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Leveraging Public Funds

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Who is NRCS?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

- **We work with private landowners and others to protect natural resources: soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy, and humans.**
- **Since the devastating Dust Bowl more than 8 decades ago, our agency has helped farmers nurture their relationship with the soil by adopting new crop production methods and building conservation practices.**



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Who is NRCS?

- In Iowa, NRCS employs about 400 people in more than 100 offices.
- We are staffed at USDA Service Centers in every county.
- Our field offices often include staffs from the Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship, local soil and water conservation districts, and even Pheasants Forever, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and other conservation partners.



Who is NRCS?

Iowa NRCS staff come from varying educations and backgrounds. We employ:

- District Conservationists
- Soil Conservationists
- Engineers
- Soil Conservation Technicians
- Agronomists
- Easement Specialists
- Wetland Specialists
- Soil Scientists
- Conservation Program Specialists
- Communications Specialists
- Contracting Specialists



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NRCS Conservation Planning

NRCS is USDA's principal agency for providing conservation technical assistance to:

- **Private landowners**
- **Soil and Water Conservation Districts**
- **Tribes**
- **other organizations.**

NRCS delivers conservation technical assistance through the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program.



NRCS Conservation Planning

Conservation planning with landowners and operators is a key part of technical assistance.

The purpose is to develop and implement a conservation plan that protects, conserves, and enhances natural resources within a social and economic perspective.

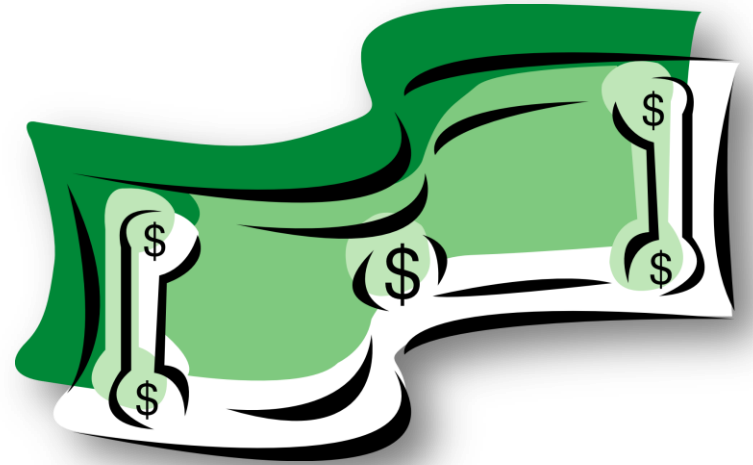


Funding Conservation Practices

To offset costs of conservation practice implementation there are several Financial Assistance Options:

- Farm Bill – Federal
- Iowa Financial Incentive Program
- County Programs

Federal conservation programs are funded through the Farm Bill.



The Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a multi-year law that governs a variety of agricultural and food programs.

It provides the policy for implementing Federal conservation programs.

The 2014 Farm Bill was in many ways a Jobs Bill, Innovation Bill, Research Bill, and a Conservation Bill.



USDA Financial Assistance Programs

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**
- **NRCS also offers voluntary easement programs to landowners through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**



NRCS FA Programs - EQIP

- Ag producers can receive financial and technical assistance from NRCS to implement conservation practices on working lands.
- Applications are accepted by NRCS on a continuous basis.
- A local working groups assist NRCS with:
 1. identifying local Resource Concerns
 2. Recommending Practices
 3. Application Ranking process to prioritize applications for funding.



