



How to Improve Water Quality on Iowa Farms

*A Step-by-Step Guide for Navigating
Conservation Programs for Farmers and
Landowners*

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Introduction

“How to Improve Water Quality on Iowa Farms” is designed to help farmers and landowners use public programs to improve water quality and promote soil health on their farmland. The guide identifies key practices funded by the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD).

Iowa farmers and landowners can use this guide to explore practices to achieve conservation goals and to quickly identify programs that can provide resources to implement these practices.

Iowa farmers and landowners have access to nearly a dozen programs involving county, state, and federal governments. Navigating these programs can be challenging. While this guide cannot answer all the questions conservation-minded Iowans may have, it does provide a systematic way to identify what resources are available and who is eligible to receive them.

As a landowner or farmer, your most important step is to develop a relationship with the staff in your county office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the county Soil and Water Conservation District. While these two agencies share office space and the staff works together, they are in fact two distinct agencies within three distinct governmental bodies. Adding another layer of complexity is the USDA Farm Service Agency, which also includes its own conservation programs and its own office space. In three counties in Iowa (Appanoose, Decatur, and Union), the FSA office is in an adjacent county. This guide aims to organize program information and identify the agencies responsible so you can visit the county offices with more knowledge. The goal is to empower you to leverage the available resources to implement practices on your farm to improve Iowa’s water quality. This guide also includes the Agricultural Law Center’s report on the development of Private Conservation Initiatives and how these programs can play a role for farmers and landowners interested in protecting soil and water resources.

Thank you for using the guide and for taking responsibility for the water quality coming off your land and for soil health on your farm. Agriculture can remain productive in our state only if farmers and landowners make a commitment to solving our water quality problems.

Professor Neil Hamilton, Drake University



How to Use the Guide

This guide is organized into two key parts: 1) Conservation Practices; and 2) Conservation Programs. For each practice there is a definition, explanation of how it can improve water quality, and a list identifying the type of support available for implementing the practice. The table on the following page provides a summarized cross reference of practices to programs.

The Conservation Programs are listed by Federal and State programs. For each program, there is an explanation of who is eligible, how to apply, what documents and forms are required, the selection process, how practices are implemented, how participants get paid, and how the program is enforced.

While the guide provides a helpful starting point for enhancing conservation efforts on your farm, it is recommended to speak with your local NRCS, FSA, and SWCD office to create a tailored conservation plan for your farm. A chart outlining the network of conservation programs is provided in the following pages to help you identify which office administers each program. A one-on-one consultation with a conservation technician is a meaningful step in establishing your relationship with the office and making the most efficient use of conservation practices and programs to improve water quality on your land.

Following the guide of public conservation programs, the document highlights additional support for conservation in Iowa. Non-profit and community organizations provide resources to farmers and landowners to implement conservation practices. We have included a list of some of the organizations partnering with farmers to increase on-farm conservation. In addition, an explanation and case study of Private Conservation Initiatives demonstrate how the private sector is playing a greater role in Iowa conservation.

Iowa farmers and landowners can access a wide range of programs providing support for multiple practices and structures. Please use this guide to find and explore programs and practices to help make your farm more sustainable and to improve Iowa's water quality.

	CSP	EQIP	CRP	Iowa Financial Incentive Program	REAP	Iowa Water Quality Initiative	Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund	State Revolving Fund
Buffer Strips & Grassed Waterways	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cover Crops	X	X		X		X		
Extended Crop Rotations	X	X				X		
Nutrient Management	X	X				X		
Conservation Tillage	X	X		X		X		
Land Retirement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tree & Shrub Planting		X	X	X	X		X	X
Wetlands	X	X	X		X	X		X
Streambank Stabilization		X			X			X
Water & Sediment Control Basins		X		X	X	X	X	X
Ponds		X			X	X		X
Terraces		X		X	X	X	X	X
Grade Stabilization Structure	X	X		X	X		X	X
Bioreactors	X	X				X		X
Prescribed Grazing	X	X			X	X		
Fences	X	X	X	X	X			X
Livestock Waste Management		X			X			X

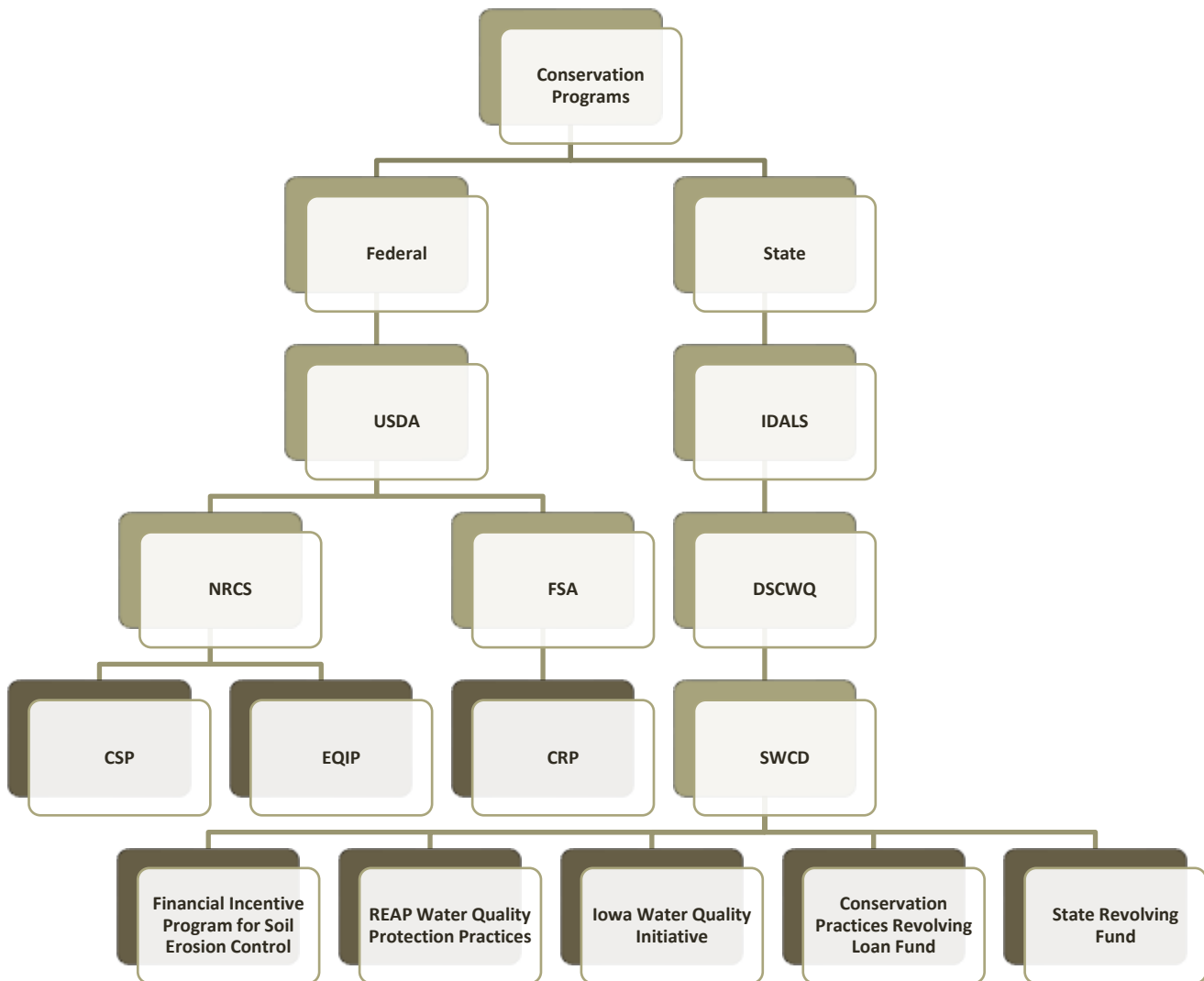
Key Terms

CDI- Conservation Districts of Iowa
CREP- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CRP- Conservation Reserve Program
CSP- Conservation Stewardship Program
DNR- Department of Natural Resources
DSCWQ- Department of Soil Conservation and Water Quality
DUNS- Data Universal Numbering System
EQIP- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FSA- Farm Service Agency
FWS- Fish and Wildlife Service
IDALS- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
NRCS- Natural Resource Conservation Service
PCI- Private Conservation Initiative
REAP- Resource Enhancement and Protection
SAM- System of Award Management
SWCD- Soil and Water Conservation District
USDA- United States Department of Agriculture
WMA- Watershed Management Authority



Network of Conservation Programs

Public conservation programs are designed and funded at the federal and state levels. Some of these programs are allocated locally.



Conservation Practices



Buffer Strips & Grassed Waterways

Buffer strips and grassed waterways are strips of grass or a mixture of vegetation strategically placed on farms to reduce erosion. Buffer strips run along the contour of a farm field and alternate down the slope of the field with wider crop strips. Grassed waterways are shaped channels that are seeded down to slow water as it drains to a stable outlet.

How can buffer strips and grassed waterways improve water quality?

- Controls sheet, rill, gully and wind erosion
- Slows runoff and traps sediments as they leave the field
- Removes nutrients and pesticides from the draining water

What type of support is available for establishing buffer strips and grassed waterways?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): CRP is a land conservation program administered by FSA. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length and often include cost-share for implementation and maintenance.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Programs offers financial assistance for filter strips, field borders, strip-cropping, and grassed waterways. Maintenance agreements for filter strips, field borders, and strip-cropping provide up to \$25 per acre and last for a period of 5 years, while grassed waterway maintenance agreements provide 50% of the cost and last for 10 years.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund: Iowa offers no-interest loans for the implementation of permanent soil conservation practices. Terms are available for up to \$20,000 and up to a 10-year repayment plan.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.

