

# Farm Bill: Agricultural Conservation Programs Address Source Water Concerns Webinar

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# Webinar Outline

- Overview of Farm Bill
- NRCS Programs
- Opportunities for Engagement
- Example Pilot Program – NWQI Program with PA American Water
- Example RCPP Program –Milford Watershed Study

# Overview of Farm Bill

- Kevin Norton, Acting Associate Chief of NRCS
- Voluntary incentive-based programs
- Design conservation systems to promote sustainability and solve natural resources concerns
- Partner directly with local soil and water conservation districts and deliver services through local field offices
- Area and state offices in addition to national technical centers that guide the science behind what they do in the field

# Farm Bill Highlights

- Strong support for private land conservation
- Supports innovative solutions
- Focus on benefits and outcomes of conservation, including benefits to profitability
- More opportunities to improve soil health, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat
- Oct 1, 2019 beginning of federal fiscal year
- Collaborate with community water systems and the State Technical Committee to identify priority areas
- Source Water Protection (quality and quantity) should be considered in all conservation planning/programs—if one practices is identified as a priority – can move from 50-75% to 90% cost share. Farmer does in kind or contracts for their 10%.
- In each FY at least 10% of funding from each conservation title program except CRP must be devoted to support SWP. \$4 billion over 10 years. (farmers, ranches, forest landowners)

# NRCS Programs

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) bricks and mortar \$1.75 B to \$2 B in 2023 – entry level with producer
- Conservation Stewardship Program \$700M to \$1B in 2023- folks invested and working on improvements already on farm- leverage that to greater benefit beyond basic level (min. 5 year contract provides payments for conservation work)
- Ag Conservation Easement Program , \$450 M/year
  - 1 entirely through partnerships with nongovt, and state and local govt to deliver ag conservation easement on ag lands to protect from further development. Preserve value of ag production and viability of ag operation
  - 2 wetlands reserve program- acquire surface rights to land with wetlands or easements with rights to establish and maintain wetland functions and values that were lost from previous practices.
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP)-new in 2014 Farm Bill-\$300 M/year
  - Leverages all NRCS conservation work through partners. NGOS, private org, state and local govt can come forward with proposals to work in a designated priority area built around their issues.
    - Flexible in partner led effort directing the engagement with ag partners in the region or state.

# Opportunities for Engagement

- Start local and work your way up. Talk with local district conservationist. Move up to area office and state office level as part of path to work collaboratively.
- Discuss specific priorities and issues –and conservation work necessary to protect our source waters
- **Local workgroups** are critical (municipal folks need to be represented) with a priority watershed where you want to see practices in place, assist with public outreach and information efforts across county boundaries.
  - Meet 1-2 times per year to set priorities
- Have a seat and be represented at the **State Technical Committee**
  - Be on the mailing list of the state technical committee to be alerted to when meetings are to be held.
  - Send info to State Conservationist
  - State Technical Committee is an advisory committee- can help on subgroups based on issues (wildlife, SWP, etc.)

# National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Program with PA American Water

- NRCS sought out partnerships with utilities to develop source water protection plans and provide long term funding certainty for select watersheds
- Utilities can identify specific areas that need treatment, select conservation practices that best address those needs, and collaborate with partners to install the practices.
  - Focused on areas where source water is impaired or threatened by ag sources

# Milford Watershed Study RCPP

- Voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers for addressing water quality concerns in Milford Lake Watershed.
- Focus was on water quality, nutrient load reduction, and HABs
- Through the RCPP, Kansas ag producers in Milford Lake Watershed can receive up to 90% cost share to put a combination of best management practices into action.
- Slogan: DON'T FEED THE BLOOM



# Take home message

- Work with NRCS on all levels to identify and prioritize emerging natural resource concerns that need to be addressed
- Proposed areas should be delineated and have an existing Source Water Protection Plan in place that lists agriculture as a potential source of contamination
- Target core NRCS conservation practices
- Ensure there is interest and demand for the project by assisting in education and outreach
- NRCS is mandated to quantify outcomes-
- Ask how can we help?– water monitoring? Technical resources?