	\$148,399.20	45	16	\$260,140.00
76F 51 FS	Forestry - Statewide	\$800,000.00	29	\$406,850.00	32	\$377,799.00	\$15,351.00	134	25	\$980,330.00
76F 51 2	FY14 Certified Organic	\$49,049.00	0	\$0.00	2	\$49,049.00	\$0.00	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 4	FY14 On-Farm Energy	\$473,362.35	0	\$0.00	26	\$473,362.35	\$0.00	36	18	\$532,935.60
76F 51 EC	FY-14 On-Farm Energy CAP	\$85,700.00	6	\$13,900.00	28	\$66,600.00	\$5,200.00	13	10	\$6,600.00
76F 51 3	FY14 Organic Transition	\$25,000.00	0	\$0.00	2	\$18,548.00	\$6,452.00	1	0	\$10,000.00
76F 51 GW	Golden Winged Warbler	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	5	2	\$18,900.00
76F 51 IW	Irrigation Water Management	\$67,640.00	0	\$0.00	4	\$40,073.60	\$27,566.40	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 AC	Livestock - Christiansburg	\$2,568,960.00	7	\$276,049.00	34	\$2,213,722.40	\$79,188.60	41	16	\$2,080,281.00
76F 51 LF	Livestock - Farmville	\$2,843,418.00	2	\$102,420.30	65	\$2,670,964.00	\$70,033.70	53	22	\$1,069,473.00
76F 51 LH	Livestock - Harrisonburg	\$3,654,503.40	0	\$0.00	56	\$3,645,054.13	\$9,449.27	75	50	\$1,080,771.79
76F 51 LS	Livestock - Smithfield	\$197,500.00	0	\$0.00	5	\$197,500.00	\$0.00	7	6	\$132.00
76F 51 LP	Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$79,000.00	0	\$0.00	1	\$17,487.00	\$61,513.00	5	2	\$6,770.00
76F 51 FM	NWQJ - Fifteen Mile Creek	\$225,334.00	0	\$0.00	2	\$45,324.00	\$180,010.00	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 MR	NWQJ - Smith Creek - Mountain Run	\$225,333.00	0	\$0.00	3	\$11,217.25	\$214,115.75	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 WB	NWQJ - Smith Creek - War Branch	\$225,333.00	0	\$0.00	2	\$46,664.20	\$178,668.80	3	2	\$31,341.10
76F 51 SH	Seasonal High Tunnel	\$357,222.60	1	\$6,099.00	41	\$351,123.60	\$0.00	32	9	\$188,899.10
76F 51 SD	Socially Disadvantaged	\$878,505.00	2	\$70,787.00	11	\$807,718.00	\$0.00	6	5	\$7,253.00
76F 51 SF	StrikeForce	\$665,084.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$665,084.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 HM	Wildlife - Habitat Maintenance	\$157,321.00	2	\$28,279.00	8	\$72,676.00	\$56,366.00	3	2	\$31,854.00
76F 51 HC	Wildlife - Wildlife Habitat Creation	\$335,000.00	0	\$0.00	28	\$262,314.00	\$72,686.00	12	11	\$2,015.00
76F 51 14897	FY14 EQIP Reserve	\$15,346.05	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$15,346.05	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 15023	FY14 CIG State Component	\$350,000.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$350,000.00	0	0	\$0.00
	No Fund Code							23	21	\$114,000.00
	Totals	\$18,566,509.00	56	\$1,020,284.30	548	\$15,261,257.93	\$2,284,966.77	596	265	\$7,555,687.99

Some Upcoming Farm Bill Program Deadlines

May 2, 2014 - Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Batching Period Ends

April 15, 2014 - NRCS is supposed to receive final program allocations for FY-14.

April 25, 2014 – States receive program guidance on the new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

May 1 – June 30, 2014 – Accept applications for Agricultural Land Easements

May 16, 2014 – NRCS can request additional EQIP program funds from NHQ.

May 26, 2014 – NRCS can begin fund obligation for new EQIP contracts.

June 11, 2014 – NRCS can request additional EQIP program funds from NHQ.

Conservation Innovation Grants

- May 2, 2014 – Pre-proposals due to NRCS State Office
- May 23, 2014 – NRCS notifies applicants of selected pre-proposals.
- June 27, 2014 – Full proposals are due to NRCS State Office
- Prior to September 30, 2014 - Agreements will be developed with successful applicants.

