

NRCS Obligates Nearly \$60 Million to Iowa Farmers in Conservation Assistance

DES MOINES, IA, DEC. 14, 2020 — USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) contracted with Iowa farmers and landowners to treat natural resources on more than 316,000 acres, obligating \$59.8 million in financial assistance during fiscal year 2020 that ended Sept. 30.

NRCS also wrote 12,624 conservation plans that cover 889,071 acres, during fiscal year 2020. The conservation plans will help Iowa farmers reduce soil erosion, improve soil health and water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and treat other environmental issues.

Iowa NRCS assisted agricultural producers through several conservation programs and targeted initiatives, including the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

"Like so many industries, implementing conservation practices and programs is challenging during a pandemic," said Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist for NRCS in Iowa. "With many of our offices open by appointment only or completely closed to the public, it's been important for our staff to find other ways to communicate and work with farmers. I am extremely proud of our staff, Iowa conservation partners, and Iowa's agricultural producers for working together during this difficult time to get conservation on the ground."

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Through EQIP, NRCS obligated \$30.1 million to treat 126,696 acres through 1,022 contracts.

EQIP is a voluntary program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. Farmers can choose from a conservation practice list developed at the county level to treat local resource concerns.

Top EQIP Practices Adopted

Some of the top conservation practices adopted by Iowans through EQIP include:

- Cover Crops (1,116 contracts/149,168 acres/\$6.3 million)
- Fence (383 contracts/992,253 feet/\$1.2 million)
- Brush Management (292 contracts/2,667 acres/\$465,419)
- Prescribed Grazing (269 contracts/15,258 acres/\$474,322)

Top Counties for EQIP

State leaders in EQIP contracts, funding, and acres treated:

- Wayne County led the state with 36 contracts, obligating \$1.5 million to local farmers, helping to treat resource concerns on 2,106 acres.
- Sioux County finished 2020 with 34 contracts, providing \$865,760 to help treat natural resources on 4,865 acres.
- Jackson County had 30 EQIP contracts, obligating \$440,606 which will help treat 2,362 acres.

Other statewide EQIP highlights include:

- Nearly \$8 million will assist livestock grazing producers implement conservation practices on their pastures.
- More than \$3.6 million through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) for practices in targeted watersheds that will help control, trap and reduce nutrient runoff.
- About \$1 million in the Prairie Pothole counties in north central Iowa to seed conservation cover and other wildlife habitat on water-saturated portions of cropland fields.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Iowa NRCS obligated about \$17.4 million through new and renewed CSP contracts during the past year. In fiscal year 2020, 395 Iowa farmers signed five-year CSP contracts to treat natural resource concerns on 187,981 acres. CSP helps farmers build on existing conservation efforts by customizing a plan to meet conservation goals and needs.

More than \$1.7 million in CSP funding is contracted for Monarch Butterfly habitat through the “Improving Working Lands for Monarch Butterflies” project. Thirty-two Iowa landowners signed up for the project in 2020, providing 12,100 acres of habitat.

Overall, northeast Iowa landowners signed 51 percent of new and renewed CSP contracts in 2020:

- Winneshiek County led the state with 34 CSP contracts, totaling 15,953 acres, with an obligation of \$1.43 million.
- Jackson County was next with 22 contracts, covering 4,973 acres with an obligation of \$714,500.
- Chickasaw County finished with 20 CSP contracts that cover 5,879 acres, obligating \$576,850.
- Floyd County had 19 contracts, covering 15,652 acres with an obligation of \$833,808.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

In fiscal year 2020, Iowa NRCS obligated \$2.8 million through RCPP to treat natural resource concerns on 22,916 cropland acres. NRCS assisted producers through RCPP partnership agreements and 69 contracts.

RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners through agreements and program contracts. Currently, there are six RCPP projects in Iowa that focus on improving water quality and soil health, implementing monarch butterfly and other wildlife habitat, and creating sustainable grain supply chains.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Seven landowners in six Iowa counties placed agricultural land into conservation easements through ACEP in 2020. The new easements cover 1,755 acres at a price to NRCS of about \$10.5 million.

Through ACEP, NRCS helps landowners, land trusts, and other entities protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and working farms through conservation easements. Overall, there are 1,664 conservation easements in Iowa covering about 190,000 acres.

NRCS also provided Iowa easement owners about \$1.8 million for stewardship activities on existing easements.

For more detailed Iowa NRCS program results and information, visit <https://bit.ly/IowaAtAGlance2020>.

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**Individual county conservation program results are available upon request.*