

**Illinois State Technical Committee Meeting
Farm Credit
1100 Farm Credit Drive
Mahomet, IL 61853
March 6, 2025 - 9:30 a.m.**

A G E N D A

Welcome and Introductions *Tammy Willis*

- Tammy discussed the current situation with the new administration and actions that are happening. She conducted a question / answer session with attendees.
- The Farm Bill has been extended. When it is released, there is a possibility there will be changes.
- The government is currently operating on a Continuing Resolution (CR); The CR expires on 3/14/25. There are three possible outcomes: 1. A budget is signed, 2. Employees are furloughed, 3. The CR is extended until 9/30/25. For now, USDA / NRCS will move forward based on the Advisory Allocations from the Farm Bill and not the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) IRA funds.
- NRCS is on a hiring freeze
- Tammy explained that the pause on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for the EQIP, CSP and ACEP funds were released to pay practices implemented in existing contracts.
- IRA funds used in agreements are still on pause.

Financial Assistance Programs *Jamie Alderks*

Application Deadlines:

Program	Application Deadline
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	May 2, 2025
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)	February 28, 2025
EQIP Landscape Initiatives ACT NOW	May 30, 2025 (note: ranking deadlines are the 13 th of every month, March – June)
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP18) - Land Management and Rental (LMR)	April 18, 2025

EQIP Applications Submitted by Deadline:

3,550 IL EQIP applications

Fiscal Year (FY) Advisory Allocations:

Program	FY 2024 Initial Allocation	FY 2025 Advisory Allocation
CSP Renewal	\$8,950,000 Budgeted	\$7,212,000 Budgeted
CSP Classic	\$13,395,000 Budgeted	\$10,618,000 Budgeted
CSP Organic	\$200,000 Budgeted	\$200,000 Budgeted
CSP Total	\$22,545,000	\$18,030,000

Program	FY 2024 Initial Allocation	FY 2025 Advisory Allocation
EQIP General	\$15,449,955*	\$13,077,223
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)	\$462,210	\$126,723
National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)	\$201,283	\$220,359
EQIP Special Projects		\$15,000,000
Topsoil Conservation		\$7,500,000
Nutrient Loss Reduction		\$7,500,000
Monarch Butterfly Initiative	\$73,806	\$100,000

Northern Bobwhite	\$219,771	\$444,826
Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP)	\$380,291	\$350,000
Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)	\$3,318,000	Headquarters Determines after applications submitted
EQIP Total	\$20,105,316	\$29,319,131

**\$4,000,000 additional EQIP funds were received in addition to the initial allocation.*

FY 2025 Obligations (to date):

Program	FY 2025 Obligation
CSP Renewal IRA	\$20,728,393
CSP Renewal Classic	\$3,959,661
CSP Renewal Total	\$24,688,054

EQIP General Ranking Pools:

- Beginning Farmer FY25
- Cropland FY25
- Forestland and Wildlife FY25
- EQIP CIC Conservation Activities FY25
- FY25 On-Farm Energy
- FY25 Organic
- FY25 OTI
- Livestock FY25
- Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)
 - MRBI - Clinton Lake FY25
 - MRBI - Upper Macoupin Creek FY25
 - MRBI - Vermilion Headwaters FY25
- Socially Disadvantaged Farmer FY25
- Topsoil Conservation FY25 (New special project)
- Nutrient Loss Reduction FY25 (New special project)

EQIP ACT NOW Ranking Pools:

- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)
 - NWQI - Friends Creek
 - NWQI - Money Creek
 - NWQI - Panther Creek
- Northern Bobwhite
- Monarch Butterfly
- Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP) - Cross Boundary Upland Oak Restoration
- Urban Ag

CSP Ranking Pools:

- Agricultural Land - Classic FY25
- Agricultural Land - BFR FY25
- Agricultural Land - SDFR FY25
- Agricultural Land - Organic FY25
- NIPF - Classic FY25
- NIPF - BFR FY25
- NIPF - SDFR FY25

Illinois NRCS EQIP website: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/eqip-environmental-quality-incentives/illinois/environmental-quality>

FA Programs Discussion:

- Questions were asked about the special projects available with EQIP for Topsoil Conservation and Nutrient Loss Reduction. Attached are maps with the special project locations and the EQIP Practice Matrix identifying practices available in each EQIP ranking pool (including the special projects). Information can also be found on the Illinois EQIP website (link above).
- Several partners were concerned that field offices were not aware of the special projects. Alderks explained that field offices were provided with the IL bulletin that identified the special projects in mid-February and that was per State Conservationist's, Tammy Willis, direction. Alderks also explained that EQIP applications were due on February 28th, but we will not have an idea of how many applications and the amount of funds submitted for each ranking pool, until after the EQIP ranking deadline of April 25, 2025.