NRCS FA Programs - EQIP

Most of the EQIP funds are distributed through Iowa's 100 field offices. Distribution is based upon:

- **Percent of ag land with impaired waters**
- **Livestock number in the county**
- **Soil types**
- **Acres of Highly Erodible Land**
- **Acres of Wetlands**
- **Acres of wildlife habitat**
- **Locally identified priority watersheds**



NRCS FA Programs - EQIP

EQIP financial assistance is based on Payment Rates:

- **Payment Rate is the expected cost to implement the planned practice.**
- **Base Payment Rate in Iowa is 50%**
- **Historically Underserved receive 75% payment rate – includes Beginning Farmers, Socially Disadvantaged, Tribal and Limited Resource Producers**
- **Statewide Initiatives receive 75% Payment Rate**



Example Practices - EQIP



Traditional Structural
Practices

Terraces
No-Till

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Example Practices - EQIP



Traditional Structural
Practices

Grassed Waterways

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Example Practices - EQIP



Traditional
Management
Practices

Cover Crops

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Example Practices - EQIP



Traditional
Management
Practices

**Prescribed
Grazing**

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Example Practices - EQIP



Non-Traditional
Practices

Denitrifying Bioreactor

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NRCS FA Programs - EQIP

EQIP funds are also distributed at the state level for special initiatives (40% of allocation). These use Initiative, 75% Payment Rate:

- **Organic Initiative**
- **On Farm Energy Initiative**
- **High Tunnel Initiative**
- **Driftless Area Initiative**
- **Monarch Butterfly Project**
- **Historically Underserved**
- **Wildlife**



NRCS FA Programs - RCPP

RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance on an area or watershed basis. RCPP is new in the 2014 Farm Bill.

NRCS annually selects from partnership project proposals. The partnership and NRCS share the cost of financial assistance.

Assistance is delivered with the rules of covered programs from the Farm Bill, such as CSP or EQIP.



NRCS FA Programs - RCPP

Through 3 years, Iowa has 8 RCPP projects.

These projects often focus on local resource issues:

Example 1 – New Project

The Allamakee SWCD is addressing water quality and soil health by promoting the implementation of cover crops and no-till in conjunction with manure application, the conversion of marginal cropland to pasture, and adding small grain crops to corn-soybean systems.