ACEP – New Farm Bill 2014 Easement Program – Summary (repeat from 2/18/14)

- New fy-14 funds are forthcoming.
- ACEP has two components:
 - ALE - Agricultural Land Easement (FRPP, GRP functions)
 - WRE - Wetland Reserve Easement (WRP functions)
- FRPP, GRP and WRP have been repealed, but their purposes and functions have been consolidated into ACEP - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.
- ACEP has few new statutory provisions when compared to GRP, FRPP and WRP, though ACEP will require a new regulation for its implementation. Does not impact authority to provide support for easements and agreements obligated under previous legislation.
- WRE highlights:
 - Reduces ownership requirement from 7 years to 2 years.
 - Authorizes waiver process to allow enrollment of CRP land established to trees.
 - No option to enroll stand-alone restoration cost-share agreements.

FRPP :: Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

- 9 FRPP easements are in the acquisition process, total 1,578 acres.
- 4 closed in fy-14 first two quarters, total 342 acres.

GRP :: Grassland Reserve Program

- 2 GRP easements are in the acquisition process, total 182 acres.

WRP :: Wetlands Reserve Program

- 6 WRP easements are in the acquisition process, total 237 acres.
- 3 closed in fy-14 first two quarters, total 56 acres.
- 10 restorations are underway.

FPE :: Floodplain Easements, in Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)

- None funded at this time.

Stewardship Monitoring

- The annual monitoring process is underway for all easements, to be completed by August 2014.
- 32% of the GRP easements have been monitored (6 of 19.)
- 18% of the WRP easements have been monitored (9 of 50.)
- Of the remaining 54 easements to be monitored, 38 will be conducted offsite (new for Virginia.)

***Need for Non-Federal Matching Funds
for Farmland Protection by Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)***

How ALE Works:

NRCS works with land conservation organizations and localities to preserve agricultural land through conservation easements. NRCS provides matching funds to organizations that acquire and hold easements on Prime Farmland or land containing significant cultural or historic resources. NRCS does not hold the easement, but does acquire a backup enforcement role as a condition of the financial assistance.

Highlights:

- NRCS partners with numerous organizations (e.g. the Virginia Outdoors Foundation) to help protect prime agricultural lands in the Commonwealth.
- The new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) in the 2014 Farm Bill offers an opportunity to leverage resources to protect additional acres with its Agricultural Land Easements (ALE.)
- The new farm bill authorizes up to \$400 million in ACEP funds nationwide for 2014.
- ALE requires a non-federal 50% match; half of that match may come from landowner donation of the easement appraised value.
- **Over the past three years, Virginia NRCS has returned almost \$3 million in farmland protection funds (FRPP/ALE) due to a lack of matching non-federal funding.**
- Applications are being accepted continuously for 2014 with the next evaluation periods set for April 18 and May 16.

Summary of Land Conservation Easement Status fy 2014, first two quarters:

<i>Easement Program, Type</i>	<i>In Acquisition Process</i>		<i>Closed in fy14</i>	
	<i># Easements</i>	<i># Acres</i>	<i># Easements</i>	<i># Acres</i>
FRPP	9	1,578	4	342
GRP	2	182	0	0
WRP	6	237	3	56
WRP Restorations	10 in progress	-	-	-
FPE	0	0	0	0

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Commodity Credit Corporation

ACTION: NOTICE (Announcement No. USDA-NRCS-VA-14-01)

Conservation Innovation Grants Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Announcement for Program Funding - Virginia

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.912

SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is announcing availability of Conservation Innovation Grants (**CIG**) to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in Virginia. NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2014 will be up to **\$350,000**. Applications are requested from eligible governmental or non-governmental organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration. Individual grants will not exceed **\$75,000**.

Funds will be awarded through a two-phase, statewide competitive grants process that will include: (1) a pre-proposal process; and (2) a full proposal process. The full proposal process will only be open to applicants whose pre-proposal applications are selected to advance to full proposals. Both phases are described in this announcement, **but only pre-proposals are being solicited at this time.**

This notice identifies the objectives, eligibility criteria, and application instructions for CIG projects. Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant. NRCS will request a full proposal package only from those applicants selected in the pre-proposal phase.

DATES: Applications for the pre-proposal phase must be received at the NRCS State Office in Richmond, Virginia, by 4 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), on Friday, **May 2, 2014.**

Notification of selected pre-proposal applications will be announced by **May 23, 2014**. Selected applicants will then be required to submit a full proposal package to the NRCS State Office by 4 p.m. EDT on **June 27, 2014.**

ADDRESSES: Applications sent via hand-delivery, express mail or overnight courier service must be sent to the following address: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, 1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 209, Richmond, Virginia 23229-5014. The contact phone number for hand-delivered pre-proposals and applications is (804) 287-1691.

Applications sent via the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants Program, 1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 209, Richmond, Virginia 23229-5014.

