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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA Conservation Program Funding Up Dramatically in Iowa

DES MOINES, IA, NOV. 10, 2021 — Conservation practice funding from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) totaled \$83 million to Iowa farmers in fiscal year 2021, which will help treat natural resource concerns on nearly 323,000 agricultural land acres.

The \$83 million obligated dollars in Iowa are a record by more than \$9 million, when Iowa NRCS obligated \$73.7 million to Iowa farmers in 2018. In fact, the record amount is about \$18 million more than the five-year average.

NRCS also wrote 10,245 conservation plans during fiscal year 2021, which cover about 797,000 acres. Conservation plans help producers reduce soil erosion, improve soil health and water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and treat other environmental issues such as addressing climate change.

NRCS provides conservation funding through four primary programs that are authorized through the Farm Bill: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Disaster Recovery Assistance

Floodplain Easements

Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist for NRCS in Iowa, said a major storyline from 2021 is the amount of disaster recovery assistance NRCS provided to Iowa landowners and one reason why program funding was up. "We never want to see floods, tornadoes or windstorms, but when natural disasters occur, we have experienced staff and conservation programs that can help individuals and communities," he said.

One such program is the Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements (EWP-FPE). In response to the devastating 2019 floods along the Missouri River and other parts of the state, 24 landowners covering 4,011 acres voluntarily enrolled cropland – grown annually in floodplains – into a permanent easement. NRCS invested more than \$25 million to purchase the easements. The goal of EWP-FPE is to restore the land to its natural condition. NRCS pays up to the entire restoration costs, which could include recreating topography and establishing native vegetation.

Derecho Recovery

Following Iowa's August 2020 Derecho, Iowa farmers lost millions of dollars in corn from the strong winds. Although not typically a disaster recovery program, NRCS offered a special EQIP signup to help affected producers pay to plant cover crops in downed corn and to replace roofs on buildings NRCS helped finance. In total, NRCS provided \$1.89 million through 143 contracts covering 34,918 acres.

Traditional Farm Bill Programs

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Through EQIP, NRCS obligated \$33.9 million to treat natural resource concerns on 131,524 acres through 1,048 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 issues.

Top Practices Adopted Through EQIP

Three of the most adopted conservation practices by Iowans last year through EQIP include:

- Cover Crops (869 contracts/152,643 acres/\$8.1 million)
- Fence – to support prescribed grazing (343 contracts/778,201 feet/\$988,252)
- Brush Management (285 contracts/3,157 acres/\$545,901)

Top Iowa Counties for EQIP

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

- Muscatine County led the state with 39 contracts, obligating \$319,844 to local farmers, helping to treat resource concerns on 3,501 acres.
- Howard County led the state with \$1.85 million obligated through 35 contracts to help treat natural resources on 3,651 acres.
- Linn County led the state with 6,584 acres treated, obligating \$370,047 through 20 contracts.

Other statewide EQIP highlights:

- In its inaugural year, 16 Iowa farmers signed up for the **Iowa Soil Health Initiative**, providing \$1.24 million to help them adopt a suite of practices to address soil and water quality, carbon sequestration and plant health.
- NRCS obligated more than \$4.8 million through the **Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)** for practices in targeted watersheds that will help control, trap, and reduce nutrient runoff on about 17,000 acres.
- NRCS obligated about \$3 million through 28 contracts covering 10,320 acres for **Source Water Protection** practices that address surface and groundwater protection (drinking water sources) in priority areas across Iowa. This includes two **National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)** projects that focus on drinking water sources – Big Spirit Lake Watershed in northwest Iowa and Cedar Lake Watershed around Winterset.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Iowa NRCS obligated about \$19.7 million through new and renewed CSP contracts during the past year. In fiscal year 2021, 389 Iowa landowners signed five-year CSP contracts to treat natural resource concerns on 186,681 acres. CSP helps farmers build on existing conservation efforts by customizing a plan to meet conservation goals and needs.

