

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

North Carolina



Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Program Updates

Allocations

For FY2024, NC was allocated over \$90 million dollars to provide financial assistance to producers to address identified resource concerns. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has been a major factor in the allocation received providing an opportunity to get more conservation on the ground in NC. Here is a snapshot of how those dollars are being invested:

EQIP Classic Allocation - \$22,608,633.00
 EQIP -IRA - \$30,209,000.00
 CSP Classic - \$13,875,000.00
 CSP-IRA - \$8,285,000.00
 FY24 CSP – Renewal - \$1,364,400.00

Applications

Now that it's halfway through the 2nd Quarter, we're processing the number the applications we have thus far. For our more common programs we're processing the following:

EQIP-

- Pending 897 applications
- Eligible 1551 applications
- Obligated \$2,615,916.85

CSP-

- Pending 996 applications
- Eligible 424 applications
- Obligated \$1,118,957.00

Adjustments have been made to the CSP program to increase the benefits available to interested participants. The minimum payment for CSP contracts has increased from \$1500 to 4000, HU payment rates has been added to the program, compensation for resource concerns are now paid at a fixed rate of \$1800 for Non-HU participants and \$3000 for HU participants, and payment rates for land use acres have increased from previous year payments.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Loss of farmland due to development and other economic factors is a great concern to North Carolina and NRCS. Despite this, our producers are serious about preserving agricultural lands for the future, as demonstrated by the following:

- IRA WRE 1 parcel (925 acres) \$7,941,595 (Easement Purchase and Restoration)
- IRA ALE 3 parcels (879 acres) \$3,582,750 (Total)
- ALE General 3 parcels \$2,518,000
- WRE General 1 parcel \$2,460,405 (Additional Funds Needed)
- Upper Cape Fear (RCPP) 11 parcels \$4,013,535 (Total Requested)
- Upper Neuse (RCPP) 10 parcels \$7,036,520 (Total Requested)
- Forever Farms II 11 parcels \$2,970,917 (Total Requested)
 - Resulting in a total of 108 applications for \$30,523,722.00

ACT Now

Thanks to ACT Now, states can immediately approve and obligate a ranked application in a designated ranking pool when an eligible application meets or exceeds a state determined minimum ranking score without waiting until the field office ranks all applications in the ranking pool. To date:

- 56 contracts have been obligated for a total of \$2,615,916.85.
- 68 applications are in approved status for a total of \$4,133,201.00.
- 237 applications are in preapproved status awaiting to be funded.

ACT NOW fund pools:

- Seasonal High Tunnel (Classic)
- Cropland (IRA)
- Forestry (IRA)
- CPA/DIA/CEMA (Classic)
- Long leaf Pine (Classic)
- Urban (Classic)

A second sign-up to accept applications for EQIP is set for March 22, 2024. This announcement was used to position ourselves to ensure we have ample applications to utilize remaining FY2024 allocations and to establish a working list going into FY2025.

General FY 2023 Updates

Certified Conservation Planners

Conservation planners are personnel who possess the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS planning process to meet client objectives in solving resource concerns.

The personnel who recently achieved this milestone for FY 2024:

Arin Hornung – CCP Level 1
 Daniel Carawan – CCP Level 1
 Halimah Wynn – CCP Level 1
 Jamie Bridges – CCP Level 1
 Mary Owens – CCP Level 1
 Zuhad Gul – CCP Level 1

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Personnel Update

The State Conservationist has recently accepted a detail opportunity as Acting Associate Deputy Chief for Science and Technology Division in NHQ for 120-days, with a start date of February 11, 2024. That Acting State Conservationist is Mr. Julius George.

We have also said good-bye to Ruben Torres who was our state resource conservationist by title but went above and beyond. He also acted as our business tool coordinator, technical service provider coordinator, and state resource inventory coordinator. The Acting State Resource Conservationist will be filled by Mrs. Heather Hinson starting March 10th through July 8th.

Local Working Groups (LWG)

The local working group process exists to provide the Partnership recommendations on resource priorities and activities. In the past, these groups have provided direct input to NRCS on priority resource issues and practices best suited to address them for funding on a local, state, and national level. Local working groups are a key pathway for producers to communicate with partners. The past year three significant land uses were identified. They were Crop, Pasture, and Confined Animal Operations (CAFO). The following is the amount invested in addressing these land uses.

Crop-	\$2,886,620.60
Pasture-	\$2,498,543.37
CAFO-	\$14,417,836.92
Total-	\$19,803,000.89

The priorities varied depending on the land use. For cropland; soil health, erosion, water quality, and plant degradation were the main priorities. For pastures it was water quality, feed & forage, animal health, and degraded plant condition. For CAFO it was animal mortality & waste, water quality, soil erosion, plant degradation, pathogens, and livestock production.

Input from LWGS play a vital role in determining how we allocate resources and address natural resource concerns in the state and the nation. In short, thank you and we look forward to working with everyone this year.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO/PL-566) Program

This program helps project sponsors protect and restore watersheds. Current active projects are all in the planning or pre-planning stages, but future years will include design and construction. Current Sponsors include Robeson County Drainage District (1, 2, and 3), Town of Oriental, and the City of Roxboro.

- Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report (PIFR) – Funding Allocated – 1 (\$55,000)
- Environmental Assessment/Plan – Funding Pending – 2
- Environmental Assessment/Plan – Funding Allocated – 2 (\$2,650,000)

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