

ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

1st Quarter
2023

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2023



Biden-Harris Administration Announces an Additional \$325 Million in Pilot Projects through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, for Total Investment of \$3.1 Billion

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NRCS photo by Reginald Jackson

(l to r) Kyle Cunningham, associate professor of Forestry, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research and Extension, Cooperative Extension Service; Dr. Michael Blazier, Dean of the College of Forestry, Agriculture, and Natural Resources, University of Arkansas at Monticello; Dr. Nana Tian, Assistant Professor in Forest Economics and Policy, University of Arkansas at Monticello; Dr. Douglas Osborne, Professor/Director, Five Oaks Ag Research & Education



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Helping People Help the Land

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From the State Conservationist

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas has much to be proud of because Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 was another great year assisting farmers, ranchers and foresters implement conservation practices addressing natural resource concerns on their operations. Thanks to the extra efforts of all our Arkansas NRCS employees and our conservation partners, we continued to manage our workloads servicing existing Farm Bill contracts while improving conservation planning and technical assistance and servicing new Farm Bill requests.

Here's an example of some of our accomplishments:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program — EQIP**
 - o Active Contracts: 3,982 Acres: 712,838
 - o New Contracts: 1,455 Acres: 226,948
 - o Obligations: \$57,445,126
- **Conservation Stewardship Program CSP**
 - o Active Contracts: 995 Acres: 846,701
 - o New Contracts: 231 Acres: 168,408
 - o Obligations: \$30,034,209
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program — ACEP**
 - o Easements: 9 Acres: 3196
 - o Acquisition and Restoration: \$11,078,201

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program — RCPP**
 - o Contracts: 64
 - o Acres: 11,982
 - o Obligations: \$3,380,907

We are proud of the strong partnership NRCS has with our conservation partners in Arkansas. Throughout Fiscal Year 2023, we will work closely with our partners to continue accomplishing our goals above and beyond what we could ever achieve on our own. Through hard work and extra effort, we will continue to deliver high-quality service assisting our customers address their most pressing natural resource concerns.

New NRCS Website:

We've recently unveiled our new website <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/arkansas>, which was designed whether you are a farmer, rancher or forest landowner who uses Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs or one of our partners who helps us deliver on our conservation mission.

The new NRCS site has been designed to support and enhance our mission by delivering relevant, timely, customer-focused information in an easy-to-navigate platform.

Key features include:

- It has been designed using the U.S. Web Design System, so you'll see a certain "family resemblance" among USDA and other federal websites, including



www.farmers.gov.

- It has accessibility (508 conformant), meaning the site is designed for use by people with disabilities.

- It's mobile responsive, meaning that it should work on a cellphone or tablet as easily as on a desktop computer:

Be sure to check out our:

- **Guides and Instructions-** Search by resource type, NRCS program, natural resource concern, and state.
- **Getting Assistance-Learn** more about available technical and financial assistance and how you can get support online as well as with the NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.

(See State Conservationist on Page 9)

ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

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The Arkansas Conservation News is published quarterly by the Arkansas Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Please send submissions to [Reginald L. Jackson](mailto:Reginald.L.Jackson@aphis.usda.gov), State Public Affairs Specialist, or [Jasmine Parham](mailto:Jasmine.Parham@aphis.usda.gov), Public Affairs Specialist at: Room 3416, Federal Bldg.; 700 W. Capitol Ave.; Little Rock, AR 72201
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For more information on Arkansas NRCS visit:

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Programs



Biden-Harris Administration Announces an Additional \$325 Million in Pilot Projects through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, for Total Investment of \$3.1 Billion

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that the Biden-Harris Administration, through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is investing an additional \$325 million for 71 projects under the second funding pool of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities effort, bringing the total investment from both funding pools to over \$3.1 billion for 141 tentatively selected projects. Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is working to expand markets for American producers who produce climate-smart commodities, leverage greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart production, and provide meaningful benefits to producers, including small and underserved producers.