Overall, northeast Iowa landowners signed 57 percent of new and renewed CSP contracts in 2021:

- Winnesheik County led the state with 49 CSP contracts, totaling 17,527 acres, with an obligation of \$2.4 million.
- Howard County was next with 31 contracts, covering 15,173 acres and an obligation of \$1.6 million.
- Clayton County finished with 21 CSP contracts that cover 3,802 acres, obligating \$549,839.
- Chickasaw County had 20 contracts, covering 9,854 acres with an obligation of \$796,706.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

In fiscal year 2021, Iowa NRCS provided more than \$2.2 million to Iowa farmers through RCPP to treat natural resource concerns on 15,727 acres. NRCS assisted producers through five RCPP partnership agreements and 78 contracts.

RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners through agreements and program contracts. The five RCPP projects in Iowa focus on improving water quality and soil health and creating sustainable grain supply chains.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Along with the 24 floodplain easements, five other landowners enrolled land into conservation easements through ACEP – three wetland easements and two agricultural land easements. The wetland easements cover about 295 acres at more than \$2.5 million. The ag land easements total 258 acres at an NRCS investment of \$350,625.

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 1,691 conservation easements in Iowa covering about 195,000 acres.

NRCS also provided Iowa easement owners about \$1.6 million for stewardship activities on existing easements.

For more detailed Iowa NRCS program results and information, visit bit.ly/IowaAtAGlance2021.

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

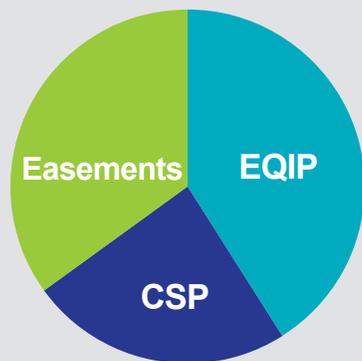
At-a-Glance

Iowa NRCS • October 2021

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FY21 Total Program Accomplishments

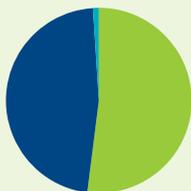


| Easement Programs | *\$29.4 M | 4,564 AC | 29 easements |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| CSP | \$19.7 M | 186,681 AC | 389 contracts |
| EQIP | \$33.9 M | 131,524 AC | 1,048 contracts |
| TOTAL | \$83.0 M | 322,769 AC | 1,466 contracts |

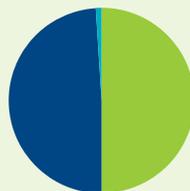
* Easements include ACEP-WRE, ACEP-ALE, EWP-FPE, and \$1.6 M in funding for stewardship activities on existing easements.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

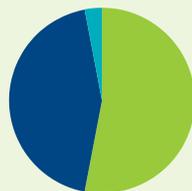
● FY21 Renewal ● New FY21 ● FY21 CSP-GCI



\$9.3 M
\$10.4 M
\$39,780



91,912 AC
94,327 AC
442 AC



171 contracts
205 contracts
13 contracts

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Obligations by Sub-Accounts

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Conservation Activity Plans | \$185,719 | 3,774 AC | 53 contracts |
| Derecho Disaster | \$1.89 M | 34,918 AC | 143 contracts |
| High Tunnel System | \$230,596 | 49 AC | 19 contracts |
| Historically Underserved | \$8.44 M | 17,826 AC | 216 contracts |
| MRBI | \$4.80 M | 16,982 AC | 108 contracts |
| NWQI | \$1.21 M | 3,865 AC | 38 contracts |
| On-Farm Energy | \$828,598 | 445 AC | 14 contracts |
| Organic | \$186,013 | 943 AC | 11 contracts |
| Prairie Pothole | \$693,404 | 373 AC | 22 contracts |
| Soil Health Initiative | \$1.24 M | 2,990 AC | 16 contracts |
| Source Water Protection | \$3.08 M | 10,320 AC | 28 contracts |
| Wildlife | \$2.16 M | 6,238 AC | 199 contracts |

FY21 Easement Programs

● ACEP (Easements: ALE, WRE, WREP) ● ACEP (Stewardship) ● EWP-FPE (Floodplain Easements)