To submit your application electronically, visit Grants.gov-Apply for Grants and follow the instructions. Applicants may also submit applications to the e-mail address on the next page.

Note: all applicants who submit electronically are strongly encouraged to ALSO submit a paper copy through the methods listed on the first page to ensure that any potential problems with the electronic submission system do not negatively impact any applications. If you submit your application electronically well in advance of the deadline AND you have received confirmation from NRCS Virginia that it has been properly received then you will not need to send a paper copy as described on the preceding page.

The address for submitting an application by e-mail is Blaine.Delaney@va.usda.gov .

For more information contact:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Program was authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) under Section 2207 of the Agricultural Act of 2014. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP and CIG to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of the CCC.

B. Overview

The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies, while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides, and references, or to the private sector. **CIG does not fund research projects and projects intended to test hypotheses do not qualify for a CIG award.** CIG is used to apply or demonstrate previously proven technology. It is a vehicle to stimulate development and adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a high likelihood of success, and that are candidates for eventual technology transfer or institutionalization. CIG promotes sharing of skills, knowledge, technologies, and facilities among communities, governments, and other institutions to ensure that scientific and technological developments are accessible to a wider range of users. CIG funds projects that target innovative on-the-ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

NRCS will accept applications under this notice for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years, submitted by eligible entities from **Virginia**. Eligible entities include State and local units of government, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

A two-phase evaluation process will be utilized for applications submitted under this notice. The first phase requires the applicant to submit a pre-proposal application. Pre-proposal applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications will be eliminated from competition; notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant. NRCS staff will evaluate complete pre-proposal applications based on how they demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one of the topics provided in section I.D. of this notice.

NRCS will only request a full proposal package from those applicants selected in the pre-proposal process. Complete applications received by applicable deadlines will be evaluated by a CIG Review Group based on the Application Evaluation Criteria identified in the application instructions in section VI.B. The CIG Review Group will make its recommendations for project approval to the NRCS State Conservationist who will make the final selections.

C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

For the purposes of CIG, the proposed innovative project or activity must encompass the development, demonstration, evaluation, implementation and monitoring of the following:

- Conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems; or
- Promising conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures or approaches; or
- Environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

To be given consideration, the innovative project or activity must comply with all federal, state and local regulations throughout the duration of the project and should:

- Make use of a proven technology or a technology that has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;
- Demonstrate and verify environmental (soil, water, air, plants, energy and animal) effectiveness, utility, affordability and usability of conservation technology in the field;
- Adapt conservation technologies, management, practices, systems, procedures, approaches and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption;
- Introduce conservation systems, approaches and procedures from another geographic area or agricultural sector; or
- Demonstrate transferability of knowledge.

D. State Component

1. Category

For FY 2014, NRCS in Virginia will offer CIG in the following resource concern areas: **Soil Health**, Silvopasture Establishment, Nutrient Management, Wetland Restoration Design and Economics (the costs and benefits of conservation).

Pre-proposals that demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one bulleted topic listed below will be considered. Pre-proposals must identify the most appropriate bulleted topic the innovation/technology is addressing. While NRCS/VA will accept proposals for each bulleted topic below, special interest is placed on receiving proposals that address topics identified as a "Priority Need".

PRIORITY NEED: SOIL HEALTH

The priority need for the Virginia State CIG in FY2014 is for projects that seek to improve soil health and function on Virginia farmland in order to improve the productivity, profitability and environmental impact of agriculture. Priority projects will seek to demonstrate, evaluate and promote implementation and integration of the following principles:

1. Maintaining cover on the soil surface
2. Reducing soil disturbance (from tillage, compaction, etc.)
3. Maximizing amount and duration of plant production (continuous living cover)
4. Maximizing biological diversity, both in crops/plants and animals
5. Integrating livestock, forage crops and annual crop production to further boost diversity

These principles apply to cropland as well as grassland systems. Projects that seek to increase adoption of only one of the above principles can qualify as meeting the priority need. Projects that address **multiple principles and integrated systems** will generally receive a higher ranking from the CIG Review Group.

The following are examples of priority topics under the soil health heading. Submission of innovative proposals that promote soil health in other ways is also strongly encouraged!

