



Farm Bill Conservation Title Funding and Policy Changes

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

RCPP provides financial and technical assistance for multi-state or watershed-scale projects. The program creates partnership opportunities to target and leverage federal conservation funding for specific areas and resource concerns. Project areas are defined by eligible partners and are selected through a competitive process. Funds are also directed through “critical conservation areas” (CCA) selected by NRCS. Current CCAs include Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Great Lakes Region, Mississippi River Basin, Colorado River Basin, Longleaf Pine Range, Columbia River Basin, Prairie Grasslands Region, and California Bay Delta.

Notable changes in 2018 Farm Bill

- The authorized, mandatory funding level of the program increases from \$100M per year to \$300M per year.
- Funding pools are changed in a way that benefits Bay applications – national funding pool is eliminated (previously allocated 40% of funds); state and CCA split the funding 50/50. The CCA funding pool (the Chesapeake Bay was the largest beneficiary of CCA funding in FY 2018 with \$16.1M) increases from 35% to 50% of total funds.
- Alternative funding arrangements authorized so that eligible partners can administer RCPP funding, allowing additional options to support to farmers tailored to state and local circumstances and priorities.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to producers and land owners to plan and install structural, vegetative, and land management practices on eligible lands to alleviate natural resource problems. Eligible producers enter into contracts to receive payment for implementing conservation practices. Approved activities are carried out according to an EQIP plan developed in conjunction with the producer that identifies the appropriate conservation practice(s) to address specific land resource concerns.

Notable changes in 2018 Farm Bill

- Modest increase in authorized, mandatory funding from current levels of \$1.75 billion to \$1.75 billion for 2019, \$1.75 billion for 2020, \$1.8 billion for 2021, \$1.85 billion for 2022 and \$2.025 billion for 2023.
- States may identify up to 10 most effective conservation practices eligible to receive 90% cost share (most practices are funded at 50%).

- Allows for 5 to 10-year EQIP contracts (contracts vary but 3 years is current benchmark).
- The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which is concentrated in Midwest, was significantly cut in favor of programs like EQIP, RCPP and others that work with farmers on a more one-on-one basis to encourage targeted conservation practices. Funding for CSP was reallocated to these programs.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

CRP provides annual rental payments, usually over 10 years, to producers to replace crops on highly erodible and environmentally sensitive land with long-term resource-conserving plantings. Bids to enroll land are solicited during a limited time-period, then compared using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). Those with the highest EBI scores are accepted. This is referred to as general sign-up. Embedded in the CRP are several small and more focused subprograms and initiatives such as CREP—some established in law and others established administratively—that bypass the general bidding process and address specific resource topics. Examples of these focus on concentrated resource problems in a portion of a state, protection of small isolated agricultural wetlands, or improvement of habitat for upland game birds. All lands that qualify for these subprograms and initiatives are automatically accepted and enrolled on a continuous basis. This is referred to as continuous sign-up.

Notable changes in 2018 Farm Bill

- Increases acreage enrollment cap from the current level of 24M acres to 24.5M acres in 2020; 25M acres in 2021; 25.5M acres in 2022; and 27M acres in 2023.
- Priority given to water quality practices in continuous sign-up programs.
- Minimum of 40% of acres committed to continuous practices, including CREP.
- Allows NGOs to enter into CREP agreements contributing 30% of cost.
- 100% cost share for riparian buffer management, allowing for better buffer survival and long-term stewardship.
- Increases federal cost share for associated forested buffer projects, such as stream fencing and alternative watering projects.
- Allows staggered reimbursement for installations costs prior to completion of the project.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

ACEP provides financial and technical assistance through two types of easements: agricultural land easements that limit nonagricultural uses on productive farm or grass lands, and wetland reserve easements that protect and restore wetlands.

Notable changes in 2018 Farm Bill

- Authorized at \$450M per year, representing a \$225M increase over the five-year period.
- Adds water quality as a priority for Wetland Reserve Enhancement easements.