“Expanding opportunities for small and underserved producers is a key goal of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities. Small and underserved producers are facing the impacts of climate change head on, with limited resources, and have the most to gain from leveraging the growing market demand for agricultural goods produced in a sustainable, climate-smart way. Our goal is to expand markets for climate-smart commodities and ensure that small and underserved producers reap the benefits of these market opportunities,”

said Vilsack. The Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity had high demand from across agriculture and forestry. Between two funding pools, USDA received over 1,000 proposals requesting more than \$20 billion in funds from more than 700 entities, including nonprofit organizations; for-profits and government entities; farmer cooperatives; conservation, energy and environmental groups; state, tribal and local governments; universities; small businesses; and large corporations. Applications were received from all 50 states, tribal lands, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

In September, USDA announced \$2.8 billion for 70 tentatively selected projects from the first funding pool, which received over \$18 billion in total project requests for projects between \$5 million to \$100 million. USDA announced an additional \$325 million for 71 projects under the second funding pool, which received over \$2 billion in proposals for projects from \$250,000-\$4,999,999. All of the projects funded through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities require meaningful involvement of small and underserved producers. The second funding pool was particularly focused on innovative projects that emphasize enrolling

small and underserved producers and invest in measuring, monitoring, reporting and verifying the benefits of climate-smart practices at minority-serving institutions.

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects benefit from a diverse range of project partners, including more than 30 minority-serving institutions, more than 20 tribal partners, and many groups focused on working with small and underserved producers. Projects include support for activities that will expand and increase producer access to markets for climate-smart commodities, provide financial and technical assistance to support climate-smart production practice implementation, include investments in quantifying and monitoring greenhouse gas benefits of those practices, and bring the resulting commodities to new markets.

To maximize access to all types of entities, the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity offered applicants flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

(See Page 4)

Climate Smart *(Continued from page 3)*

USDA is currently in negotiations regarding the first 70 projects and will work with the applicants for all 141 identified projects to finalize the scope and funding levels in the coming months. Funding will be provided by USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation.

Secretary Vilsack made the announcement from Tuskegee University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and 1890 Land-grant University, which is the lead partner on two Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodity projects. On December 16, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Dr. Homer Wilkes joined the University of Arkansas at Monticello and their partners for a visit to Five Oaks Ag Education and Research Center in Humphrey. At the event, Wilkes announced funding for Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities projects, including approximately \$3.7M for an Arkansas based climate smart forestry pilot project that will benefit small and underserved landowners in the Southern Bottomland Region.

This and other project examples include:

Developing and Harnessing Climate-Smart Commodities from Hardwood Restoration for Small and Underserved Landowners in the Southern Bottomland Region

This project plans to focus on working with small scale and underserved landowners on marketing climate-smart wood products with support for bottomland hardwood afforestation and planting mixed hardwood oak plantations. Full technical and financial assistance is planned for landowners and demonstration sites. Partners plan to use a forest inventory system to monitor and assess tree stand structure, composition, and health status across the bottomland hardwood forests, and estimate carbon storage and evaluate indicator wildlife populations.

Lead Partner: University of Arkansas System

Other Major Partners: University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM) (lead), University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), Texas A&M University

Primary States Expected: AR

Major Commodities: wood products

Approximate Funding Ceiling:

\$3,710,000

Climate Resiliency for the Farm and Market Development: Economically Viable Low Carbon and Climate-Smart Practices for Soybean Farming

Team Climate-Smart Soybean plan to provide small/underserved soybean producers with sufficient incentives to encourage the use of climate-smart practices and participate in the development of markets and promotion of climate-smart soybeans. Participants would use cover crops, no-till, climate-smart soybeans, crop rotation, bio-fertilizers, and biochar. Led by an Hispanic-serving institution, project assistance would be provided in a culturally-relative approach.

Lead Partner: University of Texas at Arlington

Other Major Partners: Texas A&M AgriLife, University of Missouri, Tarleton State University

Primary States Expected: AR, MO,

TX Major Commodities: Corn & Soybeans

Approximate Funding Ceiling:

\$4,991,400

Southeast Arkansas Agricultural Cooperative and Multicultural Education Initiative

This project plans to provide a market platform for rice growers producing premium rice that is certified sustainably grown. Participating farmers may earn a premium and save in variable crop expenses. This project plans to establish an agricultural apprenticeship at a minority serving institution, increase the supply of climate-smart rice, and promote climate-smart practices through education and demonstration. This project would use a "whole farm" approach to climate-smart management with a specific emphasis on quantifying greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in rice production.

Lead Partner: Whitaker Grain

Other Major Partners: University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, RiceTec, Ducks Unlimited

Primary States Expected: AR

Major Commodities: Rice

Approximate Funding Ceiling:

\$4,999,999

BEACON Pilot: Farmers Guiding Farmers Towards Climate Smart Agriculture

This project plans to advance equity by minimizing transaction costs and addressing cultural dynamics for Black and indigenous producers by using a farmer-to-farmer collaborative training approach. Farmers would define culturally appropriate product labels, and partners would work to increase market access, specifically through marketing the value-add of using climate-smart practices like cover crops, no-till, tree planting and prescribed grazing.

Lead Partner: Florida A&M University

Other Major Partners: National Black Food & Justice Alliance, Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network, the Tallahassee Food Network, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, Organic Farmers Association, Women Food and Agriculture Network, the Earth's Garden Network

Primary States Expected: GA, FL, AL, AR, OK, TX

Major Commodities: Specialty and organic crops

Approximate Funding Ceiling:

\$4,999,000

Increasing Accessibility to Regenerative Farming Practices and Markets for Small and/or Underserved Producers

All pilot participants would be paid a stipend to cover time spent on climate-smart regenerative farm planning and emissions reduction plan design. Each farm would also have access to incentive payments, dependent on their emissions reductions and specific implementation of Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry practices. A Greener World plans to provide customized marketing support to all project producers.

(Continued on Page 5)

Climate Smart *(Continued from page 4)*

Partners would ensure all outreach and technical assistance efforts are culturally-relevant and would assist producers in becoming Certified Regenerative which allows them to access new climate-smart markets and sell commodities for a higher premium.

Lead Partner: Greener World

Other Major Partners: Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, Sub-contractor/Evaluation Partner, Soil Health Institute (SHI), National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), National Co-op Grocers (NCG) Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (RAFI-USA)

Primary States Expected: AR, GA, MO, MS, NC, SC, TX, VA

Major Commodities: Fruit, Vegetables and Specialty Crops; Beef, Livestock

Approximate Funding Ceiling:
\$4,000,000

National Black Growers Council Regenerative Agriculture Pilot Program (National Black Growers Council: Black Cotton/peanuts)

In this project, the National Black Growers Council (NBGC) plans to work with historically underserved farmers to test regenerative agricultural practices and determine which are best suited for various regions and farm types in the Southeast United States. Once complete,

NBGC plans to scale up participation to include additional farmers a, providing incentives to increase adoption of regenerative agricultural practices and leveraging market data to sell products to corporate partners who need to meet corporate sustainability goals.

Lead Partner: National Black Growers Council

Other Major Partners: Cargill, Bayer, Syngenta

Primary States Expected: AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, VA

Major Commodities: Cotton, corn, rice, soybeans, sugar cane, peanuts, canola, and grain sorghum

Approximate Funding Ceiling:
\$4,789,000

Improved Practices of Climate-Smart Livestock Production Systems and Agricultural Commodities while Enhancing Carbon Sequestration in the Southern USA: Innovating toward a new climate-smart commodity by investing in minority producers

The project plans to work with minority small producers to implement silvopasture systems and climate-resilient forage systems. Producers would receive incentives that enable their participation in climate-smart pilots and continued implementation, including reduced feed costs, carbon credit profits, and value-added products. Partners would create a mobile processing and marketing system to support the local, farm-direct meat production pipeline in a climate-conscious manner. The marketing pipeline combine farmers' markets, local restaurants, craft butcher shops, and direct to-consumer approaches.

Lead Partner: Tuskegee University

Other Major Partners: Mississippi State University, Alabama A&M University, Langston University, Widget Development & Trading Company

Primary States Expected: AL, MS, AR, TX

Major Commodities: Sheep and Goats
Approximate Funding Ceiling:
\$4,081,100

A complete list of projects is available at usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities.

"America's farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are leading the way in implementing climate-smart solutions across their operations," said Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan in Arkansas. "Through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, USDA will provide targeted funding to meet national and global demand and expand market opportunities for climate-smart commodities to increase the competitive advantage of American producers. We want a broad array of agriculture and forestry to see themselves in this effort, including small and historically underserved producers as well as early adopters."

The Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects across both funding pools will deliver important impacts for farmers, ranchers, foresters, and communities nationwide. USDA anticipates that the projects from both funding pools combined will result in:

- **Hundreds of expanded markets and revenue streams** for farmers and ranchers and commodities across agriculture and forestry ranging from traditional corn to specialty crops.

- **More than 60,000 farms reached, encompassing more than 25 million acres of working land** engaged in climate-smart production practices, like cover crops, no-till and nutrient management, as well as pasture and forestry management.

- **More than 60 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent sequestered over the lives of the projects.** This is equivalent to removing more than 12 million gasoline-powered passenger vehicles from the road for one year.

- **Involvement of nearly 100 universities, including over 30 minority serving institutions.** This will bring new ideas and innovative skills in monitoring and outreach. This includes:

- **11 projects with a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)**

- as the lead and more than 35 projects with HBCUs as major partners; and

- **Six projects with a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)** as the lead and nearly 20 projects with HSIs as major partners.

- **Over 20 tribes and tribal groups** leading and partnering on many projects and representing tribes across a wide geography.

- Proposals for the 141 selected projects include plans to **match on average 50% of the federal investment with non-federal funds.**

(Continued on Page 6)

More Information

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is part of USDA's broader strategy to position agriculture and forestry as leaders in climate change mitigation through voluntary, incentive-based, market-driven approaches. Visit usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities to learn more about this effort, and usda.gov/climate-solutions for climate-related updates, resources and tools across the Department.

Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our Nation's lands, biodiversity and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through climate-smart agriculture and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local and Tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.



NRCS photos by Reginald Jackson

(Above and below) Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Dr. Homer Wilkes joined the University of Arkansas at Monticello and their partners for a visit to Five Oaks Ag Education and Research Center in Humphrey.



Partnerships

USDA NRCS Accepting 2023 Applications for Two Regional Conservation Partnership Program Projects in Arkansas

Farmers and landowners in two USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project areas in Arkansas can apply to receive assistance to implement conservation activities. The projects will offer financial assistance to landowners in fiscal year 2023.

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas who submit applications to their local NRCS office by January 27, 2023, will be considered for this round of funding. Applications received after January 27 will be considered in later funding periods, subject to funding availability.

“RCPP is a unique program that leverages non-federal investments brought by conservation partners to accelerate conservation in selected project areas,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “This approach helps us maximize use of our collective resources to address locally identified concerns.”

The RCPP projects and associated counties with projects are:

- Buffalo River Partnership Project (portions of Baxter, Boone, Madison, Marion, Newton, Pope, Searcy, Stone, and Van Buren counties):

The project is designed to collaborate with interested farmers and landowners to increase agricultural sustainability by implementing voluntary conservation practices within the Buffalo River Watershed. Partners seek to collaborate with local farmers, landowners and community leaders in priority watersheds to identify resource concerns and conservation practices to improve farm sustainability and water quality, reduce sediment and nutrient loads to the Buffalo River by providing technical and financial assistance to implement practices that improves pasture and nutrient management, restore eroding streambanks to prevent loss of pastureland and reduce maintenance costs and sediment loads from erosion of unpaved roads, and assist interested landowners conserve key conservation lands to prevent future erosion and nutrient loads in the Buffalo River watershed. (Lead Partner: The Na-

ture Conservancy)

- The East Arkansas Delta RCPP project: The project will implement innovative, effective and compelling solutions for the primary resource concerns related to land improvement/management/restoration of row crop and alternative crop producers and landowners in Lee, St. Francis, Monroe and Phillips counties. The objectives are to provide technical and financial assistance to all eligible producers and landowners, including socially disadvantaged producers and landowners in four select Strike-Force counties to improve their resource management and cropping systems and to help producers and landowners to identify the conservation activities they need to solve their conservation problems and install appropriate innovative conservation practices to decrease water quality degradation; improve habitat for fish, wildlife, and invertebrates; and reduce excess/insufficient water/drought.

Individuals and other entities actively engaged in agricultural production are eligible to participate in RCPP. RCPP offers a continuous application sign-up. However, to be considered for funding, applications must be received by January 27. Applicants can sign up for the 2023 program year by contacting their local USDA Field Service Center.