- ***Soil Health Education and Outreach***

- **Development of innovative soil health curricula and outreach efforts** aimed at educating farmers, crop advisors and agency personnel. Projects may be statewide, regional or local in scope. Preference will be given to projects that educate these audiences simultaneously (i.e., meetings open to all); have a strong partnership emphasis; and focus on motivating the audience to establish demonstration farms, fields and plots upon returning home.
- **Implementation of innovative soil health curricula and outreach efforts** aimed at educating farmers, crop advisors and agency personnel. Projects may be statewide, regional or local in scope. Preference will be given to projects that educate these audiences simultaneously (i.e., meetings open to all); have a strong partnership emphasis; and focus on motivating the audience to establish demonstration farms, fields and plots upon returning home.
- **Promoting a culture of demonstration and sharing** among Virginia farmers, crop advisors and agency personnel about practical implementation of soil health building principles. Examples include preparation and presentation of case studies about Virginia farmers, development of peer networks, etc.

- ***Increasing Diversity for Soil Health***

- Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **new harvestable crops**, and overcoming barriers to their usage, in order to increase crop diversity and associated benefits to soil health, pest management, etc. in traditional Virginia farming systems.
- Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **new cover crops and cover crop mixes**, and overcoming barriers to their usage, in order to increase crop diversity and associated benefits to soil health, pest management, etc. in traditional Virginia farming systems.
- Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **new crop/livestock integration strategies**, and overcoming barriers to their usage, in order to increase biological diversity and associated benefits to soil health, pest management, etc. in traditional Virginia farming systems.

- ***Increasing Grazing Management for Soil Health***

- Demonstrate, evaluate and document the use of **adaptive grazing management** (adopting several strategies i.e. rotational stocking, management intensive stocking, and or high-density stocking) for managing plant utilization while meeting animal nutritional requirements at different times during the year for overall improvements to soil health.

- Demonstrate, evaluate and document **system management strategies**, such as deferred grazing and no longer making hay on pastureland, to build soil health through increased ground cover, surface residue and soil organic matter over time.
- Demonstrate, evaluate and document the **integration of very diverse forage species mixtures** (including grasses, legumes and forbs) and overcome barriers to their usage, in order to increase biological diversity and provide productive forage species for grazing during typically dormant periods of the year.
- Demonstrate, evaluate and document the use of **seeding legumes combined with improved grazing management** to manage greater than 30% legume content and reduce the need for nitrogen additions to the system.
- **Soil Health Impacts**
 - Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **increased nutrient use efficiency and reduced fertilizer need** after adoption of soil-health-building farming systems.
 - Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **decreased pest pressure and reduced pesticide need** after adoption of soil-health-building farming systems.
 - Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **increased farm productivity and profitability** after adoption of soil-health-building farming systems.
 - Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **improved environmental conditions** after adoption of soil-health-building farming systems.
- **Innovative Strategies to Preserve/Increase Soil Health Gains**
 - Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of **adaptive strategies to preserve viability of no-till or similar soil health building practices** in face of new and evolving weeds and pests.
- **Innovative Soil Health Testing & Assessment Procedures**
 - Investigation, demonstration and education about new soil testing methods and other procedures to assess soil health in Virginia.

Other Topics of Consideration

- **Precision Agriculture/Variable Rate Nutrient Management**
 - Demonstration, evaluation and documentation of the **potential for precision technology to more effectively identify field edges and other marginal production areas** with potential for alternative crops/covers or a reduction in inputs of seed/nutrients/pesticides.

- **Silvopasture Establishment**

- Demonstrate, evaluate and document the effectiveness of alternative methods for silvopasture establishment.
 - **Converting from pine forest to silvopasture:**
Demonstrations are encouraged that compare different methods of site preparation, adjustments to soil fertility, forage species selection, establishment methods and evaluating economic comparisons relative to establishment success.
 - **Converting from grassland to silvopasture:**
Demonstrations are encouraged that compare different methods of site preparation, tree planting arrangement and layout, trees species selection and methods of tree protection during establishment period.

- **Wetland Restoration Design**

- Apply a wetland functional assessment model using the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) approach to guide a wetland restoration design on a site located in Virginia. The model to be used will be from existing HGM wetland functional assessments or be developed using current methodologies. Specific wetland functions to be identified include hydrologic, soil bio-geochemical, plant community and wildlife habitat and landscape. Provide success/failure criteria of a site-specific wetland restoration design using the wetland functional assessment. Estimate the capacity of the restored wetland to improve habitat, water quality and hydrology, such as retention of water in the soil, and nutrient cycling to improve soil and watershed health. Improving the capacity of the hydrology and soil health may include pre-restoration and post-restoration hydrologic and biologic monitoring of the restored wetland.

- **Economics (the costs and benefits of conservation)**

The economics of soil and water conservation is a topic of consideration that can either be a stand-alone project proposal, per the bulleted interest areas listed below or integrated as an interdisciplinary project component within a proposal dealing with our priority need for CIG proposals on any of the soil health topics or other topics of consideration previously listed in this RFP.