\$2.93 M
\$1.25 M
\$25.18 M



553 AC
N/A
4,011 AC



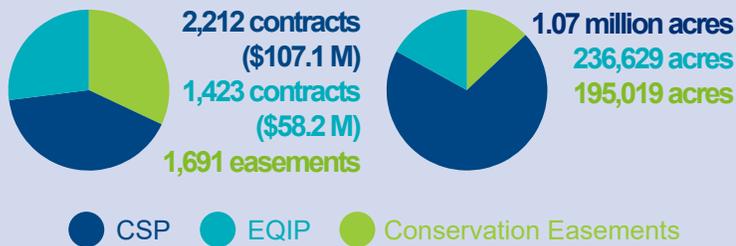
5 easements
N/A
24 easements

FY21 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP-EQIP)

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Driftless Area Habitat for the Wild & Rare Phase 2 | \$239,841 | 59 AC | 5 contracts |
| Fox River Water Quality Project | \$279,800 | 1,432 AC | 17 contracts |
| Innovative Conservation Agriculture | \$33,458 | 737 AC | 13 contracts |
| Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership | \$1,553,302 | 12,979 AC | 39 contracts |
| SmithfieldGro: Sustainable Grain Supply Chains | \$106,477 | 518 AC | 4 contracts |
| Totals | \$2,212,878 | 15,727 AC | 78 contracts |

Ongoing Program Workload

Active Contracts, Easements & Acres



FY21 Iowa Partners in Conservation (IPC)

IPC funds are used to help support Iowa NRCS mission areas and increase partner staff in local field offices.

Iowa Association of Soil Conservation District Commissioners:

The purpose of this agreement is to implement the Clear Creek Watershed Plan that will assist landowners with conservation planning and implementation to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and increase public awareness. (\$222,546)

Pheasants Forever: The purpose of this agreement is to assist NRCS with increasing conservation adoption through sustaining wildlife technical assistance available to NRCS customers to benefit soil health, wildlife habitat, and economic performance of working agricultural lands. (\$1,862,275)

Poweshiek SWCD: The goal of this project is to increase the adoption of agricultural conservation practices, protect Montezuma's drinking water source, and prioritize soil health throughout the county. (\$123,998)

FY21 Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

Iowa NRCS selected three State CIGs in FY21. These grants help develop the tools, technologies, and strategies to support next-generation conservation efforts on working lands and develop market-based solutions to resource challenges. Grantees match the CIG investment at least one to one.

Black Hawk SWCD: This project drives development of the innovative conservation approach of perennial groundcover (PGC) through 10 on-farm trials in Iowa over five years in collaboration with end-user producers, conservation leaders, commodity organizations, university researchers, and supply chain stakeholders, to deliver all four NRCS Soil Health Management Systems (SHMS) practices and other ecosystem benefits at a modest implementation cost. (\$100,000)

Practical Farmers of Iowa: PFI will employ a novel, innovative approach to address the lack of fence and economic incentives that support grazing by piloting a new cost-share program to pay for grazing infrastructure, specifically temporary fence and watering systems. (\$99,938)

Practical Farmers of Iowa: This project empowers farmers to research, share, and grow knowledge and social networks related to the nitrogen rate reduction potential of soil health management systems in Iowa. The critical information collected from this CIG project will inform part two of a larger project: Assessing the potential and appropriateness for a yield warranty for farmers who reduce N rates in soil health management systems. (\$99,473)

Other Conservation Activities

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)

- NRCS signed 35 agreements totaling more than \$8 million with local sponsors in FY21 to help communities recover from the **2019 floods**. Much of the work involves stream bank stabilization to help reduce future flooding and to protect local roads, culverts, bridges, dams, homes, cropland, and other infrastructure.
- NRCS completed four agreements in FY21 totaling \$325,117 to help communities recover from the August **2020 Derecho** wind storm. Most of the work involves debris removal from downed trees.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO)

- Provides assistance for the Clarke County Reservoir

Commission Watershed Project Plan – Environmental Document. (\$900,000)

- Provides assistance for the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors Watershed Project Plan – Environmental Document. (\$600,000)

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)*

Active Contracts: **103,819**
Acres: **1,685,105**

State Cost-Share (IDALS)*

Funds: **\$14.94 M**
Practices Funded: **4,992**

Conservation Plans*

Written: **10,245**
Acres Planned: **797,197**

*Request maps for more details.

