

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Assistance to Specialty Crop Growers

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NRCS and Specialty Crops

- Specialty Crop producers are eligible for all Farm Bill programs:
 - Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
(Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative)
 - Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)
 - Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)
 - Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)
 - plus many more.

NRCS and Specialty Crops

- Specialty Crop producers can get technical help and may receive financial assistance with activities like
 - Irrigation
 - High tunnels
 - Integrated Pest Management
 - Pollinator habitat
 - Conversion to organic farming
 - Agrichemical handling facilities
 - Composting facilities
 - and many others.

NRCS and Specialty Crops

- Program participation **IS NOT** based on farm size, crop type, livestock type, previous participation, etc.
- Program participation **IS** based on the presence of natural resource concerns which can / will be fixed with our assistance:
 - erosion (crop fields, farm lanes)
 - water quality (pesticide, soil, or nutrient runoff)
 - poor plant condition
 - pest problems (insects or plants)...

NRCS and Specialty Crops

- Please keep in mind that financial assistance varies from year to year, because programs and funding levels change from year to year.
- However, technical assistance (“know-how”) is always available upon request, for free.
 - NRCS can offer guidance and suggestions based on years of experience with a variety of crop types and farms

Common NRCS Activities with Specialty Crops

Integrated Pest Management:

--began a very productive partnership with Penn State in 2004, to promote the adoption of IPM practices:

Mating Disruption

Smart Sprayers

Biological Control

Reduced-Risk Pesticides



--Many of these activities are still available for financial assistance.

Common NRCS Activities with Specialty Crops

Irrigation: since 2004

Typically microirrigation, but can be overhead or center pivots, as well.



--available only through the Agriculture Management Assistance (AMA) program.

--due to limited funding (~\$150,000), only available in Adams and York Counties in 2013.

Common NRCS Activities with Specialty Crops

High Tunnels: since 2010, assistance possible on up to 1/20th of an acre covered by a seasonal high tunnel (= 2,178 ft², or 30' x 90')



--available through EQIP, statewide.

--can be conventional or organic; but crops must be grown in natural soil or bedded rows on natural soil (no pots, hangers, or frames/platforms).

Common NRCS Activities with Specialty Crops

Pollinator Habitat: ongoing partnership with Penn State and the Xerces Society.

>225 acres statewide so far (but this is a new area, so we're all still learning).



Photo: M.Vaughan

--Increase nectar and pollen sources, improve nest sites for pollinators on farms, adopt pollinator-friendly IPM.

Common NRCS Activities with Specialty Crops

Organic: can assist with conservation activities on Certified Organic farms.

--crop rotations, cover crops, IPM, composting facilities, windbreaks/setbacks, etc.



Can also assist with the conversion of conventional farms to Certified Organic.

NRCS Programs that are Currently Available for Specialty Crop Growers

- Agricultural Management Assistance - AMA
- Conservation Stewardship Program - CSP
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program – EQIP
- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program - FRPP
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program - WHIP

Programs not available – not accepting applications

- Conservation Reserve Program - CRP
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - CREP
- Grassland Reserve Program - GRP
- Wetland Reserve Program - WRP

2013 Practices and Payment Rates

- Payments are based on a flat rate approach.
- Practice payment rates based on regional average costs.
 - Mid-Atlantic region:
 - DE, MD, PA, NJ, NY
- Conservation Activity Plans based on national average costs.

2013 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- National Initiatives and options
- State priorities
- Locally-directed fund pools
 - Local Work Groups
- \$26.6 million

EQIP National Initiatives and Funding Options

- Air Quality Initiative
- Organic Initiative
- On-Farm Energy Conservation
- Seasonal High Tunnel
- Water Quality Initiative
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- Greenhouse Gas/Conservation Innovation Grant support
- Beginning Farmers and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers

2013 PA State Options

- Advanced Technology
 - Manure Digesters, Litter Incinerators
- CNMP/NMP Plan Development
- Conservation Activity Plans
- Feed Management
- Forestry Practices
- Forest Management Plan Development
- Wildlife Habitat
- Conservation Innovation Grant (state option)

Conservation Activity Plans

13 Plan types available:

- Agricultural Energy Management Plan
- Comprehensive Air Quality Management Plan
- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
- Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition
- Drainage Water Management Plan
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan
- Forest Management Plan
- Grazing Management Plan
- Integrated Pest Management Plan
- Irrigation Water Management Plan
- Nutrient Management Plan (no livestock)
- Pollinator Habitat Enhancement Plan

Nutrient Management

- The 4R's:
 - Right fertilizer source at the
 - Right rate, at the
 - Right time, and in the
 - Right place
- Basic Nutrient Management
- Adaptive Nutrient Management
- Advanced Nutrient Management



Conservation Stewardship Program - CSP

Funds “Enhancements” in 5-year contracts.

- Advanced management

- good option for farms with few resource concerns,
but willing to go “above and beyond”.

Available for: Agricultural Land (Cropland and Pasture)
Non Industrial Private Forestland

Average PA payments in 2012:

\$8,600 per 5-yr contract / roughly \$26 per acre

Conservation Stewardship Program - CSP

Enhancements of interest to Specialty Crop growers in the past:

- establishing pollinator habitat
- establishing beneficial insect habitat
- advanced Integrated Pest Management methods
- locally-marketed farm products



Photo: E.Mader



Photo: S.Beebe (bugguide.net)



Photo: USDA-ARS/Peggy Greb

Currently, no funds available for new 2013 contracts

Other Farm Bill Sections: Title IX

Energy

- Rural Energy for America Program - REAP (USDA Rural Development)
 - Grants and Loans
 - \$20 - 45 million/year
 - For example, Anaerobic Digesters, Solar Energy projects
- Biomass Crop Assistance Program - BCAP (USDA Farm Service Agency)
 - Support for producers and processors
 - \$20 -75 million/year

United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

For more information, visit:

- ✓ Your local USDA Service Center
- ✓ Your local conservation district
- ✓ www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov

