

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

North Carolina



Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Program Updates

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)
 - \$534,750 – Obligated (1 parcel)
 - \$3,048,000 – Under Review (2 parcels)
- ALE General 3 parcels \$2,518,000 (Allocated)
 - \$1,060,500 – Obligated
 - \$988,750 – Under Review
- WRE General 1 parcel \$2,460,405 (Additional Funds Needed)
 - Funds received and used for restoration of existing parcels
- Upper Cape Fear (RCP) 11 parcels \$4,013,535 (Total Requested)
- Upper Neuse (RCP) 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**

NC-NRCS has closed 51 easements between 2019-2023.

- 4 ACEP-WRE
- 47 ACEP-ALE

Hot Topics

Departure & Advertisements

On June 26, we said goodbye to our Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTC-FO) Mark Ferguson who retired after 33 years of service, with having served 18 of these years in the state of North Carolina. Mark was instrumental in providing leadership to the western part of the state and will be sorely missed.

The following positions have been advertised since March:

Admin Support Assistant (3 positions)

-serves as the central point of contact for a wide range of administrative, office support, and clerical functions for the supervisor and others as assigned.

Civil/Agricultural Engineer (1 position)

- serves as area, zone or state engineer and is responsible for providing technical guidance and leadership in the overall planning, design, installation, and maintenance of the engineering phases of soil and water conservation practices as well as watershed flood protection programs.

Financial Resource Specialist (1 position)

-performs a variety of complex duties and assignments in support of the formulation, allocation, utilization, analysis, and reporting of financial resources necessary to accomplish the mission responsibilities of the state, area and field offices of NRCS.

Outreach Coordinator (1 position)

-plans, schedules, implements, and executes outreach strategy for the state, aimed at targeting a diverse audiences, including but not limited to new and beginning farmers, organic and transitioning to organic farmers, small and limited resource farmers, women, specialty crop producers, Hispanic producers, veterans, and other special emphasis groups that are defined as traditionally underserved.

Resource Soil Scientist (1 position)

-responsible for maintenance, interpretation, distribution of soil survey information conducting information and education activities related to soils and soil survey provide training to NRCS employees and other technical specialists providing support to users of soil survey information assisting with conservation planning, highly erodible land and wetland determinations.

Soil Conservationist (21 positions)

-provides assistance in the development, planning, contracting and application of land conservation practices and programs consistent with NRCS policy and procedures.

State Resource Conservationist (1 position)

-formulating, recommending, and implementing policy and procedures applicable to resource conservation planning activities and various program activities, and performs an active role in developing and implementing a comprehensive soil, water, and resource conservation program for the state.

Supervisory Soil Conservationist (2 positions)

-assists the Conservation District(s) (CD) within the managerial unit, consisting of at least one county or district, in the development of a comprehensive natural resources conservation program. The incumbent performs professional duties to achieve an integrated system of sound land use and conservation treatment in harmony with the capability and needs of the land and landowner.

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General FY 2024 Updates

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership

On May 29, 2024, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that it will invest up to \$50 million in fiscal year 2024 through the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) to support conservation partners with local projects that help protect, restore and enhance critical wetlands on agricultural lands. NRCS is accepting proposals until August 16, 2024. We are prioritizing proposals that focus on producers who conserve wetlands in or that are anticipated to benefit disadvantaged communities, contributing to NRCS' effort to advance equity and environmental justice in its delivery of conservation programs.

Eligible partners include Tribes, state and local governments, and nongovernmental organizations. WREP partners are required to contribute a financial or technical assistance fund match. Proposals must be limited to \$10 million in federal funding and should include a breakdown of project activities.

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (STAC)

Members of the STAC provide recommendations for establishing technical guidelines and program criteria and priorities necessary to carry out conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. Input from the STAC is offers suggested areas of interest for addressing specific resource concerns, suggestions of funding, identify areas where outreach may be needed, confirmation of financial assistance rates, etc. STAC is a primary partner in assisting NRCS in identifying and directing assistance to address the priorities of the state.

The Committee meets twice a year on the second Wednesday every March and August. In addition to the STAC, NC-NRCS has established the following Subcommittee meetings which allow members and NRCS to dive further into critical details, needs, and issues that will assist in the delivery of NRCS technical and financial assistance. Subcommittee meetings are held each year on the second Wednesday in February and June.

USDA Invests \$5.2 Million in 17 Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Projects

USDA is investing \$5.2 million in 17 new grants that support urban agriculture and innovative production. Grant recipients, including community gardens and nonprofit farms, will increase food production and access in economically distressed communities, provide job training and education, and allow partners to develop business plans and zoning proposals.

One of the newest projects is the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle in Raleigh, N.C., which will provide community garden planning, development and support including innovative agricultural education. The project was awarded \$347,886. The project is one of six in the state.

The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) competitive grants program supports a wide range of activities through grants that include planning and implementation activities. Planning activities initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs, while implementation activities accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor and other agricultural practices that serve farmers and communities.

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