



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

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USDA Offers Expanded Conservation Program Opportunities to Support Climate-Smart Agriculture in 2022

LITTLE ROCK, AR, Feb. 14, 2022 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing several new and expanded opportunities for climate-smart agriculture in 2022. Updates include nationwide availability of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) option, a new and streamlined EQIP Cover Crop Initiative (CCI), and added flexibilities for producers to easily re-enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). These improvements to NRCS' working lands conservation programs, combined with continued program opportunities in Arkansas, are part of the Biden-Harris Administration's broader effort to support climate-smart agriculture.

"America's farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are leading the way in implementing climate-smart solutions across their operations," Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan said. "We are continuing to support the adoption of conservation approaches to assist Arkansas producers in their work addressing the climate crisis and building more resilient operations. We are continuously working to improve our programs to ensure we are giving farmers and ranchers the best tools to conserve natural resources. We want a broad array of agriculture to see themselves in this effort, including small and historically underserved producers as well as early adopters."

EQIP CCI

Arkansas NRCS will provide \$5.2 million in fiscal year 2022 for the utilization of cover crops on agricultural land. The counties included as part of this targeted effort to improve soil health through EQIP are: Craighead, Lee, Mississippi, Monroe, Phillips, and St. Francis.

The EQIP CCI is aimed at improving soil health with conservation practice standard (CPS) 340 – Cover Crop through a targeted, rapid, and streamlined application and contract approval process. Through this initiative, NRCS can support the goals of agricultural producers and increase the critical benefits that cover crops provide.

"Cover crops have the potential to provide multiple benefits in a cropping system including preventing soil and wind erosion, supply nutrients and improving the availability of soil

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water,” Sullivan said. “This funding will provide an opportunity for producers in the selected counties to plant the best cover crop species to meet their production and conservation goals for their farms.”

The EQIP-CCI application deadline for the second batch of funding was January 28, 2022.

Cover crops have the potential to provide multiple benefits in a cropping system. To learn more about cover crop termination guidelines, selection tools and more, visit the [NRCS Cover Crops and Soil Health webpage](#).

EQIP CIC

Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) address priority resource concerns, including sequestering carbon and improving soil health in high-priority areas. Through these contracts, NRCS works with producers to strengthen the quality and condition of natural resources on their operations using management practices, such as irrigation water management, drainage water management, feed management, and residue and tillage management that target resource concerns, including degraded soil and water quality, available water and soil erosion.

CIC offer producers annual incentive payments to implement management practices as well as conservation evaluation and monitoring activities to help manage, maintain and improve priority natural resource concerns within state high-priority areas and build on existing conservation efforts. [Download our “Conservation Incentive Contracts” fact sheet](#) for a list of practices.

CIC Contracts last five years. The 2018 Farm Bill created the new CIC option, and it was piloted in 2021 in four states.

NRCS Arkansas is accepting EQIP-CIC applications in several counties for livestock producers to address soil quality, plant condition, and threats to water quality. Livestock producers in Cleburne, Columbia, Conway, Faulkner, Hempstead, Howard, Independence, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Little River, Miller, Montgomery, Nevada, Perry, Pike, Polk, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Seiver, Sharp, and Van Buren counties will have until March 15, 2022, to apply for the EQIP-Conservation Incentive Contracts.

CSP Re-Enrollment Option

NRCS updated CSP to allow an agricultural producer to immediately re-enroll in the program following an unfunded application to renew an existing contract. Previously, if a CSP participant did not re-enroll the year their contract expired, they were ineligible for the program for two years.

This ineligibility was imposed on CSP participants even if their failure to sign a renewal contract was due to the unavailability of funds, which is beyond their control. USDA is now waiving this two-year ineligibility restriction for all CSP applications.

This year, producers renewed 2,600 CSP contracts covering 3.4 million acres. Applicants

with unfunded fiscal 2022 CSP renewals will receive letters this month, notifying them they are automatically eligible to apply for future CSP funding opportunities, rather than needing to wait two years to reapply.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs – including EQIP and CSP – year-round, however producers and landowners should apply by [state-specific signup dates](#) to be considered for each year’s funding. That includes January 28, 2022, for the Cover Crop Initiative and March 15, 2022, for the Conservation Incentive Contracts. To apply, producers should contact their [local USDA Service Center](#).

More Information

Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers and landowners make conservation improvements on their land that benefit natural resources, build resiliency and contribute to the nation’s broader effort to combat the impacts of climate change. More broadly, these efforts build on others across USDA to encourage use of conservation practices. For example, USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) recently provided \$59.5 million in premium support for producers who planted cover crops on 12.2 million acres through the new Pandemic Cover Crop Program. Recently, RMA announced a new option for insurance coverage, the Post Application Coverage Endorsement, for producers who “split apply” fertilizer on corn.

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 conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, 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/.

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