- Demonstrate, through coordinated case studies, how conservation efforts have benefited agricultural land users in different regions of Virginia. Topics of interest include the **economic effects of:**
 - Cover crops or cover crop systems (in particular, how long-term use of cover crops affects soil health, yields and profitability);
 - Case studies that assess the economics of waste to energy projects as a means of commercially utilizing animal wastes in surplus regions of the state, such as the Shenandoah Valley and Eastern Shore;
 - Waste storage and land application systems (how storage systems alter and affect nutrient management practices, yields and profitability);

- Inclusion of perennial legumes in crop rotations (how the introduction of legumes affects nutrient cycling, disrupts pests and diseases and affects yields and profitability);
- Precision agriculture applications (how these systems help farmers achieve greater efficiency in land management, in particular nutrient management and profitability);
- No-till systems (examining how soil health changes translate into yields and profitability);
- Rotational grazing systems (how these systems alter forage productivity and harvest, rest and recovery of forages, management flexibility and profitability);
- CREP participation (how CREP buffers affect farm operations, change wildlife habitat, provide an array of other environmental benefits and provide a stream of income as compared to the establishment and annual management costs associated with participation);
- How implementation of on-farm agricultural energy management plans (CAP122s) and the 374 Farmstead Energy Improvement practice have affected on-farm energy use, efficiency and profitability;
- Case studies that link any of the above (or other related proposal topics) to measured or projected changes in environmental performance of these managed agro-ecosystems with respect to the natural parameters evaluated (nonpoint source pollution and water quality, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, net greenhouse gas emissions and sinks, soil quality, net energy use, efficiency and associated carbon footprint of an existing system, etc.).

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

NRCS Virginia anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2014 will be up to **\$350,000**.

CIG will fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years (anticipated project start date of **September 5, 2014**). Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive grants process. The maximum award amount for any project will not exceed **\$75,000** in FY 2014.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION

A. Applicant Eligibility

CIG applicants must be a State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization or individual from Virginia.

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible for CIG, projects must involve landowners who meet the EQIP eligibility requirements set forth in <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2010-title16/html/USCODE-2010-title16-chap58-subchapIV-partIV-sec3839aa-1.htm>. Additional information regarding EQIP eligibility requirements can be found at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip>. Participating producers are not required to have an EQIP contract.

**For a full application PKg., contact
Blaine Delaney @ Blaine.Delaney@Va.usda.gov**



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Your guide to the new Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Below is a quick summary of changes made to conservation programs in the new Farm Bill, enacted on February 7, 2014. These programs are administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The new Farm Bill streamlines conservation programs that enable farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to get assistance.

To get started with NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or visit your local USDA service center.

	Previous Farm Bill	vs.	New and Streamlined Farm Bill	
Financial Assistance	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	▶	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	EQI
	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program <i>WHIP</i>	▶	Conservation Stewardship Program	CS
	Conservation Stewardship Program	▶	Agricultural Management Assistance	
Easements	Agricultural Management Assistance	▶		
	Wetlands Reserve Program	▶	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	ACE
	Grassland Reserve Program	▶		
Partnerships	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	▶	Healthy Forests Reserve Program	
	Healthy Forests Reserve Program	▶		
	Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative	▶	Regional Conservation Partnership Program	RCP
Other	Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	▶		
	Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative	▶		
	Great Lakes Basin Program	▶		
	Technical Service Providers	▶	Conservation Innovation Grants	CI
	Conservation Innovation Grants	▶	Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program	
	Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program	▶	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program	
	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program – administered by Farm Service Agency	▶	Emergency Watershed Protection Program*	
	Emergency Watershed Protection Program*	▶	Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program*	
	Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program*	▶		

*EWP and Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program are not Farm Bill programs but are offered by NRCS; Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program was funded through the 2014 Farm Bill.

An equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States Department of Agriculture

March 2014

Virginia Overview

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in order 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 or improved or created wildlife habitat.

Agricultural Act of 2014

EQIP

Environmental Quality Incentives Program



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit agricultural producers and the environment.

Benefits

Eligible program participants receive financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices, or activities like conservation planning, that address natural resource concerns on their land. Payments are made to participants after conservation practices and activities identified in an EQIP plan of operations are implemented. Contracts can last up to 10 years in duration.

Eligibility

Agricultural producers and owners of non-industrial private forestland are eligible to apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and other farm lands.

Helping People Help the Land

allocation - 18,566,509 for FY 17

over
→

Applicants must:

- Be engaged in agriculture or forestry and have a farm number and tract established with the Farm Service Agency
- Control or own eligible land
- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements
- Develop an EQIP plan of operations to meet their objectives

Additional restrictions and program requirements may apply.

