

Thinking about Working With NRCS?

Here's what you need to know.

So you're ready to make some improvements on your land but not sure where to start? The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) may be able to help! NRCS works with farmers of all sizes, forestland owners, tribes and other individuals interested in conserving the soil, water and other natural resources on their land. We can help you identify natural resource concerns and develop a conservation plan to address those issues on your property. Funding is available to help you offset the costs to implement the actions identified in your conservation plan.

Still Interested? That's great! Below are a few things to think about before applying to NRCS for financial assistance programs.

Seeking financial assistance? Can you answer yes to the following questions?

1. Do you have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS?

☐ Y ☐ N
2. Do you have an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation on your land?

☐ Y ☐ N
3. Will you maintain control of your land for the entire span of the proposed NRCS contract? The typical length of a contract for CSP is 5 years. EQIP contracts can span from 1-10 years. Easements are 30 years to permanent.

☐ Y ☐ N
4. If you're an entity, do you have signature authority to make management decisions on the land?

☐ Y ☐ N
5. Is your land in agriculture, such as cropland (including urban and small-scale farms), pasture land, non-industrial private forestland, or grassland?

☐ Y ☐ N
6. Is your land in compliance with Highly Erodible Land and wetland conservation provisions? To find more information about this visit NRCS' [Conservation Compliance website](#).

☐ Y ☐ N
7. Is your adjusted gross income less than \$900,000?

☐ Y ☐ N
8. Have you established eligibility for USDA Programs? If not - refer to the [Applying for USDA Programs](#) factsheet.

☐ Y ☐ N

Other Considerations

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 activities on your land within a set time frame to earn financial payments. NRCS understands that things can happen outside of your control that result in delays, such as a natural disaster or family emergency; so we may be able to modify the contract if needed. But keep in mind that if contract conditions aren't met, you may be liable for paying back all or a portion of the funding, and your contract may be terminated.

You pay the costs up-front.

NRCS contracts work kind of like a mail-in rebate. Typically, you pay the costs up-front for conservation practices, then NRCS issues you a payment after completion. Therefore, it's important to consider your out-of-pocket costs up-front and determine if the proposed project makes financial sense for your operation. Advance payments are an option that can minimize your up-front costs if you qualify as a historically underserved producer. Ask your local NRCS office about advance payments if that sounds like a better fit for you.

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 obligated by NRCS. You must have at least one conservation practice completed 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 that the contract will require certain practices to be completed within a specified time frame.

Projects must meet NRCS standards.

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

NRCS must certify the completed work before issuing your payment.

Before NRCS can issue your payment, NRCS staff will need to visit your land to certify that the conservation practices have been completed according to our conservation standards. Once NRCS certifies a practice, you will receive payment via direct deposit.

NRCS payments vary depending on the type of conservation practice.

Interested in how much you may get paid for various conservation practices? NRCS has set payment rates that determine the payment amount. Check with your local NRCS office to find out more about payment rates.

You are responsible for paying income tax on any 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. NRCS recommends checking with your personal accountant for tax advice pertaining to contract payments.

You'll be asked to provide your 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 is protected by USDA.

We realize this is a lot of information to process, and we're here to help. Contact your [local NRCS field office](#) to get started. We are looking forward to working with you!