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on how well they align with project priorities using procedures to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal



NRCS photo by Reginald Jackson

Outreach Coordinator Alvin Peer (center) and Assistant State Conservation Engineer Shannon Griffin (far right) work with alternative crop producers in Forrest City.

where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents.

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. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

For more information, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local USDA/NRCS Field Service Center.



Partnerships

NRCS Accepting 2023 Applications for Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network Open Pine Landscape Restoration RCPP Project



Farmers and landowners in the Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Open Pine Landscape Restoration Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project in Arkansas can apply to receive financial assistance in fiscal year 2023.

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas who submit applications to their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office by February 17, 2023, will be considered for this assistance.

“RCPP is a unique program that leverages non-federal investments brought by conservation partners to accelerate conservation in selected project areas,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “This approach helps us maximize use of our collective resources to address locally identified concerns.”

The RCPP project and associated counties with the project are:

Conservation Delivery Network Open Pine Land Restoration Project (portions of Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Clark, Drew, Lincoln, Nevada, Ouachita counties)

The AR-LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration partnership will advance the recovery of species of conservation concern by implementing Desired Forest Condition management practices across 30,000 acres of private lands in Arkansas.

American Bird Conservancy and 19 partners plan to use several innovative tools and approaches to target funding to lands critical for the protection of species such as Northern Bobwhite, Henslow’s and LeConte’s sparrows, Louisiana Pine Snake, and Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Partnerships with the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff and other entities will help ensure that Historically Underserved farmers participate meaningfully in the project.

(Lead Partner: American Bird Conservancy)

Individuals and other entities actively engaged in agricultural production are eligible to participate in RCPP. RCPP offers a continuous application sign-up. However, to be considered for funding, applications must be received by February 17. Applicants can sign up for the 2023 program year by contacting their local USDA Service Center.

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on how well they align with project priorities using procedures to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds

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our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

All USDA Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with NRCS should call ahead to schedule an appointment. Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal where producers can view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in.

For more information about RCPP, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local USDA/NRCS Field Service Center.



Programs

What are Your 2023 Conservation Resolutions?

The year 2022 has come to an end, meaning it's time to start thinking about what you want to work on in 2023. Setting resolutions can be hard, but The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is here to help with your conservation resolutions!

If you would like to make a #ConservationResolution for 2023, here are just a few options to consider:

- Incorporate cover crops into your operation;
- Extend your growing season by using a high tunnel;
- Improve your soil health by utilizing no-till practices;
- Provide recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat by restoring wetlands;
- Reduce input costs by focusing on

• Protect topsoil and groundwater quality by devoting environmentally sensitive agricultural land to conservation benefits.

Sometimes resolutions can be hard to stick to, but here are some tips for how to make your conservation resolutions successful:

- Develop a conservation plan- To get started on your #ConservationResolutions, call and make an appointment at your local USDA service center, to discuss your vision for your operation. NRCS can provide you with free technical assistance.
- Don't do it alone -NRCS's conservation programs give you the tools and resources to protect environmentally sensitive land and restore grasslands, wetlands, and forests which leads to cleaner water and air, healthier soil, and enhanced

wildlife habitat. NRCS can also help with financial assistance to help you achieve your #ConservationResolutions

- See what other landowners are doing
- Learn about the benefits of conservation practices directly from the farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners applying them with our series of 90-second videos. Explore the different types of conservation practices by watching our Conservation at Work series. You can also read producer profiles on farmers.gov.

See #ConservationResolutions and see how NRCS highlights how you can help protect our natural resources. Follow along to start your #ConservationResolutions!



STC (Continued from page 2)

• Conservation by State
-Find information on NRCS programs, services and other information in your state.
If you can't find something that you used to find on our website, contact us and we can help.
Now that we are in the winter season, this is a reminder that NRCS offers disaster assistance for those operations affected by inclement weather. NRCS provides financial resources through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources.

Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes. Contact your local USDA Service Center for more information.
NRCS also offers climate-smart solutions through voluntary programs to help producers build soil health, sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and mitigate the impacts of climate change while building resilience to strengthen agriculture operation. NRCS offers financial and technical assistance to support farmers, ranchers, private forest landowners, and partners in implement-

ing climate-smart management solutions. These programs include EQIP, CSP, and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. NRCS also offers RCPP and the Conservation Innovation Grants program that support climate-smart conservation efforts through partnership and grant opportunities.