Key Resource Concerns

1. Soil Erosion (Sheet, rill, wind, and excessive bank erosion from streams)
2. Water Quality (excess quantities of)

- Nutrients in surface and ground waters
- Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications
- Sediment in surface waters

3. Livestock Production (limited or inadequate)

- Feed and forage
- Livestock shelter
- Water

4. Degraded Plant Condition

- Undesirable plant productivity and health
- Inadequate structure and composition

5. Inefficient Energy Use

- Equipment and facilities
- Farming practices and field operations

6. Fish/Wildlife Habitat Degradation

How to apply

Visit your local USDA Service Center to apply or visit

www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.

NRCS will help eligible producers develop an EQIP plan of operations, which will become the basis of the EQIP contract.

EQIP applications will be ranked based on a number of factors, including the environmental benefits and cost effectiveness of the proposal.

More Information

For more information visit your local USDA Service Center or

www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill.

Find your local USDA Service Center

<http://offices.usda.gov>

What's New in EQIP

- The former Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program was folded into EQIP.
- Advance payment opportunities now exist for agricultural producers who are veterans.
- Advance payments for socially disadvantaged, beginning and limited resource farmers, and veterans were raised from 30 percent to 50 percent.
- Payment limitations are set at \$450,000 with no ability to waive.



Virginia growers can receive financial assistance through EQIP for soil-health building practices like cover crops, crop rotations, and no-till with erosion control practices.

www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

at least 60% of funds must go to livestock
minimum of 5% goes to wildlife habitat (but VA won't meet this goal for FY14)

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United States Department of Agriculture

Virginia Overview

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits.

Under the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) component, NRCS in Virginia can help state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land.

Under the Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

What's New in ACEP

The ACEP is a new program that consolidates three former programs – the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Agricultural Act of 2014

ACEP

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

March 2014



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit agricultural producers and the environment (photo by Jason McGarvey, Virginia Outdoors Foundation).

Benefits

Agricultural Land Easements protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Land protected by agricultural land easements provides additional public benefits, including environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat and protection of open space.

Wetland Reserve Easements provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.

Eligibility

Farmers, ranchers and owners of non-industrial private forestland are eligible to apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands.



Helping People Help the Land

Agricultural Land Easements

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing Agricultural Land Easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land. In the case of working farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture.

The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including pastureland and shrubland. Eligible partners include state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs.

Under the Agricultural Land component, NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

Wetland Reserve Easements

NRCS also provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a Wetland Reserve Easement.

Through the Wetland Reserve enrollment options, NRCS may enroll eligible land through:

- *Permanent Easements* are conservation easements in perpetuity. NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement, and 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs.
- *30-Year Easements* expire after 30 years. Under 30-year easements, NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the

purchase of the easement, and 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

- *Term Easements* are easements that are for the maximum duration allowed under applicable state laws. NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the term easement and 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

For Wetland Reserve Easements, NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, charges for abstracts, survey and appraisal fees, and title insurance.

Eligibility

Land eligible for agricultural easements includes cropland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land.

NRCS will prioritize applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural use.

Land eligible for Wetland Reserve Easements includes farmed or converted wetland that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. NRCS will prioritize applications based on the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

To enroll land through agricultural land easements, NRCS enters into cooperative agreements with eligible partners. Each easement is required to have an agricultural land easement plan that promotes the long-term viability of the land.

To enroll land through Wetland Reserve Easements, NRCS enters into purchase agreements with eligible private landowners that

include the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland reserve restoration easement plan. This plan restores, protects, and enhances the wetland's functions and values.

How to apply

- *Agricultural Land Easements* - eligible partners may submit proposals to NRCS to acquire conservation easements on eligible land.
- *Wetland Reserve Easements* - landowners may apply at any time at a local USDA Service Center.

More Information

For more information visit your local USDA Service Center or the NRCS Farm Bill website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill.

Find your local USDA Service Center

<http://offices.usda.gov>



NRCS makes a site visit to determine whether the land is eligible for a Wetland Reserve Easement.

www.nrcs.usda.gov

Natural Resources Conservation Service



United States Department of Agriculture

March 2014

Virginia Overview

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides this assistance to producers through partnership agreements and program contracts or easement agreements.

RCPP combines the authorities of four former conservation programs – the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, and the Great Lakes Basin Program. Assistance is delivered in accordance with the rules of EQIP, CSP, and ACEP.

Agricultural Act of 2014

RCPP

Regional Conservation Partnership Program



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit agricultural producers and the environment.