Easement Programs *Cindy Johnston for Paula Hingson*

- With \$2.3 million in Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE) funding, we will have selected three Easement applications to fund: Two new applications and one 30-year conversion to a permanent easement.
- We have \$200,000.00 in funding for improvements/repairs for existing Easements.
- For ACEP-WRE-IRA we received \$4.5 million at the beginning of the year. We have projects selected for that funding that will require release of those funds. They are currently on pause.
- We received \$450,000 in Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) for new projects. We currently have one application for those funds.
- For Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)- We closed on 5 Easements in FY24. We are obligating 4 new Easements totaling \$614,970 and planning to go to closing on one additional easement worth \$212,500.00 in April, or sooner, if possible.
- There is a newly funded RCPP-project, however it was funded with IRA funding, therefore it is currently on pause.

NRCS Partnerships *Eric Gerth*

- Update was provided on the current status of Agreements in Illinois. Reimbursements using IRA funds are currently on hold until further guidance is received. All agreements are currently being evaluated to ensure they meet the priorities of the new administration. We will keep partners updated as we learn new information.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Updates *Shelley Sweatman for Jamie Diebal*

The 2018 Farm Bill was extended, which has allowed County Offices to work on existing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) accounts. We are still waiting on information regarding a continuous, general & grassland signup.

CRP Contracts and Acres Expiring FY2025

- IL FSA has around 7,386 contracts expiring in FY2025. A majority of those are continuous contracts.
- Roughly 70,850.51 acres are associated to those expiring CRP contracts.
 - In comparison to last year, this is almost double what expired last year. In 2026 & 2027 our expiring acres will be even more 100,000.
- Please be patient with our COFs. If you are helping us in any way, please try and get work back to us as you get them done to help us avoid trying to review all approvals the day before a deadline.

Continuous Signup 61

- None at this time

General Signup 62

- None at this time

Grasslands CRP Signup

- None at this time

Soil Rental Rates

- FSA annually updates county-average rental rates and SRR's to ensure CRP payment rates are set at an amount that encourages enrollment of eligible land and not adversely impact the cropland rental market.

- The Farm Bill requires FSA to use NASS data to determine our county average rates.
- If sufficient county NASS data is not available, NASS determines a State average cropland rental rate which is reflected in this data.
- A State average cropland rental rate may or may not be representative of actual county rental rates.
- We just completed a review in January.
- Nine counties requested alternative rental rates. Fourteen counties did not have sufficient data and the average was used.

Disaster

- Spring weather is coming
- FSA runs the State Emergency Board (SEB) for all USDA agencies. The SEB is responsible for Secretarial Designations process and submissions for approval.
- FSA is working with IEMA to get quicker/more accurate damage reports and to help spread the word quicker on FSA programs that might be helpful for agricultural losses.
- Conservation Division has 2 programs that might help with agricultural losses due to weather related disasters.
 - Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) is not new, but it is being utilized more and more to help repair and restore private timber and forest areas that are damaged during a disaster such as a tornado or derecho. EFRP can be utilized to clean up downed trees, repair fence within the timber area, or to replant trees in areas of destruction to ensure continuity of the forest/timber area. This program can also be utilized on CREP acres.
 - Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) is utilized to repair and restore cropland areas that have been damaged during a natural disaster. For example: with flooding, this program can help to rebuild erosion structures or fence or take sand and silt off fields that are cropped. If tornado or derecho damage occurs, ECP can help clean up debris in cropped fields or replacement of windbreaks and shelterbelts. If there is a drought, ECP can help with irrigation to orchards and vineyards, and it can supply water to livestock.

The biggest key with both EFRP and ECP is that the damage must be so severe that participants are not able to do the restoration without our help. Following that logic, they cannot start the work before they have an approved application. There are exceptions but it is a severe/public or personal safety situation that would allow for work being done prior to applying. Contacting us quickly after a disaster happens will be key in our ability to help them.

