

## **Technical and Financial Assistance for Working Lands\***

Programs administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation offer a range of cost share and incentive payment programs targeted to specific land conservation and water quality objectives. Eligibility may vary depending on the location and the type of farm.

### **Federal Cost Share and Incentive Programs for Conservation**

- **Conservation Reserve Program** – The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland and other environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover. Participating landowners receive annual rental payments for 10- to 15-year contracts. CRP provides cost-share funding for the installation of approved vegetative practices on eligible cropland.
- **Conservation Security Program** – The Conservation Security Program (CSP) provides financial and technical assistance to support conservation efforts on tribal and private agricultural land in targeted watersheds. The program helps producers maintain existing conservation practices and encourages them to implement new practices that will provide additional conservation benefits. All participants must develop a conservation stewardship plan.
- **Debt for Nature** – The Debt for Nature Program is available to landowners with FSA loans secured by real estate. The program reduces a borrower's debt in exchange for a conservation contract with a term of 10, 30, or 50 years. Participants may not develop land placed in the Debt for Nature Program or use it to raise livestock or for agricultural production. Eligible lands include wetlands, highly erodible lands, and areas of high water quality or scenic value.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** – The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) pays up to 50 percent of the cost for producers to implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. EQIP is open to any producer engaged in livestock, forestry, or crop production on eligible land. EQIP provides technical and financial assistance to producers to plan, design, and install conservation practices that have been approved for use in the local area. In North Carolina, NRCS offers EQIP cost sharing on a county-by-county basis.
- **Forest Land Enhancement Program** – This is a voluntary program for non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners. It provides for technical, educational, and cost share assistance to promote sustainability of non-industrial private forest lands. In North Carolina, the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) reimburses 40–60 percent of the cost of

specific forestry and wildlife habitat improvement practices. Any individual who owns at least five acres of forestland and is not principally engaged in the processing of wood products, or engaged in fee hunting operations, is eligible to participate. Cost sharing is based on approval by the NC Division of Forest Resources of a forest management plan. A maximum of \$10,000 annually may be received by any landowner.

- **Wetlands Reserve Program** – The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides landowners with technical and financial assistance to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. Landowners can receive as much as 100 percent of the appraised agricultural market value of the property for permanent conservation easements, or 75 percent for 30-year easements. Eligible land includes wetlands cleared or drained for farming or pasture, and must be restorable and suitable for wildlife. The NRCS accepts applications for WRP on a continuous basis.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program** – The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides cost share assistance and technical assistance to develop and improve habitat for fish and wildlife on private land. Landowners work with the NRCS to create wildlife habitat management plans that list the goals and practices needed to improve wildlife habitat. As part of their conservation plans, landowners agree to implement habitat practices and maintain the enrolled acreage for a period of five to 10 years. In exchange, NRCS provides up to 75 percent in cost-share assistance to implement the plan.

### **Complementary State Programs**

- **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program** – The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) seeks to protect land along targeted waterways that is currently in agricultural production. Landowners of existing agricultural land within the Tar-Pamlico, Neuse and Chowan river basins and the Jordan Lake watershed are eligible to participate in CREP, which is administered by the NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation. Under CREP, landowners can voluntarily enroll eligible land in 10-year, 15-year, 30-year, and permanent contracts. The state will pay additional bonuses to landowners who enroll land in 30-year and permanent agreements. Cost sharing is available for installation of approved practices.
- **North Carolina Forest Development Program** – The North Carolina Forest Development Program (FDP) is a reforestation cost sharing program administered by the NC Division of Forest Resources. Under FDP, a landowner is partially reimbursed for the costs of site preparation, seedling purchases, tree planting, release of desirable seedlings from competing vegetation, or any other work needed to establish a new forest. To qualify for this assistance, the landowner must have a forest management plan

approved by the Division of Forest Resources. Any private individual, group, association or corporation may qualify on 1–100 acres per year.

- North Carolina Forest Stewardship Program – The North Carolina Forest Stewardship Program provides landowners technical assistance from the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources to develop a stewardship management plan. The forest stewardship plan is based on the landowner’s objectives, and activities are included to enhance the forest for wildlife, soil and water quality, timber production, recreational opportunities and natural beauty.
- North Carolina Agricultural Cost Share Program – The North Carolina Agricultural Cost Share program provides funding assistance to help landowners address nonpoint source pollution runoff concerns related to their farming operations. The program is administered by the NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation and delivered locally by Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors and employees, with the assistance of NRCS District Conservationists.

For more information, contact your local NRCS district conservationist, FSA office, or Soil and Water Conservation District.

*\*Text: Excerpted from “Planning for an Agricultural Future: A Guide for North Carolina Farmers and Local Governments,” prepared by American Farmland Trust’s SE Regional Office.*