Benefits

RCPP encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales.

Through RCPP, NRCS and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved. The Secretary of Agriculture may also designate up to eight critical conservation areas to focus RCPP assistance.

Eligibility

Eligible Partners - Agricultural or silvicultural producer associations, farmer cooperatives or other groups of producers, state or local governments, municipal

RCPP combined - CBWI, Great Lakes, AWEP, CCPI

Helping People Help the Land

RCPP funding

25% - State
40% - Nat'l
35% - Critical - especially Ches. Bay

water treatment entities, water and irrigation districts, conservation-driven non-governmental organizations and institutions of higher education.

Eligible Participants - Under RCPP, eligible producers and landowners of agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland may enter into conservation program contracts or easement agreements under the framework of a partnership agreement.

RCPP assistance is also available independent of a partner if the land is located either in a partner project area or in a critical conservation area designated by the Secretary. Conservation program contracts and easement agreements are implemented through the :

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

NRCS may also utilize the authorities under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program, other than the Watershed Rehabilitation Program, in the designated critical conservation areas.

How to apply

NRCS will announce a request for proposals that will outline requirements for proposal submissions for funding. NRCS will review partnership proposals according to the priorities identified in the announcement and make project selections.

Upon selection of a partnership proposal, NRCS and the partner will

enter into a partnership agreement through which they will coordinate to provide assistance to producers in the project area. Partnership agreements may be for a period of up to five years. NRCS may extend an agreement one time for an additional 12 months if needed to meet the objectives of the program.

Producers may apply for RCPP assistance in several ways:

1. At the producer's request, a partner may submit the application for participation in a selected project area
2. Directly at their local USDA Service Center in a selected project area
3. Directly at their local USDA Service center in a critical conservation area designated by the Secretary of Agriculture

Partnership Agreement

The partnership agreement defines the scope of the project, including:

1. Eligible activities to be implemented
2. Potential agricultural or nonindustrial private forest operation affected
3. Local, state, multi-state or other geographic area covered
4. Planning, outreach, implementation, and assessment to be conducted

Partners are responsible for contributing to the cost of the project, conducting outreach and education to eligible producers for potential participation in the project, and conducting an assessment of the project's effects.

In addition, partners may act on behalf of the eligible landowner or producer in applying for assistance and for leveraging financial or technical assistance provided by NRCS with additional funds to help achieve the project objectives.

Before closing the agreement the partner must provide an assessment of the project costs and conservation effects.

More Information

For more information visit your local USDA Service Center or www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill.

Find Your Local USDA Service Center

<http://offices.usda.gov>

What's new?

RCPP is a new partnership program that combines the authorities of four former programs - Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and the Great Lakes Basin Program, and delivers assistance through covered programs, including EQIP, CSP, and ACEP.

www.nrcs.usda.gov

Natural Resources Conservation Service



United States Department of Agriculture

March 2014

Agricultural Act of 2014

CSP

Conservation Stewardship Program

Virginia Overview

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns.

Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance – the higher the performance, the higher the payment.



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit both agricultural producers and the environment.

Benefits

Through CSP, participants take additional steps to improve the resource conditions on their land—including soil, air and habitat quality, water quality and quantity, and energy conservation.

CSP provides two types of payments through five-year contracts: annual payments for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices; and supplemental payments for adopting a resource-conserving crop rotation. Producers may be able to renew a contract if they have successfully fulfilled the initial contract and agree to achieve additional conservation objectives. Payments are made as soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous year.



Helping People Help the Land

Eligibility

Eligible lands include private and agricultural lands, cropland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land. CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or type of crops produced, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas.

Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian tribes that meet the stewardship threshold for at least two priority resource concerns when they apply. They must also agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional priority resource concern by the end of the contract.

Producers must have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract. Contracts

include all eligible land in the agricultural operation.

A person or legal entity may not receive more than \$40,000 annually or \$200,000 for a five-year contract.

Additional restrictions and program requirements may apply.

How to Apply

Visit your local USDA Service Center to apply or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.