For additional information, log on to www.farmers.gov/conservation/climate-smart or contact your local USDA Service Center.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Sullivan".

Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

Conservation On the Ground



(l to r) Foresters Dow Dollar, Sr. and Dow Dollar, Jr.

How a Father and Son Duo is Effectively Restoring Wildlife Habitat Utilizing Technical assistance from NRCS

*Story and photos by Jasmine Parham
Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS Arkansas*

Dow Dollar, Sr. and his son Dow Jr. have taken unique paths to discovering their love of the woodlands. For Dow Sr. adjusting to forestry started out as a learning curve but later turned into a passion. A lifelong Arkansan, Dow grew up loving the outdoors and appreciating nature. This love and adoration for the environment fostered his interest in farming.

With over 27 years of experience in the industry, Dow Sr. is no stranger to farming, but in the past three years, he recently began managing forest land after obtaining and purchasing land from family members. Dow Sr. and his son manage a 417-acre woodland in Pope County that they named Iron Oak.

"My son came along and he happened to love farming also. Now we work together on these projects and we both enjoy it and are lucky to work together," said Dow Sr.

The Iron Oak property gets its name from the abundance of post oaks located throughout. In addition, the forest also includes cherry bark oak, willow oak, and shag bark hickory just to name a few.

The Dollars' passion for forestry is evident in the work that they do. The duo work diligently towards forest land improvement, but they attribute much of their success to the financial and technical assistance from Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

"NRCS and partner agencies help forestland owners access technical expertise and financial assistance to develop and complete conservation practices that improve the health and productivity of their land," said State Forester Doug Akin.

Even though Dow Sr. lacks a forestry background, much of his management knowledge come from his professional background. As a former Vietnam-era Marine with a degree in Accounting from the University of Central Arkansas, Dollar brings his tacti-

cal and technical skills to his business.

"Forestry must be managed like a business," Dow Sr. said. "If you want it to flourish and do well based on your intended goals, you must manage it."

Successful maintenance of the woodlands has drastically changed the integrity of their property. The Dollars worked with District Conservationist Reginald Cunningham and Resource Conservationist Wesley Duvall through an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract.

"We get you started, but it is refreshing to witness producers that actually take initiative, said Duvall." "The Dollars manage their property exceptionally well and that makes all the difference."

In three short years, the Dollars have taken what might be perceived as undesirable trees and have planted trees and shrubs



An example of NRCS practice forest stand improvement being implemented on the Iron Oak property.

(Continued on Page 11)

Conservation On the Ground

for wildlife food and cover. In addition, they have completed forest stand improvement to thin trees and create openings on 158 acres, installed more than 13,000 feet of firebreaks and reduced underbrush on 40 acres using prescribed burns.

Dow said his goal in forest improvement is simple yet impactful— providing firewood, sequestering carbon, and serving as a habitat for wildlife.

“We would like to think we are leaving this place a whole lot better than we found it” Dollar, Sr. said.

Managing forest land comes with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. NRCS can help with the challenges of conservation and support foresters in their efforts to achieve sustainability for their communities. You can start by contacting your local USDA Service Center.



Pope County District Conservationist Reginald Cunningham and Dow Dollar, Sr. observing some of the desirable forest species

The Iron Oak property located in Pope County



RESPOND NOW

YOUR VOICE. YOUR FUTURE. YOUR OPPORTUNITY.

nass.usda.gov/AgCensus

#AgCensus

USDA United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service

USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture.

If you receive a survey questionnaire, please respond quickly and online if possible.

The results of the surveys help determine the structure of USDA farm programs, such as soil rental rates for the Conservation Reserve Program and prices and yields used for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs. This county-level data is critical for USDA farm payment determinations. Survey responses also help associations, businesses and policymakers advocate for their industry and help educate others

on the importance of agriculture.

NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents and publishes only aggregate data, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

Important Dates

February 6, 2023: Response deadline; producers can respond online, by mail, or telephone.

Spring/Summer 2024: Data release

NASS data is available online at nass.usda.gov/Publications and through the searchable Quick Stats database. Watch a video on how NASS data is used at youtube.com/watch?v=m-4zjn-h26io&feature=youtu.be.

