

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Funding

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Overview

- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners.
- Under this program NRCS has earmarked \$644,000 in federal funding for the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) to coordinate with partners in expanding conservation on preserved farms.
- Participating partners are the N.J. Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Open Space Institute/William Penn Foundation, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which are making available additional funding to supplement the federal funds
- Altogether, approximately \$1.24 million will be available to:
 - 1) Increase payments to farmers and landowners who apply for NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding to implement certain conservation practices on preserved farms statewide through the NJDA's Conservation Cost-Share Program (CCSP). Total cost-share will increase from approximately 75 percent to up to 90 percent of project costs; and
 - 2) Establish a pilot program in Salem County to preserve wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas of a farm under a separate conservation easement at the time a farm enters the Farmland Preservation Program, with the agreement of the landowner.



Photos, clockwise from upper left: A vegetative filter strip planted to trap sediments and other pollutants in runoff; a water and sediment control basin installed to help control erosion and runoff, and a restored wetland that improves water quality by trapping and filtering runoff while creating a diverse habitat for wildlife.



How It Will Work – EQIP-CCSP

- The NRCS, NJDA and SADC will announce a funding round and farmers will apply for EQIP funding at their local NRCS office.
- Farmers may apply for funding for any of more than 100 eligible EQIP conservation practices to address soil and water resource concerns. (For more information, see www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/nj/programs/financial/eqip/.)
- The NRCS will process, rank and approve applications under the same procedures used for traditional EQIP applications.
- NRCS payments will be matched with N.J. Department of Agriculture funding to provide up to a 90 percent cost-share for approved applications.
- RCPP funding is limited to farms preserved pursuant to the N.J. Agriculture Retention and Development Act (N.J.S.A. 4:1C-11, et seq.).

How It Will Work – Conservation Easement Pilot Program in Salem County

- The SADC and partners will identify applications for farmland preservation where the landowner is willing to accept a conservation easement on environmentally sensitive portions of the farm (e.g., wetlands, riparian corridors and other areas beneficial to water quality).
- Large wetlands areas that are currently farmed or have a history in agriculture, but are too difficult to farm anymore, will be included in a “conservation exception” area in the Farmland Preservation Program deed of easement. NRCS will pay for and hold a Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) on this area under its Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). NRCS also will pay 100 percent of the cost to restore impaired wetlands to functional wetlands.
- Areas that are beneficial to water quality and are not farmed or are difficult to farm, but do not qualify for WRE, may be included in an exception area or omitted from the Farmland Preservation Program deed of easement. NJCF will purchase and hold a conservation easement on those areas using funding provided by the Open Space Institute/William Penn Foundation. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding will be used to enhance those areas (e.g., by planting of herbaceous and/or woody vegetation, removal of invasive species, bank stabilization and habitat enhancements, depending on the site and landowner preference).
- Side-by-side farmland preservation and conservation easements will help improve the natural function of environmentally sensitive areas, stretch Farmland Preservation Program dollars by leveraging additional federal and nonprofit funding, and avoid potential conflicts with the Farmland Preservation Program deed of easement.