Cover Crops

Cover crops are plants added to a crop rotation to provide temporary ground cover that protects soil from wind and water erosion, increases organic matter in soils, traps nutrients, and filtrates ground water. Examples include cereal rye, oats, winter wheat, crimson clover, hairy vetch, field peas, and medium red clover.

How can cover crops improve water quality?

- Provide ground with year-round coverage to protect soil from erosion
- Use up residual nutrients to prevent them from entering water systems
- Improve water infiltration
- Decrease run-off

What type of support is available for planting cover crops?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement for up to 10 years through NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program offers a one-time payment of \$25 per acre with a maintenance agreement of 1-4 years for the establishment of cover crops.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.



Extended Crop Rotations

Using extended crop rotations is the practice of growing different crops in a recurring sequence on the same piece of land. More crops in rotation and longer planned sequences greatly increase conservation benefits.

How can crop rotations improve water quality?

- Reduce commercial fertilizer needs when adding nitrogen-fixing plants, such as alfalfa and other legumes
- Reduce pesticide use by naturally breaking the cycles of weeds, insects, and diseases
- Improve soil health by adding diverse biological activity
- Reduce soil erosion

What type of support is available for using extended crop rotations?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects. The National Organic Initiative through EQIP provides support for extended crop rotations.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.



Nutrient Management Plans

Nutrient management plans control the rate, source, method of application, and timing of plant nutrients and soil amendments.

How can nutrient management plans improve water quality?

- Prevent over-application of commercial fertilizers and animal manure
- Maintain and improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil

What type of support is available for creating nutrient management plans?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.



Conservation Tillage

Conservation tillage is any cropland system that leaves at least one-third of the soil covered with crop residue after planting. Conservation tillage types include no-till, strip-till, ridge-till and mulch-till.

How can conservation tillage improve water quality?

- Improves soil health by preventing soil erosion, adding organic matter, and increasing microbial activity
- Increases water infiltration by reducing soil compaction, and forming root channels

What type of support is available for conservation tillage?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program provides a one-time payment of \$10 per acre for no-till, strip-till, and ridge-till practices for maintenance periods of 1-4 years. Support for contour farming is also available at a rate of \$6 per acre for a period of 5 years.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.



Land Retirement

Land can be retired from production and conservation enhanced by establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover of grasses, legumes, and forbs. The plants provide nesting cover, winter cover, brood cover, pollinator habitat, and food for wildlife.

How can land retirement improve water quality?

- Provides ground with year-around coverage to protect soil from erosion
- Reduces sedimentation
- Improves water infiltration and decreases run-off

What type of support is available for land retirement?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): CRP is a land conservation program administered by FSA. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length and often include cost-share for implementation and maintenance.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program offers a 20-year maintenance agreement with 50% of cost-share assistance in the implementation of conservation cover for land retirement.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund: Iowa offers no-interest loans for the implementation of permanent soil conservation practices. Terms are available for up to \$20,000 and up to a 10-year repayment plan.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.

Tree & Shrub Plantings

Trees and shrubs are woody plants established in non-forested areas by planting seeds, seedlings, cuttings, or potted plants.

How can trees and shrubs improve water quality?

- Uptake soil and water-borne chemicals and nutrients
- Provide wind and water erosion control

What type of support is available for planting trees and shrubs?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): CRP is a land conservation program administered by FSA. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length and often include cost-share for implementation and maintenance.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program offers a 20-year maintenance agreement with providing 50% of cost, up to \$450 per acre for the establishment of trees and shrubs.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund: Iowa offers no-interest loans for the implementation of permanent soil conservation practices. Terms are available for up to \$20,000 and up to a 10-year repayment plan.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.

Wetlands

A wetland is an area of land in the form of a swamp, bog, slough, pothole, or marsh that has saturated soils and water-loving plants.

How can wetlands improve water quality?

- Filter sediment, nutrients, and chemicals from water using biological processes
- Reduce soil erosion and downstream flooding

What type of support is available for creating, enhancing, or restoring wetlands?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): CRP is a land conservation program administered by FSA. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length and often include cost-share for implementation and maintenance.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.



Stream Bank Stabilization

Stream banks can be stabilized by using grass, riprap, or other treatment to protect stream banks from erosion.

How can stream bank stabilization improve water quality?

- Maintains stream flow capacity
- Reduces stream bank erosion and downstream sediment
- Improves stream corridor for fish and wildlife habitat

What type of support is available for stream bank stabilization?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.



Water and Sediment Control Basins

A water and sediment control basin is an earth embankment or a combination ridge and channel constructed across the slope of a minor waterway to form a sediment trap and water detention basin with a stable outlet.

How can erosion control basins improve water quality?

- Trap sediment on uplands preventing it from reaching downstream bodies of water
- Reduce gully erosion by controlling water flow within a drainage area

What type of support is available for erosion control basins?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program offers a 20-year maintenance agreement providing 50% of the cost of implementing erosion control basins.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund: Iowa offers no-interest loans for the implementation of permanent soil conservation practices. Terms are available for up to \$20,000 and up to a 10-year repayment plan.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.

Ponds

A pond is a pool of water formed by either constructing a damn or digging a pit.

How can ponds improve water quality?

- Prevent soil erosion by eliminating gullies
- Collect and store runoff water

What type of support is available for building ponds?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.



Terraces

A terrace is an earthen embankment around a hillside that stops water flow and stores or guides water safely off a field.

How can terraces improve water quality?

- Reduce erosion by reducing slope length in a field
- Retain runoff for moisture conservation
- Convey runoff to grassed waterways or other practices that filter chemicals and nutrients

What type of support is available for installing terraces?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentives Program offers a 20-year maintenance agreement providing 50% of the cost of implementing terraces.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund: Iowa offers no-interest loans for the implementation of permanent soil conservation practices. Terms are available for up to \$20,000 and up to a 10-year repayment plan.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.



Grade Stabilization Structures

Grade stabilization structures are earthen embankments built across a waterway with a drop spillway made of metal, pipe, wood, concrete, or other materials. These structures provide controlled passage of storm water through a sudden drop in elevation from one stable grade to another.

How can grade stabilization structures improve water quality?

- Reduce sediment delivered downstream
- Prevent gully erosion

What type of support is available for installing grade stabilization structures?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program offers a 20-year maintenance agreement providing 50% of the cost of implementing grade stabilization structures.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund: Iowa offers no-interest loans for the implementation of permanent soil conservation practices. Terms are available for up to \$20,000 and up to a 10-year repayment plan.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.

Bioreactors

A bioreactor is a below-ground structure containing a carbon source, such as wood chips, designed to reduce the concentration of nitrates in subsurface drainage.

How can bioreactors improve water quality?

- Filter nitrates from water leaving the farm through subsurface drainage

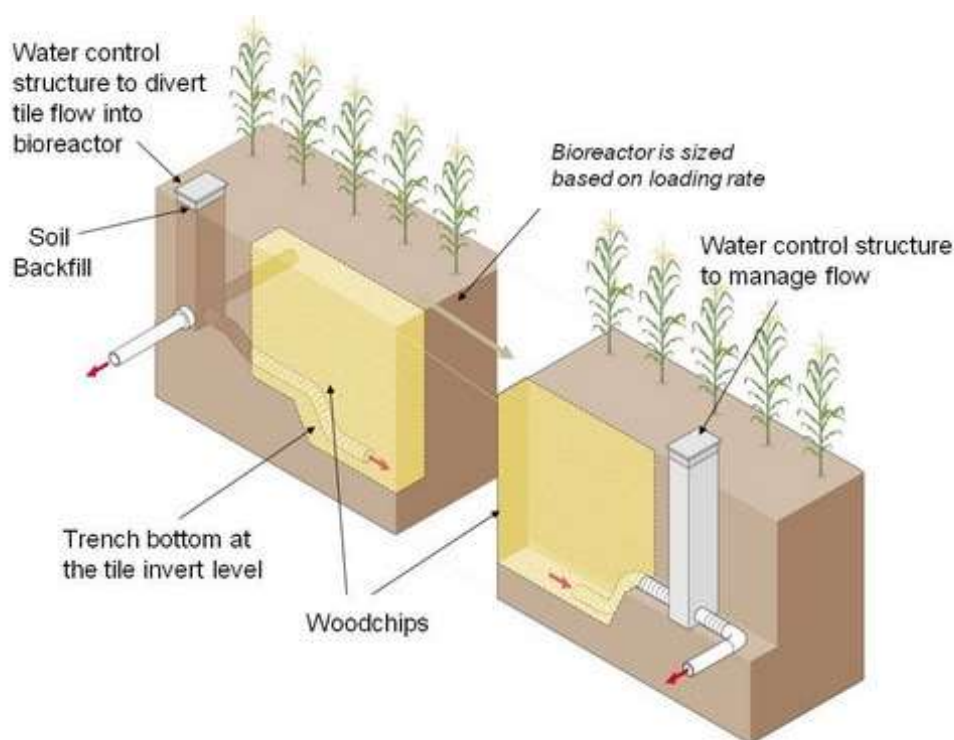
What type of support is available for installing bioreactors?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement of up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for a variety of water quality projects from \$5,000-\$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.