- FSA also has other programs that help with weather related disaster damage or loss of virtually any ag commodity that is marketed. There are also some programs that help with damage to facilities needed to market an ag commodity as well. FSA can help with damage to orchards, vine crops, Christmas trees, sod, floriculture, grazing/pasture, farm raised fish, honey/bee hives, livestock, windbreaks, water transportation, water removal, grain bins and other commodity storage/hauling.
- This is some of what FSA can do to help ag producers with weather related damage or loss. Can you help us spread the word on these programs if you are out and about and see someone in need that we might be able to help? Would you, our partners, have any disaster resources for producers? We are genuinely interested to know if there are other disaster resources out there that we can point producers to in a case where we are unable to help them. Please let us know if you have any disaster programs/resources you would like to share by emailing us at shelley.sweatman@usda.gov

Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs) Update *Trevor Sample*

- The Steering Committee is working with the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center and the National Center for Supercomputer Applications to develop an NLRs data portal on the Great Lakes to Gulf website.
 - We are currently building the site from scratch using reported data through 2022.
 - We are beginning with developing the Point Source Sector information page. A draft mockup is almost complete and will be sent to working group members for feedback.

- We are starting with static content contained in the 2023 Biennial Report while we work with state and federal agencies to resubmit previous years data with HUC 8 codes. This will enable interactive maps.
- The idea is to have more visual content and less text, although some explanatory text will accompany the graphs and tables.
- The Urban Stormwater Sector will be developed next, along with a research page. We will be working
- Due to the amount of data, the Agriculture Sector page will be developed last.
- Our goal is to have the site completed by the end of 2025, with interactive maps for most information.
- In 2026, we will update the website with data from 2023-2025 and publish an Executive Summary highlighting this new data.
- Data will be updated on an annual basis along with an Executive Summary.
- There will be no 2025 Biennial Report.
 - US Geological Survey (USGS) will soon be finalizing the 2019-2023, five year running average loads that were presented at the Policy Working Group meeting last November.
 - The 2020-2024 preliminary load results will be completed this fall and will be presented at an NLRS meeting. Those results will be finalized in spring of 2026.
 - The 2025 water year will end September 30 of this year. Preliminary loads will be presented in the fall of 2026 and finalized the following spring of 2027. At this point, we will be able to compare the 2021-2025 five-year average loads with the interim NLRS goals of 15% nitrate reduction and 25% total phosphorus reduction.
- The Urban Stormwater Tracking subgroup meeting was held February 19 on Zoom.
 - Items of Discussion were Resources and Outreach Data submitted by Urban Stormwater Partners, the NLRS website, as well as a review of a survey on urban stormwater data displays.
- The Steering Committee will be sending a poll soon to select a data for an NLRS Conference in November.

Other Items *Open to Group*

- Don Kahl, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Wildlife : at this time there is no negative news on funding status.
- Mike Redmer US Fish & Wildlife: The State Private Lands Office experienced no loss in staff due to the deferred resignation or termination of probationary employees, however, other FWS staff located in IL were lost. Among challenges my office will face include doing business and paying bills due to the current freeze on Government purchase cards. The Department of Interior has also announced there will be Reductions in Force (RIF) that will vary by agency.
- Pheasants Forever (PF): We are heavily federally funded, and pausing all operations for now. We have frozen onboarding for several and frozen all jobs nationwide.
- Jamie Jones: is open to conversation and asks that anyone with questions reach out.
- Stacy Lindeman, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf): NWTf has three IL Foresters that are NRCS funded, if the agreement is lost we will be heavily impacted.
- Emy Brawley: We are RCPP, and IRA funded. We have been doing outreach for a year. We are looking beyond the April deadline for ways to reach out.
- Eliot Clay, Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD): Operating funds were reduced drastically. We will be going to the State Capitol to figure out how to support programs. We want to determine how do we diversify revenue?
- Helen VanBeck, American Farmland Trust (AFT): AFT's Ag Conservation Easement Program (ACEP-ALE) farmland protection work in Illinois kicked off in January. Brought on new staff working in Chicagoland – work is now paused due to federal funding freeze.
- RCPP Sand County Foundation (IRA Funding) to set up FLASH Groups – Farmers Leading the Advancement of Soil Health. \$4Million
 - Batch and Grow program
 - Funding at risk; staffing limitations
- Working with Archer Daniel Mills (ADM) Regenerations / Illinois Cover Crop Initiative (ICCI) Program.
 - 400k acres enrolled in 2024.
 - Happy to see ADM stand by their climate commitments .
- TruTerra Partner for Climate Smart Commodities (PCSC) Project – Soil health trainings for farmers & landowners across Midwest. Staff in Illinois working on that project. Unsure about future of funding.

- Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership (ISAP) Programs
 - Financial INCentive Database (FIND) Tool – 60 financial incentive programs filtered by county; going to update this year.
 - Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) trainings – contract signed; Soil Health Specialist Jim Iserman will be leading that – 5 trainings between now and end of the year. Part of SB1701 for conservation districts to be trained to develop soil health plans.
- Upcoming
 - Fall Covers for Spring Savings – 1-million-acre goal.
 - Technical Service Providers – what's going on with Certified Crop Advisor fast track process? Are we waiting for something to be included in the Farm Bill? What can partners do to help this process?
- MJ Oviatt, Savanna Institute: We have 3 Demonstration Farms that are fairly new (planted between 2020-2022) in Urbana, Monticello, and Oregon, IL. Join the Savanna Institute newsletter on savannainstitute.org to hear about upcoming field days and events.
 - The grant program, Expanding Agroforestry Project, is still taking applications through Friday, April 18th (deadline extended). It is IRA funded but follows traditional Farm Bill program structures. Learn more and apply at <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/provide-food-and-water-sustainably/expanding-agroforestry-production/>
- Amelia Cheek, Farm Bureau: We are working on pollinator grants.
- Megan Dywer, IL Corn: Regarding Part of two grants, those are paused. A second round of payments went out this past week. We have been asked to submit letters of support to NRCS.
- Megan Baskerville, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) continues to work with landowners on conservation easements in both DogTooth Bend and the Lower Wabash. Last fall, TNC was awarded a \$15mil RCPP for the Upper Wabash watershed, which will bring extra financial assistance to landowners and operators in Vermilion, Ford and Champaign Counties. On April 2nd, the IL Sustainable Ag Partnership (ISAP) is hosting a conservation drainage training for practitioners alongside The Conservation Drainage Network's Annual Meeting in Champaign April 1-3. Costs to participate are covered, and registration and more info can be found here: <https://ilsustainableag.org/event/a-practitioners-guide-to-advancing-conservation-drainage-practices/>
- Eliott Lagacy, Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA): Regarding the dust storm issues in IL, IDOA has been charged to seek a remedy. We have been discussing it since last June. We are considering a multi-year agreement. There are some structural items that need to be changed. We are creating a Dust Storm Sub Committee from the Illinois State Technical Committee. We will be searching for those interested in joining. We will be meeting in person. Long term solutions need to be implemented. Contact Eliot Lagacy to join, and cc Eric Gerth. IRA related activities are paused. There will be some Soil Health Training. Directors are also invited to attend. In order to receive state cost share money, you have to receive a Soil Health Assessment.
- Trevor Sample: Headquarters has moved to the west side of Springfield.
- Ryan Arch : IL LICA: Thanked ILNRCS, including Matt Robert, for supporting the ILICA Annual Convention by providing a session on conservation practice design set review for their contractor members last January. ILICA is working on their bioreactor partnership (NRCS, IFB, UofI Ext., ILICA) and doing private grant work focusing on conservation drainage. At the national level, LICA is working to renew their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with National NRCS.
- Ted Funk, Illinois Pork & Illinois Beef: Illinois Pork Producers Association has completed seven years of tree buffer projects, planting native trees and shrubs as windbreaks/shelterbelts/tree buffers around livestock buildings across the state. We received good cooperation with NRCS during the project.
- Stacy Zuber, Illinois Soybean Association: ISA's RFP opened on March 3rd, will close on May 1st. Details can be found at <https://www.ilsoy.org/request-for-proposals/>. Please reach out to Stacy if you have questions.
- Elen Loechner, USFWS: We are prioritizing assistance to endangered species.
- George Henshaw, Ecological Sciences, NRCS: TSP: will get with those that had TSP questions following the meeting.
- Liz Stelk, Illinois Stewardship Alliance: We would like to extend our gratitude to the NRCS staff. We are working with farms to encourage congress to get programs unfrozen and stop rollbacks and cuts.
- Cliff Schuette, President, Illinois Grazing Land Coalition: We will be having speakers this week, speaking on grazing land and promoting soil health. If anyone would like to sign up, there are four more slots. We would like to extend a "Shout Out" to the Farm Bureau for grant process. There was an NLRS in Clinton, over two hundred people attended.

Closing Comments *Tammy Willis*

Field office staff were saying they were unaware of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) situation. Guidance had been sent out to all field office staff. A suggestion was made that all field office staff need to be reminded. (Elliot Lagacy)

Tammy Willis stated that she will make sure the information is sent back out.