Did You Know?

Emergency Watershed Protection Program Offers Assistance for Flooding, Storms, and Other Natural Disasters



A producer in Pope County looks over flooded field in 2019



(Above) Logs and debris left over from flooding in Washington County

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) which responds to emergencies created by natural disasters. It is not necessary for a national emergency to be declared for an area to be eligible for assistance. The EWP Program is a recovery effort aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural disasters. All projects must have a project sponsor. NRCS may bear up to 75 percent of the eligible construction cost of emergency measures (90 percent within limited-resource areas as identified by the U.S. Census data). The remaining costs must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard life and property as a result of a natural disaster.

Threats that the EWP Program addresses are termed watershed impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

- debris-clogged waterways,
- unstable streambanks,
- severe erosion jeopardizing public

infrastructure

- wind-borne debris removal, and
- damaged upland sites stripped of protective vegetation by fire or drought.

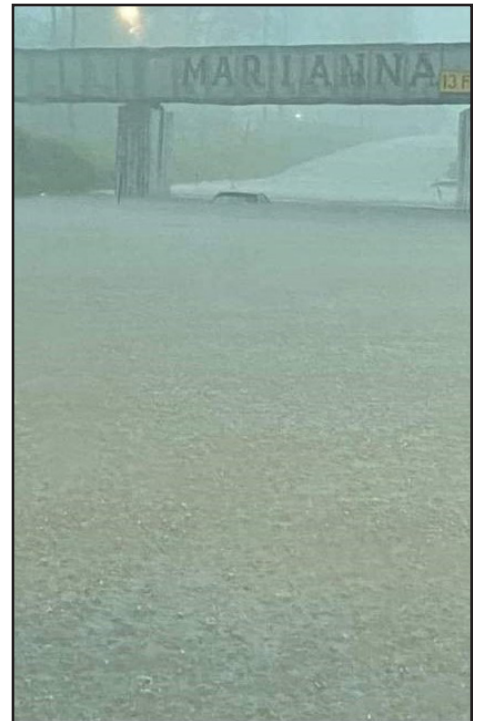
Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance but must be represented by a project sponsor.

Sponsors include legal subdivisions of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization.

Sponsors are responsible for:

- providing land rights to implement repair work,
- securing all necessary permits,
- furnishing the local cost share,
- accomplishing required works of improvement to remove the imminent threat to life and property,
- performing any necessary operation and maintenance.

If your land has suffered severe damage that may qualify for the EWP Program <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ewp-emergency-watershed-protection>, contact your local NRCS office and request assistance.



*Photo submitted by Kalven Trice
Flooding event in downtown Marianna in April 2022*

City, county, state governments, flood and water control districts, and soil and water conservation districts are the most common sponsors of EWP projects.

Climate Smart Ag

USDA Announces Once-in-a-Generation Investment in Rural Communities

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) welcomed the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, which will deliver \$19.5 billion in new conservation funding to support climate-smart agriculture. This historic funding will bolster the new steps that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced to improve opportunities for nutrient management. NRCS will target funding, increasing program flexibilities, launch a new outreach campaign to promote nutrient management's economic benefits, in addition to expanding partnerships to develop nutrient management plans. This is part of USDA's broader effort to address future fertilizer availability and cost challenges for U.S. producers.

Through USDA's conservation programs, America's farmers and ranchers will have streamlined opportunities to improve their nutrient management planning, which provides conservation benefits while mitigating the impacts of supply chain disruptions and increased input costs.

Alongside the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act and American Rescue Plan, the Inflation Reduction Act provides once-in-a-generation investment in rural communities and their infrastructure needs, while also responding to the climate crisis. The bill invests \$40 billion into existing USDA programs promoting climate smart agriculture, rural energy efficiency and reliability, forest conservation, and more.

Approximately \$20 billion of this investment will support conservation programs that are oversubscribed, meaning that more producers will have access to conservation assistance that will support healthier land and water, improve the resilience of their operations, support their bottom line, and combat climate change. This includes:

- \$8.45 billion for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- \$4.95 billion for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- \$3.25 billion for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- \$1.4 billion for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

For more information and resources for nutrient management planning, visit farmers.gov/global-food-insecurity. Contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.



NRCS photos by Reginald Jackson

(Above) Chief Terry Cosby addresses NRCS staff during Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts Meeting and discusses Inflation Reduction Act.

(Below) Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan, Chief Terry Cosby, AACD President Jerry Don Clark, Arkansas Department of Agriculture (ADA) Natural Resources Division Director Chris Colclasure in August 2022



WHY IS THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE IMPORTANT TO YOU?



THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE IMPACTS THE FUTURE OF YOUR OPERATION, COMMUNITY, AND INDUSTRY.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) sends a census questionnaire to every known producer in the country.

Producers benefit with new and improved farm programs and services tailored to their region and needs. They also benefit by having accurate data to help make production and marketing decisions for their operations.

We encourage all producers to complete the questionnaire and return it.

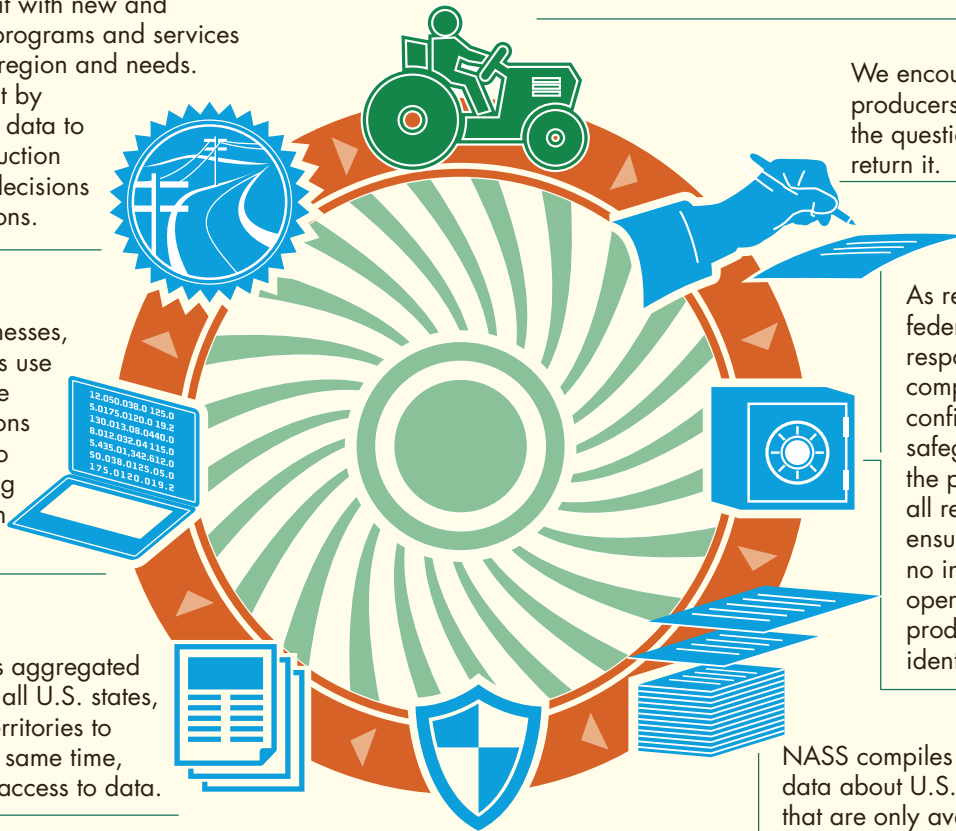
Producers, businesses, and many others use the data to make informed decisions such as where to locate processing or transportation facilities.

As required by federal law, all responses are completely confidential. NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

NASS publishes aggregated census data for all U.S. states, counties, and territories to everyone at the same time, ensuring equal access to data.

Data are kept secure and each NASS employee is committed to data security by following mandated procedures to ensure information is not compromised.

NASS compiles and analyzes data about U.S. farming that are only available as part of the census such as demographics, economics, and land use.



Census of Agriculture data work for you by improving decisions about jobs, transportation, production practices, new technologies, marketing opportunities, farm services and programs, local, state, and federal policy, and more. For these reasons, it is important to respond to the ag census.



www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus
United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

**CENSUS OF
AGRICULTURE**