Prescribed Grazing

Prescribed grazing is the regular and systematic pasture rotations for livestock. Allowing areas to rest maximizes the quality and quantity of forage growth.

How can prescribed grazing improve water quality?

- Improves distribution of manure
- Decreases soil compaction
- Increases soil organic matter
- Decreases soil washouts
- Decreases chemical fertilizer usage

What type of support is available for prescribed grazing?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

Iowa Water Quality Initiative: The Iowa Water Quality Initiative provides up to 50% cost-share funding for practices identified in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy for improving water quality.



Fences

A fence is a constructed barrier used to regulate access of livestock, wildlife, and people.

How can fences improve water quality?

- Protect areas such as new plantings or waterways from damage by livestock, wildlife, or people
- Implement a prescribed grazing plan or provide better distribution of grazing animals

What type of support is available for building fences?

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): CSP is a 5-year contract through NRCS designed to reward farmers already using conservation practices and enable them to implement additional conservation improvements.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): CRP is a land conservation program administered by FSA. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length and often include cost-share for implementation and maintenance, including the construction of fences.

Iowa Financial Incentive Program: The Iowa Financial Incentive Program offers financial support for fences used to protect conservation areas from grazing.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for livestock water quality projects from \$5000- \$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.

Livestock Waste Management

Livestock waste management structures include a storage facility that protects downstream waterways from manure runoff by storing manure until conditions are appropriate for field application. Facilities include earthen storage ponds, above or below ground tanks, pits underneath a confinement facility, or a sheltered concrete slab.

How can livestock waste management improve water quality?

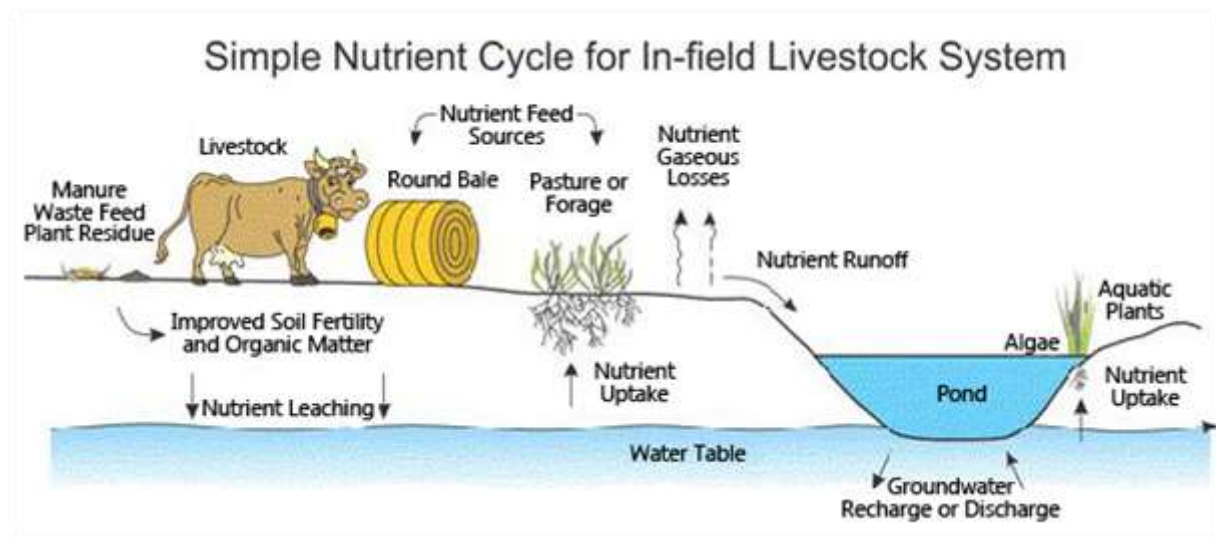
- Prevents runoff from livestock operations
- Allows field application when conditions are appropriate

What type of support is available for livestock waste management?

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): EQIP is a contractual agreement up to 10 years with the NRCS to implement practices to improve the environmental quality of the farm through cost-share and payment programs. EQIP programs may help landowners and producers to improve conservation so that they may become eligible for CSP projects.

REAP Water Quality Protection Practices: REAP cost-share programs target off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to a 20-year maintenance agreement to implement conservation practices.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program: The state of Iowa subsidizes low-interest loans for livestock water quality projects from \$5000- \$500,000 with terms up to 15 years.



Federal Programs

The USDA provides financial support to farmers and landowners for implementing and maintaining conservation practices on their land. The NRCS administers CSP and EQIP cost-share funding using a ranking and priority system. The USDA has identified 10 resource concerns to be addressed with CSP and EQIP. Each state selects 5 targeted resource concerns. An application for cost-share funding considers how the practice will impact the resource concerns. Below is a list of the USDA resource concerns, with Iowa's targeted resource concerns highlighted in bold:

- 1) Soil erosion**
- 2) Soil quality degradation**
- 3) Water quality degradation**
- 4) Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife**
- 5) Livestock production limitation**
- 6) Excess water
- 7) Insufficient water
- 8) Air quality degradation
- 9) Degraded plant condition
- 10) Inefficient energy use

The FSA is responsible for administering CRP, Continuous CRP, and CREP. These programs are land retirement programs that can be used to implement conservation cover and enhance wildlife habitat. Several of the programs available may be used together to implement conservation on your land. Meeting with a conservation technician at your local NRCS and FSA office is the best way to determine which programs and practices will be most effective in improving water quality on your farm. In most Iowa counties, the NRCS and FSA offices are located in the same building. However, in Appanoose, Decatur, and Union counties, the FSA office is located in an adjacent county. Find your local NRCS and FSA offices [here](#).

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP covers more acres of working farm and ranch lands on a multi-year basis than any other federal conservation program. It is a comprehensive working lands conservation program designed to help farmers and ranchers protect and improve natural resources on productive and profitable farms. Through CSP, farmers and ranchers receive technical and financial assistance to actively manage existing conservation systems and to implement additional conservation activities on land in agricultural production.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for CSP, you must:

- Be a landowner or have control of the land for the contractual period of the CSP agreement (5 years)
- Be actively engaged in the day-to-day management of the agricultural operation and share in the risks associated with agricultural production
- Be meeting the stewardship threshold for at least two resource concerns at the time of application
- Have current farm records with the Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirement
- Annually earn within the adjusted gross income limit of \$900,000

How do I apply?

- CSP applications are accepted on a continuous basis. However, NRCS establishes application submission deadline dates for evaluation, ranking, and approval of eligible applications.
- Review and prepare the CSP application found [here](#).
- Submit the application to your local NRCS office, and schedule a one-on-one consultation with a staff member to review your eligibility for the program.

What documents and forms are required?

- Official tax ID
- If applying as a business entity, you must:
 - Have a [DUNS number](#) and be registered with SAM
 - Complete [form CCC-901](#) Member's Information
- Property deed or lease agreement demonstrating control of the land to be evaluated
- Existing records with FSA
 - A farm tract number for the land to be evaluated in your application
 - [Form AD-1026](#): Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (HELC-WC)
 - [Form CCC-941](#): Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax information

- You should also be prepared to provide maps or identify all land in your operation on maps with an NRCS representative to determine if the land is eligible for enrollment and if you have additional land to offer for enrollment.

How does the selection process occur?

- Applications for CSP are accepted on a continuous basis. However, there are set deadlines for each funding cycle.
- Once your application is submitted to your local NRCS office, you will meet with a conservation planner to review your current farm management system and the natural resources on your farm to determine what conservation practices will best suit your operation and land.
- Once you have been found to be eligible for CSP and have chosen the conservation activities that you will adopt, your application will be scored using the Conservation Activity Evaluation Tool (CAET) to determine how your CSP participation will address national, state, and local natural resource concerns.
 - To review the national and state ranking questions, click [here](#).
 - Additional consideration is given to socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers during the rating process.
- Your application will be rated against other applications with similar resource challenges in the same local ranking pool.
- The highest scoring applications will receive contract offers first.

How are practices implemented?

- If you are selected to participate in a program, you will be offered a contract for the work to be done.
- Once you sign the contract, you will be provided standards and specifications for implementing the practice and have a specified amount of time to complete the work.
- NRCS provides technical assistance in implementing the practice.
- The work will then be inspected to assure it meets the NRCS standards and specifications.
- Upon inspection approval of an NRCS technician, you will receive compensation for the work, as provided in the contract.
- The participant is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the conservation practice throughout the life of the conservation activity.

How do I get paid?

CSP payments are based on 2 primary factors:

1. Payments to continue conservation practices used at the time of CSP application
 - \$350 is allocated for each resource concern already addressed by your conservation practices
 - An additional per-acre payment is made annually based on the use of the land enrolled in CSP
 - Crop, Pastured Cropland, and Farmstead: \$7.50 per acre
 - Pasture: \$3.00 per acre
 - Range \$1.00 per acre
 - Forest and Associated Agricultural Land: \$0.50 per acre
2. Payments to implement additional conservation practices while under contract. Click [here](#) for list of CSP enhancements.
 - An optional supplemental payment is also available through CSP for the adoption or improvement of a resource-conserving crop rotation.
 - A CSP contract will provide a minimum payment of \$1500 annually, but will not exceed \$40,000 per year.
 - Funds will be directly deposited into the account of your choice by completing a [direct deposit form](#).

How is the program enforced?

- Compliance checks may be requested to ensure the contract terms are being upheld. A compliance check may require the participant to do any of the following:
 - Provide records and receipts as proof of implementation, payments, and compliance
 - Allow NRCS access to the property for monitoring progress, so long as NRCS provides reasonable notification prior to entering the land
- If a participant fails to comply with the terms of the contract, the contract may be terminated. In the case of termination, the participant may be required to refund payments and pay liquidated damages in an amount equal to 10% of the total financial assistance provided to cover administrative and technical costs.
- If a contract is not terminated in light of a compliance violation, the participant may be required to accept adjustments in subsequent payments.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps agricultural producers improve agricultural operations while conserving natural resources like soil, water, and air. EQIP provides farmers and ranchers with financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices on working agricultural land.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for EQIP, you must:

- Be a landowner or have control of the land for the contractual period of the EQIP agreement
- Be actively engaged in the day-to-day management of the agricultural operation and share in the risks associated with agricultural production
- Develop an EQIP plan of operations that addresses at least one resource concern
- Have current farm records with the Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirement
- Annually earn within the annual adjusted gross income limit of \$900,000

How do I apply?

- EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis. However, NRCS establishes application submission deadline dates for evaluation, ranking, and approval of eligible applications.
- Review and prepare the EQIP application found [here](#).
- Submit the application to your local NRCS office, and schedule a one-on-one consultation with a staff member to review your eligibility for the program.

What documents and forms are required?

- Official tax ID
- If applying as a business entity, you must:
 - Have a [DUNS number](#) and be registered with SAM
 - Complete [form CCC-901](#) Member's Information
- Property deed or lease agreement demonstrating control of the land to be evaluated
- Existing records with FSA
 - A farm tract number for the land to be evaluated in your application
 - [Form AD-1026](#): Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (HELC-WC)
 - [Form CCC-941](#): Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax information
- You should also be prepared to provide maps or identify all land in your operation on maps with an NRCS representative to determine if the land is eligible for enrollment and if you have additional land to offer for enrollment.

How does the selection process occur?

- Applications for EQIP are accepted on a continuous basis. However, there are set deadlines for each funding cycle.
- Once your application is submitted to your local NRCS office, you will meet with a conservation planner to review your current farm management system and the natural resources on your farm to determine what conservation practices will best suit your operation and land.
- The application will be screened using a [pre-screening tool](#).
- Some NRCS offices may establish local, minimum ranking cutoff levels for funding selection.
- Upon satisfying the pre-screening requirements, applications are prioritized using state, national, and locally developed ranking criteria that consider cost-effectiveness, resources to be treated, location of the land, and how the contract will reduce the need for future environmental regulations.
 - [State ranking tool](#)
 - [National ranking tool](#)
 - Additional consideration is given to socially disadvantaged, beginning, and limited resource farmers during the rating process.
- The highest scoring applications will receive contract offers first.

How are practices implemented?

- If you are selected to participate in a program, you will be offered a contract for the work to be done.
- Once you sign the contract, you will be provided standards and specifications for implementing the practice and have a specified amount of time to complete the work.
- NRCS provides technical assistance in implementing the practice.
- The work will then be inspected to assure it meets the NRCS standards and specifications.
- Upon inspection approval of an NRCS technician, you will receive compensation for the work, as provided in the contract.
- The participant is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the conservation practice throughout the life of the conservation activity.

How do I get paid?

- EQIP payments vary on the practice implemented. Click [here](#) for a list of EQIP practices and payment schedule.
- Socially disadvantaged, beginning, and limited resource farmers may be eligible for higher payments and advances.
- Funds will be directly deposited into the account of your choice by completing a [direct deposit form](#).

How is the program enforced?

- Compliance checks may be requested to ensure that the contract terms are being upheld. A compliance check may require the participant to do any of the following:
 - Provide records and receipts as proof of implementation, payments, and compliance
 - Allow NRCS access to the property for monitoring progress, so long as NRCS provides reasonable notification prior to entering the land
- If a participant fails to comply with the terms of the contract, the contract may be terminated. In the case of termination, the participant may be required to refund payments and pay liquidated damages in an amount equal to 10% of the total financial assistance provided to cover administrative and technical costs.
- If a contract is not terminated in light of a compliance violation, the participant may be required to accept adjustments in subsequent payments.



Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length.

There are three distinct mechanisms of CRP that can be used to implement conservation practices: General CRP, Continuous CRP, and CREP.

- General CRP can be used for highly erodible farm land and is only available during limited and competitive enrollment periods.
- Continuous CRP can be used to implement eligible partial field conservation practices, such as buffer strips and waterways, at any time.
- CREP is reserved for targeted areas within each state to address state and local conservation issues. In Iowa, CREP is available in 37 counties in North Central Iowa to reduce nitrate levels from water contributing to the Hypoxic Zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Review this [map](#) to determine if your land is eligible for CREP.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for CRP:

- You must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months before the first year of the contract period, with the following exceptions:
 - The land was acquired due to the previous owner's death,
 - The ownership change occurred due to a foreclosure, or
 - FSA is otherwise satisfied that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.
- You must have control of the land for the duration of the contractual period (10-15 years)
- The land must be:
 - Highly erodible cropland that has been planted in 4 of 6 previous crop years; or
 - Marginal pasture that is suitable for use as a riparian buffer or for similar habitat or water quality purposes; or
 - Ecologically significant grasslands that contain forbs or shrubs for grazing; or
 - A farmable wetland and related buffers

How do I apply?

There are three options for enrolling CRP acres. The type of CRP enrollment that is right for you farm depends on the environmental sensitivity of the land and the conservation practices to be implemented on the land.

General Sign-Up- Landowners offer land for general CRP enrollment during a set enrollment period, and land is selected for the program on a competitive basis.

Continuous Sign-Up- Continuous CRP enrollment is available for land that is environmentally sensitive and will benefit exceptionally by the implemented conservation practice. Continuous CRP enrollment is available at any time and is not subject to competitive bidding. However, enrollment is limited to the funds available in any given year.

CREP- Applications for CREP are accepted on a continuous basis. CREP targets high-priority conservation concerns identified by the state, and federal funds are supplemented with non-federal funds to address those concerns. Additional CREP land eligibility requirements apply to the location and characteristics of the land to be enrolled. All enrollment offers are processed through your local FSA office.

What documents and forms are required?

- Official tax ID
 - If applying as a business entity, you must:
 - Have a [DUNS number](#) and be registered with SAM
 - Complete [form CCC-901](#) Member's Information
- Property deed or lease agreement demonstrating control of the land to be evaluated
- Existing records with FSA
 - A farm tract number for the land to be evaluated in your application
 - [Form AD-1026](#): Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (HELC-WC)
 - [Form CCC-941](#): Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax information
- You should also be prepared to provide maps or identify all land in your operation on maps with an NRCS representative to determine if the land is eligible for enrollment and if you have additional land to offer for enrollment.

How does the selection process occur?

General Sign-Up: General Sign-Up applications are only accepted through a set enrollment period. At the closing of the sign-up period, applications are scored and ranked against one another to determine which lands will be admitted to the program. The Environmental Benefit Index (EBI) is used to determine which lands will provide the most ecological benefit from the CRP program. EBI considers factors such as:

- Water quality benefits from reduced soil erosion
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond CRP enrollment
- Wildlife habitat benefits
- Cost-effectiveness

Continuous Sign-Up: Continuous Sign-Up is available to implement partial field conservation practices at any time and is not subject to competitive bidding. Eligible land will be automatically enrolled in CRP; qualifying practices include:

- Buffer strips and grass waterways
- Shelterbelts
- Wetlands
- Wildlife and pollinator habitat

CREP: CREP is only available to landowners located in 37 counties in the North Central Region of Iowa. The program may be used to strategically implement buffer strips and wetlands in areas that are particularly susceptible to erosion and nutrient run-off.

How are practices implemented?

- Participants apply for CRP through their local FSA service center and work with the NRCS staff to implement the conservation practices.
- FSA administers the program, determines participant eligibility, prepares and holds the contracts, and makes payments.
- NRCS identifies the qualifying practices and provides all of the technical assistance to the participant in implementing the practices.

How do I get paid?

- Rental payments- FSA will pay the contract holder an annual rental payment for removing environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and planting species that will improve environmental health and quality.
- Cost-Share- FSA will pay up to 50% of the cost to implement the CRP practice.
- Signing Incentive Payment (SIP)- FSA will make a one-time incentive payment to eligible contract holders who enroll in a determined list of continuous signup practices.
- Performance Incentive Payment (PIP)- FSA will pay 40% of the eligible installation costs for eligible participants. There are a handful of continuous sign up practices not eligible for PIP.
- There is a \$50,000 annual payment limitation.

How is the program enforced?

- Participants are bound by the terms of the contract they sign with the FSA office. While NRCS may provide guidance on practice compliance, FSA enforces the contract.
- Participants may be found out of compliance and in violation of their contract through spot checks, whistle blower complaints, status reviews, and other means of determining a breach of contract.

- Compliance checks may be requested to ensure that the contract terms are being upheld. A compliance check may require the participant to do any of the following:
 - Provide records and receipts as proof of implementation, payments, and compliance
 - Allow FSA and NRCS access to the property under contract for monitoring progress, so long as FSA and NRCS provides reasonable notification prior to entering the land
- If a participant fails to comply with the terms of the contract, the contract may be terminated. In the case of termination, the participant may be required to refund payments with interest and pay liquidated damages to cover administrative and technical costs.

Are there additional opportunities within CRP?

- **Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP):** The Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) is designed to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffer to improve both vegetation and water flow. Participants must agree to restore the wetlands, establish plant cover, and to not use enrolled land for commercial purposes. Plant cover may include plants that are partially submerged or specific types of trees.
- **Transition Incentive Program (TIP):** The Transition Incentives Program (TIP) offers assistance for retired or retiring land owners and operators, as well as opportunities for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. It provides the retired or retiring land owners or operators with two additional annual rental payments on land enrolled in expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, on the condition they sell or rent this land to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher.



Additional Federal Resources

The following are additional programs and resources that could be helpful to farmers and landowners. Some of those listed narrowly target specific locations or circumstances. Others indirectly relate to conservation practices, but may be helpful for farmers and landowners to implement or maintain their practices and structures.

Microloan Program—FSA

Microloans focus on the financing needs of small, beginning farmer, niche and non-traditional farm operations. Such farms include truck farms, farms participating in direct marketing and sales such as farmers' markets, CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture), restaurants and grocery stores, or those using hydroponic, aquaponic, organic and vertical growing methods.

Emergency Conservation Program—FSA

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) helps farmers and ranchers repair damage to farmlands caused by natural disasters and to install methods for water conservation during severe drought.

Debt Cancellation Conservation Contract Program—FSA

A conservation contract is available to persons with FSA loans secured by real estate. These individuals may qualify for a reduction of their FSA indebtedness in exchange for a conservation contract with a term of 50, 30 or 10 years. The conservation contract is a voluntary legal agreement that restricts the type and amount of development that may take place on portions of the landowner's property. Contracts may be established on marginal cropland and other environmentally sensitive lands for conservation, recreation, and wildlife purposes.

Direct Farm Ownership Loans—FSA

Direct Farm Ownership Loans can be used to purchase farm or ranch land, construct or improve farm or ranch buildings, and implement soil and water conservation practices.

Emergency Forest Restoration Program—FSA

The Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) helps owners of non-industrial, private forests restore forest health damaged by natural disasters. The local FSA County Committee implements EFRP for all disasters, with the exceptions of drought and insect infestations, which are handled at a national level.

Tree Assistance Program—FSA

The Tree Assistance Program (TAP) provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes, and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Pollinator Habitat Initiative—FSA

The Pollinator Habitat Initiative is a CRP practice (CP-42) that is designed to provide habitat for honey bees and native pollinator species. Participants of newly enrolled pollinator habitat practices are eligible to receive annual rental payments, cost-share support, and a sign-up incentive payment.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Partners for Fish & Wildlife program works with private landowners to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their lands.

Small Wetlands Program—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Small Wetlands Program uses funds from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps to permanently protect some of the most threatened and productive migratory bird habitat in the United States.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program—NRCS

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps restore, protect, and enhance enrolled wetlands.



State Programs

Iowa's conservation programs include cost-share support and low-interest loans that can be used to achieve the goals outlined in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. In 2008 the Gulf Hypoxic Action Plan called on 12 states along the Mississippi River to develop a strategy for reducing nitrogen and phosphorous pollution by 45%. The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy was prepared by IDALS, IDNR, and Iowa State University as the state's framework for assessing and reducing nutrients added to Iowa waters and the Gulf of Mexico from point and non-point sources of pollution. The voluntary approach to addressing water quality relies on farmer and landowner participation in conservation as well as continued support from the state.

The Nutrient Reduction Strategy further seeks to use a watershed approach to improving water quality by prioritizing watersheds and the limited resources. Coordinating conservation on a watershed scale provides more strategic and effective improvement to water quality. There are over 20 Watershed Management Authorities (WMA) in Iowa that consist of cities, counties, SWCDs and stakeholders that cooperatively engage in watershed planning and management. The WMA partner with the public and private sectors to receive funding for conservation projects. Depending on your location, your land may be eligible for additional support through the WMA in your area. A list of the active Iowa WMA may be found [here](#).

You may inquire about the state programs using the online [Financial and Reports Management System \(FARMS\) application](#). To develop a more comprehensive conservation plan for your land, visit your local SWCD to determine the programs available in your watershed and county.

Financial Incentive Program

The Financial Incentive Program is designed to incentivize landowners to implement conservation practices that will mitigate soil erosion to improve Iowa's water quality through cost-share plans. Each county selects the practices that will be funded from an approved state list. The rate of cost-share funding may range between 50-75%, depending on the practice and the location of the land where it will be implemented. To estimate the cost-share rate for your project, contact your local SWCD office.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for the Financial Incentive Program, you must:

- Own private agricultural land or have the landowner's consent on the program application
- Have more than ten acres of land in agricultural production or sell more than \$2500 of agricultural products annually
- Demonstrate that the practice funded by the program is needed to reduce soil erosion or prevent sediment damage

How do I apply?

- Financial Incentive applications are accepted on continuous basis at each SWCD.
- Contact your SWCD office to get an application and submit a request for assistance.
- Upon submitting a request for assistance, a technician will assess the land to determine the extent to which the proposed practice will improve conservation.

What documents and forms are required?

- An application must be completed and signed by the landowner and the applicant (if someone other than the landowner).
- If an applicant is granted approval for a Financial Incentive project, the applicant must sign a maintenance agreement to be funded.
- Copies of all forms, applications, and agreements are available from the SWCD office in each county.

How does the selection process occur?

- Each SWCD sets priorities for reducing soil erosion within each county. To determine the priorities set by your county, speak with a representative at the local SWCD office.
- Applications submitted to the SWCD office are ranked amongst one another based on the priorities set by the district and the public benefit that is derived from implementing the conservation practice on your farm.
- Applications that best meet the priority needs of the district and provide the greatest public benefit will be selected for funding.
- To make your application more competitive, speak with a local SWCD technician about the priorities and which practices are more likely to be funded in the area.

How are practices implemented?

- If you are selected to participate in the program, funds will be obligated to your project but not distributed until completion.
- A SWCD technician will design and lay out the conservation practice plan.
- The applicant is responsible for implementing the practice or securing any contractors needed to complete the project.
- Upon implementation, a technician will inspect and certify that the practice is in compliance with the applicable standards and specification of the plan.

How do I get paid?

- Following the certification from the SWCD technician, the applicant must submit all bills for material and labor to the district in an itemized form.
- The district commissioner will verify the technician certification and itemized bills and submit them to the state for approval.
- Once the project is approved by the state, the funds will be distributed to reimburse the applicant.

How is the program enforced?

- The landowner will sign a [maintenance agreement](#) that states the applicant will maintain the practices in the manner and for the term specified in the agreement.
- A technician may inspect the practice at any time the district may suspect the practice is not being satisfactorily maintained.
- The landowner may also request an inspection at any time to assure the practice is in compliance.
- Where the district finds noncompliance, the state may issue the landowner an administrative order to come into compliance or refund the entire amount of the financial incentive payment.



REAP Water Quality Protection Practices

REAP is an Iowa program designed to protect the state's natural resources through funds raised from gaming receipts and natural resource license plates. Each year, a portion of the REAP revenues are allocated to a Water Protection Fund that is then used to finance Water Quality Protection Practices. The cost-share program targets off-site sediment, nutrient pollution, and livestock waste contamination issues by providing landowners and producers with cost-sharing up to 75% with up to 20-year maintenance agreements to implement conservation practices.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for the REAP Water Protection Practices, you must:

- Own private agricultural land or have the landowner's consent on the program application—applications for streambank stabilization and tree plantings are not subject to the agricultural land restriction
- Demonstrate that the practice funded by the program is needed to protect water quality

How do I apply?

- Water Protection Practices applications are accepted on continuous basis at each SWCD.
- Contact your SWCD office to get an application and submit a request for assistance.
- Upon submitting a request for assistance, a technician will assess the land to determine the extent to which the proposed practice will improve conservation.

What documents and forms are required?

- An application must be completed and signed by the landowner and the applicant (if someone other than the land owner).
- If an applicant is granted approval for a Water Protection Practices project, the applicant must sign a maintenance agreement to be funded.
- Copies of all forms, applications, and agreements are available from the SWCD office in each county.

How does the selection process occur?

- Each SWCD sets priorities for reducing soil erosion within each county. To determine the priorities set by your county, speak with a representative at the local SWCD office.
- Applications submitted to the SWCD office are ranked amongst one another based on the priorities set by the district and the public benefit that is derived from implementing the conservation practice on your farm.
- Applications that best meet the priority needs of the district and provide the greatest public benefit will be selected for funding.
- To make your application more competitive, speak with a local SWCD technician about the priorities and which practices are more likely to be funded in the area.

How are practices implemented?

- If you are selected to participate in the program, funds will be obligated to your project but not distributed until completion.
- A SWCD technician will design and lay out the conservation practice plan.
- The applicant is responsible for implementing the practice or securing any contractors needed to complete the project.
- Upon implementation, a technician will inspect and certify that the practice is in compliance with the applicable standards and specification of the plan.

How do I get paid?

- Following the certification from the SWCD technician, the applicant must submit all bills for material and labor to the district in an itemized form.
- The district commissioner will verify the technician certification and itemized bills and submit them to the state for approval.
- Once the project is approved by the state, the funds will be distributed to reimburse the applicant.

How is the program enforced?

- The landowner will sign a maintenance agreement that states the applicant will maintain the practices in the manner and for the term specified in the agreement.
- A technician may inspect the practice at any time the district may suspect the practice is not being satisfactorily maintained.
- The landowner may also request an inspection at any time to assure the practice is in compliance.
- Where the district finds noncompliance, the state may issue the landowner an administrative order to come into compliance or refund the entire amount of the incentive payment.



Water Quality Initiative

The Water Quality Initiative is designed to support the reduction of nutrient loss by implementing water quality practices through watershed demonstration projects and individual cost-share practices.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for Water Quality Initiative cost-share funding, you must:

- Own private agricultural land or have the landowner's consent on the program application
- Demonstrate that the practice funded by the program has the primary purpose of improving water quality

How do I apply?

- Apply for Water Quality Initiative cost-share funds with the Iowa Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality (DSCWQ).

What documents and forms are required?

- An application must be completed and signed by the landowner and the applicant (if someone other than the land owner).
- If an applicant is awarded cost-share funding, the applicant must sign a maintenance agreement to be funded.

How does the selection process occur?

- Iowa Water Quality Initiative cost-share support is distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis.
- Some funding is reserved for targeted watershed projects. Contact the DSCWQ to determine if there is funding available for your project.

How are practices implemented?

- If you are selected to participate in the program, funds will be obligated to your project but not distributed until completion.
- A SWCD technician will design and lay out the conservation practice plan.
- The applicant is responsible for implementing the practice or securing any contractors needed to complete the project.
- Upon implementation, a technician will inspect and certify that the practice is in compliance with the applicable standards and specification of the plan.

How do I get paid?

- Following the certification from the SWCD technician, the applicant must submit all bills for material and labor to the district in an itemized form.
- The district commissioner will verify the technician certification and itemized bills and submit them to the state for approval.
- Once the project is approved by the state, the funds will be distributed to reimburse the applicant.

How is the program enforced?

- The landowner will sign a [maintenance agreement](#) that states the applicant will maintain the practices in the manner and for the term specified in the agreement.
- A technician may inspect the practice at any time the district may suspect the practice is not being satisfactorily maintained.
- The landowner may also request an inspection at any time to assure the practice is in compliance.
- Where the district finds noncompliance, the state may issue the landowner an administrative order to come into compliance or refund the entire amount of the incentive payment.



Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund

The Conservation Practices Revolving Loan is a no-interest loan available only to landowners to implement permanent conservation practices, such as buffer strips, grassed waterways, land retirement, erosion control basins, grade stabilization structures, terraces, and tree and shrub establishment.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for the Conservation Practices Revolving Loan, you must:

- Own private agricultural land
- Demonstrate an ability to repay the loan
- Have more than ten acres of land in agricultural production or sell more than \$2500 of agricultural products annually
- Demonstrate that the practice funded by the program is needed to reduce soil erosion or prevent sediment damage

What are the loan terms?

- Loans are available in amounts from \$2500 to \$20,000
- Terms up to 10 years, payable in equal annual amounts
- 0% interest

How do I apply?

- Applications are accepted on a continuous basis and should be submitted to your SWCD office.
- Copies of all forms, applications, and agreements are available from the SWCD office in each county.

What documents and forms are required?

- An application must be completed and signed by the landowner.
- If the landowner's application is approved, the applicant must sign a maintenance agreement to be funded.
- Successful applicants will be requested to provide necessary financial information to demonstrate the applicant's ability to repay the loan.



How does the selection process occur?

- Each SWCD sets priorities for reducing soil erosion within each county. To determine the priorities set by your county, speak with a representative at the local SWCD office.
- Applications submitted to the SWCD office are ranked amongst one another based on the priorities set by the district and the public benefit that is derived from implementing the conservation practice on your farm.
- Applications that best meet the priority needs of the district and provide the greatest public benefit will be selected for funding.
- To make your application more competitive, speak with a local SWCD technician about the priorities and which practices are more likely to be funded in the area.

How are practices implemented?

- If you are selected to participate in the program, funds will be obligated to your project but not distributed until completion.
- A SWCD technician will design and lay out the conservation practice plan.
- The applicant is responsible for implementing the practice or securing any contractors needed to complete the project.
- Upon implementation, a technician will inspect and certify that the practice is in compliance with the applicable standards and specification of the plan.

How do I get paid?

- Following the certification from the SWCD technician, the applicant must submit all bills for material and labor to the district in an itemized form.
- The district commissioner will verify the technician certification and itemized bills and submit them to the state for approval.
- Once the project is approved by the state, the funds will be distributed to applicant.
- Upon applicant's receipt of payment, the applicant will be required to sign loan papers.

How is the program enforced?

- The landowner will sign a [maintenance agreement](#) that states the applicant will maintain the practices in the manner and for the term specified in the agreement.
- A technician may inspect the practice at any time the district may suspect the practice is not being satisfactorily maintained.
- The landowner may also request an inspection at any time to assure the practice is in compliance.
- Upon loan delinquency, the interest rate will accelerate immediately to the current legal limit, and it shall be applied to the entire unpaid principal, prorated for the period for which the installment is delinquent.

State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan Program

Most practices eligible for the Financial Incentive Program, REAP and EQIP are eligible for loans. These practices include, but are not limited to: terraces, grade stabilization structures, water and sediment control basins, pasture and hay land planting, prescribed grazing, grassed waterways and filter strips

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for the State Revolving Fund Loan, you must:

- Own private agricultural land or have the landowner's consent on the program application
- Demonstrate an ability to repay the loan
- Demonstrate that the practice funded by the program is needed to reduce soil erosion or prevent sediment damage

What are the loan terms?

- Loans from \$5,000 up to a maximum of \$500,000 per borrower
- Terms up to 15 years
- Can fund up to 100% of actual costs
- Interest rate of no more than 3%

How do I apply?

- Applications are accepted on a continuous basis.
- Begin by contacting the local SWCD to discuss your project and acquire cost estimates.
- Applicants may work with the lender of their choice or go online to view the list of [current participating lenders](#).
- If the lender of your choice is not currently a participating lender, the lender may apply to participate in the Water Quality Linked Deposit Programs.
- Once the SWCD approves your application, you will complete the normal loan application process for your selected lender.
- Upon approval of your loan, the lender must complete an [application](#) to enroll the loan into the program.

What documents and forms are required?

- An application must be completed and signed by the landowner and submitted to the SWCD.
- Upon application approval, the applicant will take a copy to the lender and apply for a loan.
- If the landowner's application is approved, the applicant must sign a maintenance agreement to be funded.
- Applicants will complete the normal loan application process for the selected lender.

How does the selection process occur?

- State Revolving Fund Low-Interest Loan support is distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis.

How are practices implemented?

- A SWCD technician will design and lay out the conservation practice plan.
- The applicant is responsible for implementing the practice or securing any contractors needed to complete the project.
- Upon implementation, a technician will inspect and certify that the practice is in compliance with the applicable standards and specification of the plan.

How do I get paid?

- Once the project is completed, inspected, and certified, the lender will be able to request funds.
- The funds held in an account by the Iowa Finance Authority and are distributed to the lending institution annually.
- The deposit does not guarantee the loan nor is it collateral for the loan, it is only to reduce the interest rate charged to the borrower.

How is the program enforced?

- The landowner will sign a [maintenance agreement](#) that states the applicant will maintain the practices in the manner and for the term specified in the agreement.
- A technician may inspect the practice at any time the district may suspect the practice is not being satisfactorily maintained.
- The landowner may also request an inspection at any time to assure the practice is in compliance.



Other Resources

The following are representative examples of organizations working to connect farmers and landowners to resources for on-farm conservation.

[Iowa Water Center](#)



[Iowa Watershed Management Authorities](#)



[Practical Farmers of Iowa](#)



[Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation](#)



[Women Food & Ag Network](#)



[Iowa Soybean Association](#)



Private Conservation Incentives

In 2016 the Agricultural Law Center received funding from the Leopold Center to examine the emerging interest in private conservation initiatives. This section provides information from that study and explains how PCI can be an adjunct to more traditional public conservation programs.

Description of Private Conservation Incentives

In recent years, several Iowa agricultural businesses and farm organizations have developed what can be described as “private conservation incentives” (PCIs), designed to encourage farmers to adopt conservation practices, improve soil health and address environmental issues such as nitrate loss and climate change. This project examined the nature and range of PCIs underway in Iowa to better understand how they operate, what they offer farmers who participate, and what role they might play in promoting soil and water conservation and in addressing climate change.

When we started our research, we focused on six elements of PCIs:

An agreement, between

An agricultural business, and

A farm operator or landowner, to adopt

A conservation or environmental farm practice, in order to become eligible for

An incentive relating to

A market based, consumer oriented sustainability claim.

What we found was a more complex and evolving landscape for farmers to navigate. We broadened our definition by identifying three participants for a PCI. These include:

- 1) the involvement of a **private business** other than the farm;
- 2) an inducement of some kind (may or may not be directly economic) for the **farmer**; and
- 3) a claim of sustainability related to a **consumer** driven market demand.

These three key aspects provide a way to identify private conservation related activities not fitting neatly into the six-part definition.

Another way to understand the development of new tools and relationships helping farmers put conservation on their farms is to compare new PCI efforts to traditional conservation efforts. This evolution of conservation efforts is outside of or in addition to the traditional relationship between the farmer or landowner and a government agency. We are seeing new entities and some new resources directed to putting more conservation on Iowa farms. Comparing these new efforts to the traditional models also provides some help in identifying PCIs.

Traditional—USDA and farmer and land owner partnerships

- clearly defined cost/share and incentive payments
- formal contracts
- enforcement mechanisms such as conservation compliance
- relatively transparent programs and agreements that are part of the public domain
- clearly defined practices
- practice-based evaluations—if the farmer implements the practice as prescribed, he or she will generally get credit for meeting requirements
- coordination with and sometimes support from state and county programs
- voluntary

PCI—Businesses interested in encouraging or partnering with farmers and landowners to increase conservation

- No uniform approach and little in the way of “legal” documentation
- Little evidence of direct financial rewards for farmers
- Many benefits for farmers are other than premium, incentive, or cost-share payments
- Farmer participation may be required for market access
- Relation of PCI to public conservation programs is uncertain
- Entities promoting this are motivated by self-interest: business development, market power (green labeling—meeting consumer demand), response to tax or regulatory regimes
- Possibly more outcome based rather than practice based (It is still to be determined if this develops as outcome based or practiced based. There is definitely talk of outcomes but most examples are rooted in specific practices rather than farm level outcomes.)
- No shared definition of sustainability
- Multiple and varied motivations by the entities partnering with farmers. This difference in motivations and business models drives a diversity of ways in which farmers are being invited to participate.

Five Examples of PCIs:

- 1) SUSTAIN
 - Provides access to certified Ag retailers who evaluate practices and make recommendations. They create a baseline of a “farm’s overall soil health, nutrient use efficiency and production output in order to track your progress as you implement changes.”
- 2) Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative
 - Cost-share rate of \$15/acre available to farmers planting cover crops on seed corn acres, regardless of cover crop type. Seed companies may offer other incentives to growers. None are specifically listed with the project announcement.
- 3) Sustainable Soy Project by ADM and Unilever
 - Provides up to \$25 per acre, discounts on certain brands of cover crop seeds, demonstrations and field days to learn more about the practices. Applies to farmers within a 100-mile radius of Des Moines.
- 4) Boone River Watershed Nutrient Management Initiative
 - Provides opportunity to observe and implement conservation practices. Demonstration practices available with the project include strip-till, no-till, replicated strip trials, water monitoring, plant tissue sampling, cover crops, bioreactors, wetlands, drainage water management and nitrogen stabilizers.
- 5) Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 - The Fox River Water Quality Project will receive a \$900,000 investment. Includes a partnership with Davis County Soil and Water Conservation District and seven other partners. The second project, Innovative Conservation Agriculture, will receive \$646,670 and partner with Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation District and three other organizations.

A Case Study of how an Iowa Farm is using Private Conservation Initiatives

Chris and Pat farm mostly owned land with a few cash rented acres. They have been farming for 12 years. They have a few cows and sell feeder calves. They are conversation minded farmers. They have put some of their farm into the CRP. They've used EQIP and participate in the CSP.

As for PCI, they participate in two programs. One program (SUSTAIN) is with their local farmers' coop where they pay a small fee per acre to grow corn more sustainably and to increase their productivity on those acres. The other is a program that pays them a premium for sustainably raising soybeans and selling them to a processor (ADM/Unilever).

Together these two PCI's along with the government programs are helping them achieve their goal of making their farm more productive by focusing on the health of their soils. They are working their way through three goals: saving the soil, balancing and resting the soil, and building the soil. These goals, while good for the environment are also about building the long term productive capacity of their farm. They see USDA conservation programs and PCI all working together to help them achieve these goals. Their goals drive their participation in all of these programs and not the other way around. They have never adjusted their goals in order to get government payments or to participate in government programs. With PCIs, that attitude remains the same. They are using PCIs to advance their goals and have experienced good partners in both PCI programs.

A history of how they have used programs to meet their goals provides a useful way to understand how farmers can use a variety of programs.

Goal #1— Saving the Soil, first five years.

Their farm was a little tired when they started farming. The farm, at about 300 acres, was managed around large units and was focused on corn and soybeans. They signed up for EQIP to put in terraces, build a pond, and do tiling work. Fortunately, they were looking at EQIP at the same time their farm was in a targeted watershed. They were able to successfully compete to participate in EQIP. EQIP helped them establish the structures and practices to keep their soil on their farm. During this time, they started the process of managing their farm in smaller units and looking at ways to diversify how they were managing their fields.

Goal #2— Balancing and resting their Soils, second five years.

They started to focus their attention on the "good dirt" as well as identify the more inefficient areas on their farm. They used CRP to take some ground out of production as well as transitioned some acres into hay. They also began reducing tillage.

Goal #3— Building their Soils, third five years.

Currently they are working on their third goal. They “graduated” into the CSP as a way to push themselves. With CSP they expanded their no-till practices and started using cover crops. CSP helped provide the encouragement to do this. They are building organic matter. They are now managing their farm with much smaller units than when they started. They could not imagine farming now without cover crops. The help from the government programs has been invaluable in helping them develop their farm around their goals in the past 12 years. They bought additional ground and are nearing 400 acres in their farm. They are also participating in two PCIs that like the government programs are helping them achieve their goals of managing their soils for increasing productivity. They have maintained their commodity production by focusing on the most productive acres and reducing or eliminating commodity production on their least productive ground. They have taken about 100 acres out of production, but by increasing yields on the rest of the acres, they are raising almost the same amount of grain on their farm. SUSTAIN and the Sustainable Soybean Program are helping them continue their progress. They are in their second year of these programs.

The following PCIs are helping them build soils.

SUSTAIN is essentially an input supply agreement. Chris and Pat pay for agronomic services from their coop to identify and use best practices on their farm for raising corn. Their coop is trained by SUSTAIN and can use the SUSTAIN platform. They are looking for better outcomes for their farm especially improved production (profitability) and better environmental outcomes (water quality, soil health, and long term productivity). SUSTAIN offers them a way to incorporate a large amount of data into their decision making. They do soil and tissue testing, upload production data, and plan production on smaller in-field units. Below is a description of the SUSTAIN program as it is used on their farm.

Farmer

- pays a fee
- uses the data and agronomy support from the coop in planning corn production
- uses the same agronomist they’ve used for years, but now have a third set of eyes in the SUSTAIN program looking over their production and providing feedback on their decision making.
- uses some additional inputs from the coop but is likely to reduce inputs as well. Additional inputs are using N-Serve nitrogen stabilizer.
- uses their SUSTAIN data to suggest corn yields. They are pushing those corn yields on their most productive acres. One strategy is to increase the lbs of nitrogen on those acres but using N-serve and tissue sampling to make sure things are balanced. They believe they are able to increase yields by increasing fertilizer utilization.

- becomes more profitable over time by balancing maximizing output against maximizing environmental outcomes. The combination of increasing productivity and reducing costs on subfield management units should make them more profitable in the long term.
- Benefits from additional feedback and information about management strategies
- Considers a longer time frame than single crop years.

Co-op

- provides the service
- uses computer program to monitor weather to provide real time analysis of what's happening with nutrients on their farm.
- shares some of the cost with the belief that they are supporting best practices for their member
- sells additional services or products to farmer, but may also reduce some of the sales, especially in reducing fertilizer.
- over time, plans to develop a service that farmers will pay for
- wants to get ahead of regulations if they are coming, or if their business model is successful it may fend off regulations

SUSTAIN

- provides the platform (IT and other services) for coop to use
- Provides Training for the Coop.
- Over time believes the business unit will be successful as a conduit between those serving farmers (coops) and end users (Walmarts and Unilevers) demanding higher levels of sustainability.
- Positions themselves in the market place to connect farmers and consumers around more sustainable commodities.

The Sustainable Soy Project is the second program and is operated by ADM who works with Unilever to source soybeans in Iowa for Hellmann's Mayonnaise. The program provides a premium for soybeans sold. Chris and Pat signed up for the program by providing data through the Field Print Calculator to document how they raise their soybeans. If their production practices meet the buyer's definition of sustainable, then they are permitted to sell soybeans and receive a 10 cent per bushel premium when they do so. The number of acres they enroll determines the number of bushels they can deliver, although they are not required to deliver any soybeans if they choose to sell to other buyers. Their agreement allows them to get the premium but doesn't require them to do so.

Farmer

- uploads "everything" they are doing to the crop. They enter data twice a year, once after the crop is planted and again after the crop is harvested.
- Focuses on trying to replace whatever they are taking off their land. They value the feedback they are getting from participating in the program. The feedback is helping them make decisions for soybean production.

- Receives 10 cents a bushel premium. This provides a few hundred dollars for them, which is appreciated, but would hardly be enough of an incentive if they didn't also see value in the feedback they were getting.
- gets a ranking of how their farm compares to other farms in the program.
- uses the program to make decisions about their farm. An especially helpful calculation is looking at how many BTUs it took to raise a bushel of soybeans. By focusing on increasing productivity on the best ground and taking poorer ground out of production, they are increasing the efficiency in each bushel of beans. This is good for their productivity and it is good for the environment by reducing the carbon footprint on a bushel by bushel basis of the beans coming off of their farm.

ADM

- Enters into agreement with the farmer
- Provides technical assistance to the farmers as the farmers upload their data
- Receives the beans
- Pays out the premium
- Uses the premium to get enough farmers to sign up for the program to meet Unilever's goals.