More Information

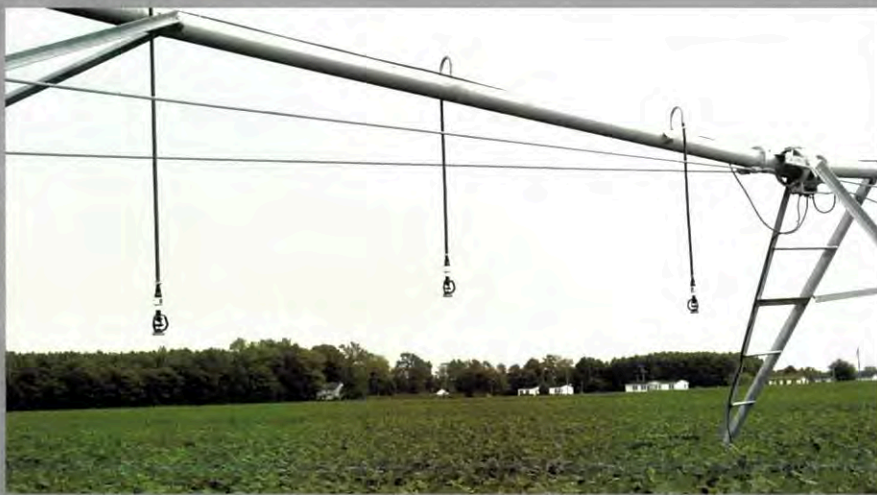
For more information visit your local USDA Service Center or www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill.

Find Your Local USDA Service Center

<http://offices.usda.gov>

What's New in CSP

The 2014 Farm Bill increased the program's focus on generating additional conservation benefits, removed the limitation on the number of nonindustrial private forestland acres that can be enrolled in CSP, and increased flexibility to enroll land coming out of the Conservation Reserve Program.



NRCS can help producers conserve water with efficient irrigation systems.

www.nrcs.usda.gov

Natural Resources Conservation Service



United States Department of Agriculture

March 2014

Virginia Overview

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands. The state component emphasizes projects that benefit a limited geographic area. Projects may be farm-based, multi-county, small watershed, or statewide in scope.

Agricultural Act of 2014

CIG

Conservation Innovation Grants



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs that benefit agricultural producers and the environment.

Benefits

CIG accelerates technology development and transfer, and the adoption of promising technologies and approaches to address some of the nation's most pressing natural resource concerns; projects often result in production and operational benefits as well. NRCS identifies successful projects for potential integration of technologies and approaches into NRCS' toolkit of conservation practices.

Eligibility

CIG applications are accepted from state or local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Caribbean and Pacific Islands areas.



Helping People Help the Land

Conservation approaches or technologies must be sufficiently studied to indicate a likelihood of success to be considered possible candidates for technology transfer. CIG funds innovative on-the-ground conservation projects, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

Proposed projects must conform to the description of innovative conservation projects or activities published in the funding notice. For example, technologies and approaches commonly used in the geographic area covered by the application, and which are eligible for EQIP funding, are not eligible for funding through CIG.

At least 50 percent of the total project cost must come from non-federal matching funds (cash and in-kind contributions) provided by the grantee. The grantee is also responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully complete the project. NRCS will provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

Proposed projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers. CIG funds provided directly or indirectly to producers are counted toward a producer's EQIP payment limitation.

How to apply

National CIG: A CIG funding notice is announced each year. Funds for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years, will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process.

Projects may be watershed-based, regional, multi-State, or nationwide in scope. The natural resource concerns eligible for funding through CIG will be identified in the funding announcement and may change annually to focus proposals

on new and emerging high priority natural resource issues.

Applications should describe the use of innovative technologies or approaches to address a natural resource conservation concern or concerns. Applications are evaluated by a technical peer review panel against criteria identified in the funding notice.

Evaluated applications are forwarded to an NRCS Grants Review Board which makes recommendations to the NRCS Chief for final selection. Awards are made through a grant agreement.

State CIG: The state component emphasizes projects that benefit a limited geographic area. Projects may be farm-based, multi-county, small watershed, or statewide in scope. Public notices in each participating state will announce the availability of funds for the state CIG competitions.

Beginning Farmers, Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers, Veterans and American Indian Tribes

NRCS recognizes the need to provide special consideration to historically underserved producers, and strives to ensure that these producers benefit from innovative technologies and approaches.

CIG offers two programmatic exceptions intended to encourage the participation of beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, and Indian tribes, in CIG.

- 1) Each year, up to 10 percent of National CIG funds may be set aside for applicants who are beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers, Indian tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.

- 2) CIG allows applicants that are historically underserved to derive a higher percentage of project matching funds from in-kind contributions.

More Information

Once funds for CIG become available, a funding notice is posted on the federal eGrants portal, www.grants.gov.

The funding notice also may be accessed from the NRCS website at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig

Each notice will specify the information required from applicants. Complete applications must be submitted to the address identified in the national or state notices.

If you need more information about a national notice, contact the National CIG Program Manager at nrcscig@wdc.usda.gov.

To learn more about Virginia CIG funding, contact:

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www.nrcs.usda.gov

Natural Resources Conservation Service