

USDA Programs and Conservation Provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, widely referred to as the Farm Bill, was initiated to respond to the broad range of emerging natural resource challenges farmers and ranchers face, including soil erosion, wetland loss, wildlife habitat deterioration, and farmland protection. The Farm Bill accomplishes this through voluntary assistance programs, including cost-share, land rental, incentive payments, and technical assistance. The 2002 Farm Bill places a strong emphasis on the conservation of working lands, ensuring that land remain both healthy and productive.

Although a voluntary program, federal payments through any Farm Bill program are linked to conservation activities on the land, known as Conservation Compliance. Specific criteria have been laid out to be eligible for program participation with the government, including Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and wetland provisions. Land accessed as HEL requires a Conservation Plan to be developed to hold soil loss to certain allowable levels. This plan may require grassed waterways, field borders, contouring, contour buffer strips, conservation tillage, and even grass in rotation in a field to meet Farm Bill compliance guidelines. Wetland provisions require evaluation of any land (including non-ag land) that is to be drained or brought into production to have a wetland determination completed on it. If the land is determined to meet the definition of a wetland, little additional drainage or clearing can be performed.

Farm Bill programs of most interest in Henry County include the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and the Conservation Security Program (CSP). (The CSP program has not yet had open enrollment in any Henry County watershed.) Additional programs provided by the state to assist implement practices to meet conservation compliance standards include the Iowa Financial Incentives Program (IFIP), Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP), Revolving Loan, and the Local Water Protection Program (LWPP).

If you have any questions on how these programs may apply to your property, stop in and we will review or complete a conservation plan based on your goals and evaluate potential programs to meet those goals.