



Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

Conservation Choices for Rhode Island's Small Farms



Conservation practices help improve soil health, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and provide other natural resource benefits.

No matter what size farm you have, knowing how to conserve, maintain and restore the natural resources on your farm is a powerful tool. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help small farmers create a conservation plan that serves as a road map to improve the health and resiliency of your land.

A conservation plan empowers you to make educated decisions for your farm, keeps you from making costly management mistakes, and can help to qualify you for financial programs.

The way soils are managed has the greatest impact on your land's productivity. Productive and resilient land can be obtained by following these four simple soil health management principles:

- Minimize disturbance from tillage and over-grazing.
- Maximize soil cover with residues and living plants.
- Maximize diversity with crop rotations, cover crops and inter-cropping.
- Maximize living roots year-round with crops, forages and cover crops.



Benefits include increased soil organic matter, improved resilience to drought and floods, improved nutrient cycling, and overall increased profits.

This fact sheet lists common small farm conservation practices to help you address natural resource concerns on your land. To learn more about help available for your farm and how to get started, visit your local USDA NRCS or Conservation District office. We can help you make the right choices to protect and improve your land and natural resources.

Practice	Description		Benefits
High Tunnel		A covered structure used to protect crops from sun, wind, excessive rainfall, or cold	» Improves plant growing conditions » Extends the growing season » Improves plant quality
Low Tunnel		A low-profile temporary covered structure that protects plants	» Protects plants from cold, sun and wind » Extends the growing season » Excludes pests from crops
Cover Crops		Grasses, legumes, and/or broadleaves planted for seasonal cover	» Reduces erosion » Improves soil organic matter » Traps and cycles nutrients » Improves water infiltration and water-holding capacity » Reduces compaction
Mulching		Applying plant residues or other suitable materials to the land surface	» Improves soil moisture management » Reduces weed pressure and erosion » Builds or maintains soil organic matter
Pollinator & Beneficial Insect Habitat		Planting wildlife friendly grasses and wildflowers to support pollinators and beneficial insects	» Increases crop pollination » Increases predation and parasitism of pests » Reduces soil erosion, runoff and improves water quality
Crop Rotation		Growing a diverse number of crops in a planned sequence	» Reduces crop pests (insects, disease, weeds) » Adds soil biological diversity » Can reduce erosion
Micro-irrigation		Managing the volume, frequency, and rate of irrigation water	» Improves irrigation water use efficiency » Minimizes irrigation-induced soil erosion » Improves plant growing conditions » Reduces energy use

For more information visit www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov or call 401-828-1300

Practice	Description		Benefits
Raised Beds		Create an above-ground growing environment	» Improves plant health & productivity » Reduces salt or chemical concentrations in soil » Reduces soil erosion
Structures for Wildlife		Structures installed to replace or modify missing or deficient wildlife habitat (like bird boxes, bat boxes, or bee boxes)	» Enhances wildlife habitat » Protects targeted wildlife from hazards or predation » Provides wildlife nesting sites
Soil Carbon Amendment		Applying natural materials like compost, biochar, other carbon-based materials to the soil	» Improves soil organic matter » Improves soil aggregate stability » Improves habitat for soil microorganisms » Sequesters carbon
Nutrient Management		Manage the amount, placement, and timing of fertilizers or manure through record keeping, soil testing	» Improves plant health & productivity » Reduces nutrient runoff to surface & ground water » Reduces air pollution » Improves soil organic matter
No-Till		Limit tillage & soil disturbance to manage plant residue amount and distribution on cropland year-round	» Reduces erosion and sedimentation » Maintains or increases soil health, organic matter, and soil moisture » Reduces energy use » Provides food & cover for wildlife
Tree/ Shrub Establishment		Planting seedlings or cuttings, seeding, or promoting natural tree regeneration	» Establishes forest cover » Enhances wildlife habitat » Erosion control » Improves water quality » Captures carbon & conserves energy
Brush Management		Manage or remove woody plants, including invasive species, in grasslands, forest lands, and other areas	» Restores desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, or improve water quality. » Improves forage accessibility and quality. » Facilitates future forestry activities.

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Practice

Description

Benefits

Wind Breaks



Create single or multiple rows of trees and/or shrubs in a line or curve

- » Reduce wind erosion
- » Protect crops, livestock, farmsteads from wind, snow, or heat
- » Improve air quality by trapping chemicals & odors

Herbaceous Wind Barriers



Create strips of herbaceous vegetation within a field

- » Reduce wind erosion
- » Improve plant health by reducing wind or wind-borne soil particles
- » Improve air quality by reducing soil particulate emissions



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NRCS works hand-in-hand with the people of Rhode Island and the Ocean State's three conservation districts to improve and protect their soil, water, air, plants, animals and energy. We employ conservation experts who help farmers, woodland owners, oyster growers, livestock producers, and urban growers develop conservation plans for sustainable and resilient operations, create and restore wetlands, restore and manage other natural ecosystems, and advise on flood protection, nutrient and animal waste management and watershed planning.