NRCS FA Programs - RCPP

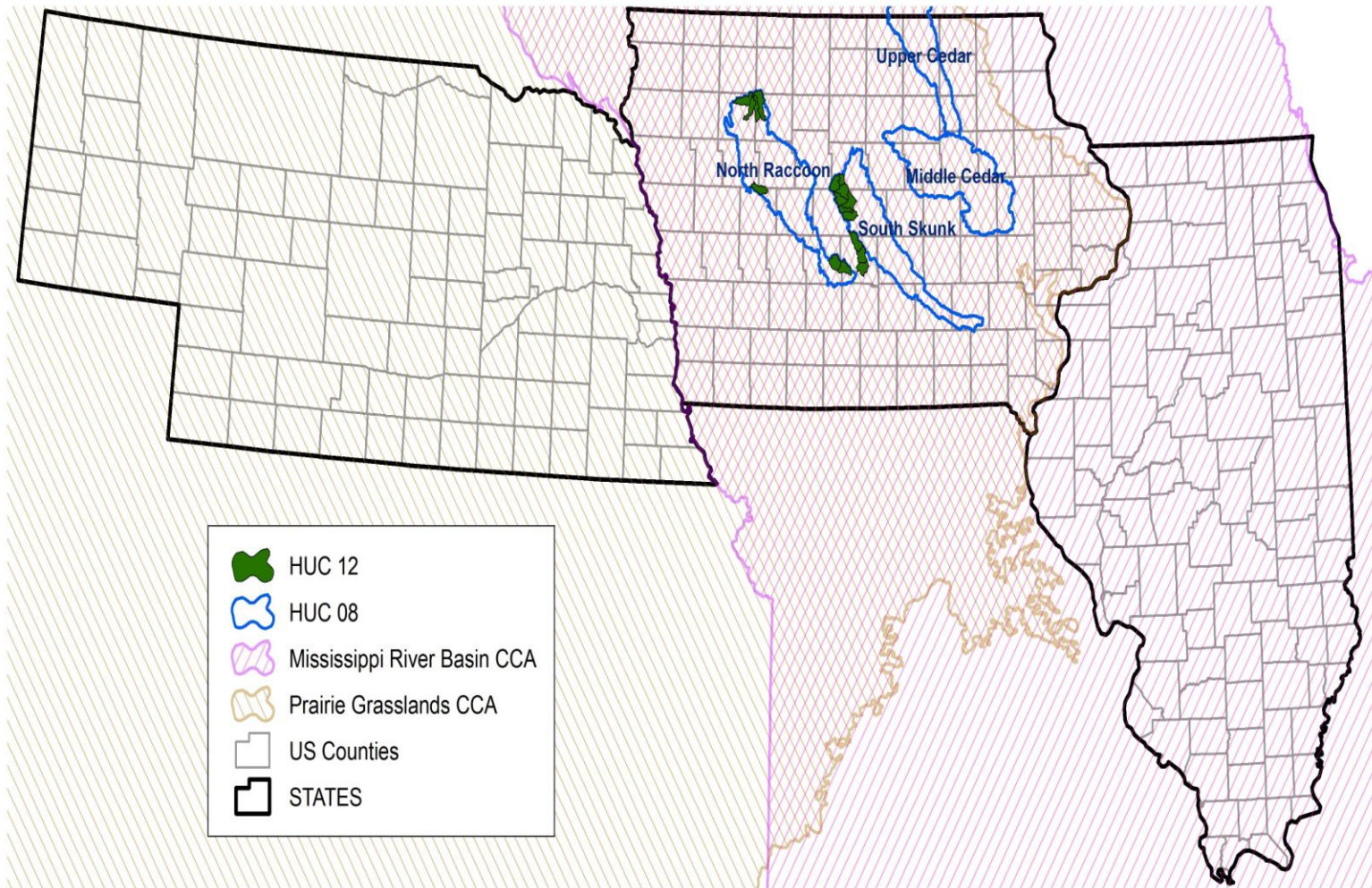
Example 2

One of the biggest RCPP projects in the Nation during fiscal year 2016 signup was the Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership, led by IDALS.

- More than 40 partners contributing \$38 million to help reduce nutrient loss and improving water quality, soil health and habitat for at-risk wildlife.
- Focuses on Iowa, with emphasis on priority Iowa watersheds.



NRCS FA Programs - RCPP



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NRCS FA Programs - RCPP

Example 2 Cont...

Key practices in the Midwest Ag Water Quality Project include:

In-field practices

- Nutrient Management
- Residue and Tillage Management, No-till
- Cover Crops

Edge-of-field practices

- Saturated buffers
- Denitrifying bioreactors
- Constructed Wetland



USDA FA Programs - CRP

Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) effort

USDA announced Dec. 7:

Allows for Bioreactors and Saturated Buffers to be installed on existing CRP filter strips and riparian buffers where practice is feasible.



USDA FA Programs - CRP

CLEAR is meant to improve Water Quality. Eligible practices include:

- Existing Filter Strip and Riparian Buffer CRP Contracts
- Re-enrollment of Filter Strip and Riparian Buffer CRP Contracts
- New enrollment of Filter Strips and Riparian Buffer CRP Contracts
- Initiate with your local FSA office
- NRCS provide Technical assistance
- Cost share and incentives are available



NRCS FA Programs - CSP

Farmers must qualify for CSP based on existing conservation efforts.

The entire operation is implemented into CSP.

NRCS offers incentive payments for implementing conservation practices that enhance the sustainability of your entire operation.



NRCS FA Programs - CSP

CSP Eligibility

- You must have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract.
- You must be actively engaged in the day-to-day management of the operation and share in the risks associated with ag production.
- You must meet stewardship requirements for at least two resource concerns at the time of application.



NRCS FA Programs - CSP

CSP Ranking

- Ranked on the level of existing Stewardship
- Amount of new activities adopted as part of the application



NRCS FA Programs - CSP

CSP Payments

- Payments for maintaining existing level of conservation stewardship
- Adopt at least one new activity
- All new activities receive a separate payment





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Questions?



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