

Getting Started with Conservation

Overview

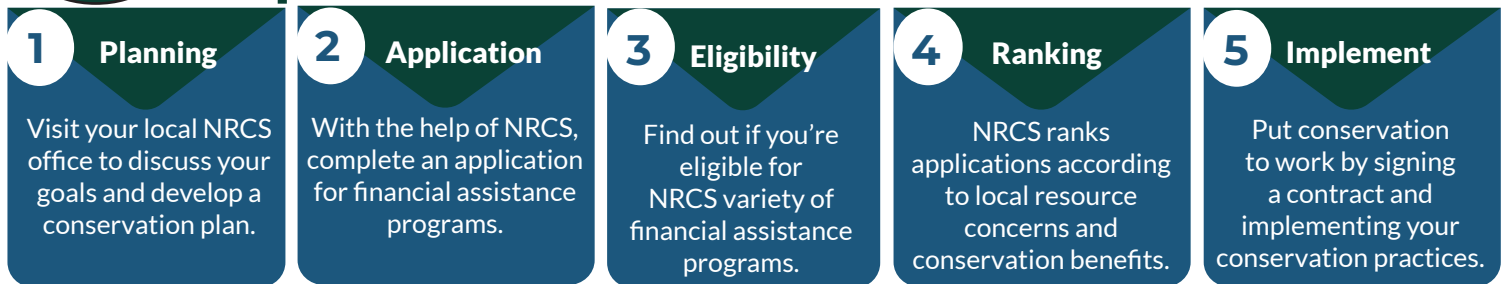


The **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** helps farmers, ranchers and foresters protect and improve natural resources. We provide voluntary technical and financial assistance to address resource concerns related to water quality, grazing land health, soil erosion, wildlife habitat and forest health on private lands through voluntary implementation of conservation practices.

We'll help you identify natural resource concerns on your land and develop a conservation plan to address them. Financial assistance through Farm Bill programs may help mitigate the cost of implementation.

Still interested in conservation? To qualify for our programs, an individual must produce food, fiber, livestock or other agricultural products. There is no minimum agricultural income or production duration requirement.

5 Steps to Assistance



Can you answer YES to all the following questions?

Work with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to establish and update your eligibility to participate in NRCS financial assistance programs.

Producer Eligibility	YES	NO	Land Eligibility	YES	NO
1) Do you have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS?	☐	☐	1) Is your land in agriculture, such as cropland, rangeland, pasture or non-industrial private forest land?	☐	☐
2) Can you prove control of land for the proposed NRCS contract? Most programs require a three-to-five year contract. Proof of land control can be a deed, a lease, or another form of land ownership.	☐	☐	2) Is your land in compliance with Highly Erodible Land and wetland conservation provisions? (If you don't know, check with your local USDA Service Center).	☐	☐
3) Is your adjusted gross income less than \$900,000?	☐	☐	3) Do you have an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation on your land?	☐	☐
4) Do you have authority to sign for management decisions? If not, can you obtain written permission from the landowner?	☐	☐	4) If your plan involves irrigation practices, can you provide documentation showing your irrigation history, and water rights, if applicable?	☐	☐

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Additional Considerations for Financial Assistance

It's a contract.

It's important to understand that to receive financial payments from NRCS, you are entering into a contract with the U.S. government. That means you agree to complete certain conservation practices on your land within a set timeframe to earn financial incentives. We understand things happen outside of your control resulting in delays, so we may be able to modify the contract, if needed. But keep in mind if contract conditions aren't met, you may be liable for returning all or a portion of the funding, or your contract may be terminated.

You pay up front, we reimburse you.

NRCS contracts work similar to a mail-in rebate. You pay the costs up front for conservation practices, then we issue you a payment after completion. Therefore, it's important to consider your initial costs and determine if the proposed project makes financial sense for your operation. Some individuals may qualify for advanced payments.

Work must take place during the specified contract timeline.

This means you'll need to wait to begin working on a conservation practice until your contract is signed and finalized if you want to be reimbursed by NRCS. Most NRCS contracts

last a minimum of three years, and it is required to have at least one conservation practice commenced during the first year of your contract. NRCS will help you in the planning process to figure out the best schedule for your operation, but keep in mind a contract will require certain practices to be completed within a specified timeframe.

Projects must meet NRCS design standards.

Because we want to ensure conservation projects on your land will perform as intended, NRCS has developed science-based conservation standards for each of our practices. That means when you implement projects on your land, they must meet NRCS technical specifications. Practices that fall short of these standards will not be reimbursed and may need to be removed or replaced.

NRCS must certify the completed work before issuing payment.

Before we can issue your payment, NRCS staff will need to visit your land, or obtain other proof of completion such as documents or photographs, to certify the conservation practices have been completed according to our conservation specifications. Once we certify a practice, you will receive payment via direct deposit.

NRCS payments vary depending on the type of conservation practice.

Financial assistance can cover part of the costs to plan and implement conservation practices contracted through our programs. Check with your local NRCS office to find out more about payment schedules.

You are responsible for paying income tax on NRCS payments.

By law, you must report any payments you receive from NRCS as taxable income when filing your annual income tax return. You may need to consider how this will impact your tax returns. Payments are usually spaced out over multiple tax years.

You'll be asked to provide personal information, but it's kept strictly confidential.

NRCS financial assistance programs require you to provide personal, financial, or sensitive information to process your applications, contracts and payments. This information is kept confidential and protected by USDA.



It's a lot of information to process, and we're here to help. If you have any questions about the above information, please visit your local NRCS office. Our staff are ready to help you through the process!

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