

USDA Programs Provide Financial Incentives for Innovative Producers

There are close ties between pest management and water quality, especially where some farming activities can lead to water quality impairment. Opportunities are available now for producers to receive financial and technical assistance to try different pest management strategies that result in water quality improvements. For example, financial assistance can be provided to eligible producers that implement practices to reduce the potential for off-site movement of pesticides. This is one way that stewardship activities that may not be cost-effective on their own may become more economically feasible.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers programs to provide financial and technical support to eligible agricultural producers to meet specific conservation objectives. Most of the programs require a conservation plan which is simply a record of the producer's decisions that address the protection of soil, water, air, plant and animal resources on their land. Conservation plans provide for the sustainable use of natural resources while taking into account economic and social considerations. Each plan includes an implementation schedule for selected practices, including pest management, needed to better protect the farm's resources and meet the producer's goals. Assistance with developing a conservation plan is available through your local NRCS or Conservation District office.

Two popular voluntary conservation programs that can provide funding to eligible producers for pest management related activities are the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

EQIP promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible producers implement management practices or install structures on eligible agricultural land that address high priority natural resource concerns. EQIP activities are carried out in accordance with a conservation plan. Up to 75% cost-share (financial support for a portion of the cost of a practice) is available and contracts can last up to ten years.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) fosters ongoing stewardship on private agricultural land by providing payment for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. CSP identifies and rewards farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, rangeland, and forested land that is an incidental part of an agricultural operation.

Examples of pest management activities, which as part of a larger conservation plan may be eligible to receive financial support can include: use of pesticide drift reduction technologies, selection of reduced risk pesticides, field scouting, adherence to approved integrated pest management (IPM) guidelines and use of computer-based decision support tools. Pest management plans are developed with the landowner and are specific to their operation.

Applications for program participation are submitted through your NRCS or Conservation District office. Generally, applications are submitted in the fall to be considered for funding the following spring. The Conservation Security Program is unique because you must be in a selected watershed to apply and the application period varies from year to year. Contact your local NRCS or Conservation District office for cost-share funding application information or visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>

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