Unilever

- Developed the protocol and characteristics of sustainable soybeans
- Partners with ADM, which processes the soybeans for the soy oil used in Hellman's Mayonnaise.
- Develops marketing for Hellman's Mayonnaise that promotes the environmentally friendly nature of how Hellman's is using its purchasing power to encourage the growing of more sustainably raised soybeans.

As they consider the next decade on their farm, one of their future goals is to move to a more natural based nitrogen source but this is costly, especially in terms of time and management. Two sources include animals and green manure. They have some concerns about what the anhydrous ammonia is doing to their soil. They have been doing soil digs to monitor their earthworm population. So far, they are happy with the improvements they've seen in the worm counts. For now they plan to continue to use anhydrous nitrogen with N-Serve but continue to be open to other more natural forms of nitrogen in the future. They use herbicides but no insecticides on their farm. They are interested in continually combining both traditional farm programs with new private conservation initiatives to help them meet current and future goals. They anticipate further decreasing their management units, increasing yields on their most productive ground, and decreasing production on their least productive lands. As they evaluate and calculate the productivity of their farm, they consider their whole farm rather than just the yields of one or two crops.

12 Questions farmers should answer while considering participation in a PCI

1. Why do I want to participate?

The program should provide you with something new such as income, market access, or technical support. Another reason to participate could be that it lessens a burden or challenge to your farm such as relief from a regulation, reduction in soil loss, solving a labor challenge, or reducing inputs? You should be able to articulate at least to yourself if not to your banker or landowner why you want to participate. You should also consider if you are being encouraged to participate and why, such as a receiving a sales pitch, a threat about market access, or even peer pressure?

2. Who is making the agreement with me?

This may seem obvious, but you do need to know for certain the entity with which you are making the agreement. Who is the person in charge? Does the person you are dealing with have any authority in the agreement or just providing services in the relationship between you and the entity offering the agreement? You should be able to answer this question—"if something goes wrong, who can I hold accountable to remedy the situation?" Or another way of putting it is "who has the ability to hold me accountable and possibly force a remedy from me?"

3. What am I agreeing to do?

Your success depends on you knowing what you are required to do. You should have access to or be able to create a list of what you have to do to comply with the agreement. You need to know what options exist within the agreement. For example, can the entity modify the agreement to include additional or new demands? Can you modify the agreement to include additional or new demands? The agreement should clearly identify what part of your farm is included in the agreement. Are you signing up your whole farm or just some of your farm? You should know if the agreement includes all of your production or just some of it. For example, does it only include crop production or does it include livestock production as well?

4. What am I agreeing not to do?

You should be able to list activities you will no longer be able to do once you enter into the agreement? Can this list be modified by either you or the entity during the length of the agreement?

5. How long will the agreement be in force?

The agreement should include both a start date and an ending date. If things don't go as you anticipate, can you end the agreement? What are the termination policies for this program? Consider those policies for both you and the entity and be aware of any penalties for ending the agreement early. You should understand the process for modifying the length of the agreement.

6. Is there a written agreement?

The answer is likely yes, but you also need to know whether you can acquire a copy of the agreement, and can you share a copy of this agreement with other people? Do you sign an actual agreement?

7. How does the agreement effect any public policy programs I participate in or may want to participate in?

Make a list of the local, state, and federal programs you participate in. Also, consider programs you might want to utilize in the future. Do you see any potential conflicts between this PCI and those government programs on your list? You may also find there are benefits in combining this PCI with local, state, and federal programs.

8. What is the value of participating in this program to my farming operation?

Take the time to try to identify all of the value for this program. Who captures this value? Who identifies this value? If a dollar value can be placed on the program outcomes, identify who gets those dollars. You also need to identify any tax implications for participating. Try to get some other opinions about the value of this program to the success of your farm. For example, what does your lender have to say about the program?

9. Are there any costs or fees I need to pay in order to participate?

Try to list all of the costs and fees you need to consider: initial fees before the program starts, fees that come later in the program or that are required to continue, and penalties, if there are any, for terminating the agreement. If you are sharing your farm data, you should understand any costs to doing so. For example, how much time will it take to record the data? Will you need to purchase or lease technology to capture the data? Regarding your farm data, you should consider at least these three questions: how will you share this data? Who will control this data? What is the value of this data and if so how will you benefit from the value of this data?

10. How does this agreement effect my tenure relationship with the landowner?

You may need to have your landowner also participate. You'll to decide how much information you need to share with your landowner. Your landowner may want to share in the value of your participation. Will your landowner share in any of the costs of your participation? You'll also want to consider how your participation might affect other people such as your neighbors or people you farm with including those you farm with on an informal basis.

11. Who else is participating in this PCI?

If possible, talk to someone else who is participating before you sign up your farm. You can ask the entity offering you the agreement if you can have a list of other participating farmers.

12. What do my trusted advisors have to say about this agreement?

Think of all of the people who you consider trusted advisors: Professional advisors such as attorneys, accountants, lenders, or agronomists; Family members; Employees; Informal mentors; Fellow farmers; Landowners; Staff or leadership of farm organizations; other people who have provided you with helpful insights during your farming career. Consider talking to them about this program before you enter into the agreement.

Examples of PCIs

SUSTAIN

www.sustain.ag

Organizations Involved

Land O'Lakes.

In Iowa that includes:

Farmers Feed & Grain: St. Ansgar, IA

Key Coop: Roland, IA

IAS: Hubbard, IA

South Central: Lacona, IA

Smith Fertilizer: Knoxville, IA

FJ Krob: Ely, IA

Linn Coop: Marion, IA

IAS: Monticello, IA

Dunkerton Coop: Dunkerton, IA

East Central Iowa Coop: Hudson, IA

Source: <http://sustain.ag/retailers>

Objectives/Mission

SUSTAIN is a service to agricultural retailers. "The SUSTAIN platform is a progressive, industry leading approach for our ag retailers to deliver significant value to their growers and the agri-food value chain through stewardship and agronomy that delivers fertilizer optimization and soil health improvements."

Source: http://sustain.ag/about_sustain

Benefits to Farmers/Landowners

Access to certified Ag retailers who evaluate practices and make recommendations. They create a baseline of a “farm’s overall soil health, nutrient use efficiency and production output in order to track your progress as you implement changes.”

Source: <http://sustain.ag/growers>

Dates

July 2016-PRESENT (Acquired from United Suppliers with the 2016 merger)

Summary

Works to connect grower, ag retailers and food companies to create sustainability efforts across Land O’Lakes various divisions. This includes Purina, WinField United, United Suppliers, food production divisions like KozyShack and Land O’Lakes Butter and 4,331 members nationally (Dairy producers, ag producers and co-op members)

Source: <https://www.landolakesinc.com/Company#fndtn-CropInput>

Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative

<http://iowaseed.org/2016/04/12/iowa-seed-corn-cover-crops-initiative/>

Organizations Involved

Developed by Iowa Seed Association, Agribusiness Association of Iowa, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Corn Growers Association, and the Soil and Water Conservation Society. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship provided \$1.1 million grant through their Clean Water Initiative.

Objectives/Mission

Increase the number of seed corn growers using cover crops through partnerships with seed corn companies, their growers and agricultural retailers, distribution of educational material and demonstration field days to teach growers about resources available.

Benefits to Farmers/Landowners

Cost-share rate of \$15/acre available to farmers planting cover crops on seed corn acres, regardless of cover crop type. Seed companies may offer other incentives to growers. None are specifically listed with the project announcement.

Date

April 2016 - December 2018

Summary

“The Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative will focus on ways to help increase adoption of cover crops specifically within the seed corn production system in Iowa. The focus on seed corn is driven by the unique opportunity that seed corn provides due to the earlier harvest, thereby providing better timing opportunities for establishing cover crops in the late summer and fall after harvest. This focus is also heavily driven by the seed corn industry in Iowa, and their efforts to help promote and support the use of cover crops as part of Iowa’s Nutrient Strategy.”

Source: <http://iowaseed.org/2016/04/12/iowa-seed-corn-cover-crops-initiative/>

Unilever—ADM—Iowa Soybean Growers

Subset of this effort.

“Driving Cover Crop Adoption through Education and Technical Assistance and Showing Environmental Benefits.”, a project of The Conservation Technology Information Center—Purdue University-- <http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/> Director of this Center went to BV, Storm Lake with Michael the Dept. Sect at IDALS.

Organizations Involved

Unilever, ADM, DuPont Pioneer, LaCrosse Seed, Practical Farmers of Iowa

Objectives/Mission

Boost the use of cover crops through cost-share programs, technological demonstrations and one-on-one sessions with other farmers who have successfully implemented conservation strategies.

Benefits to Farmers

Up to \$25 per acre, discounts on certain brands of cover crop seeds, demonstrations and field days to learn more about the practices.

Source: <http://www.iasoybeans.com/stories/2015/08/07/cover-crop-cost-share-program-available-iowa-soybean-farmers>
<http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/FIND%20INFORMATION/CTIC%20Initiatives/>

Sustainable Soy: Continuous Improvement Project

[http://www.extension.iastate.edu/marshall/sites/www.extension.iastate.edu/files/marshall/15-2640%20ADM%20Unilever%20Brochure-6%20\(00000002\).pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/marshall/sites/www.extension.iastate.edu/files/marshall/15-2640%20ADM%20Unilever%20Brochure-6%20(00000002).pdf)
<http://www.ctic.org/media/IDALS/SustainableSoy.pdf>

Organizations Involved

A project of The Conservation Technology Information Center. Includes Unilever, ADM, DuPont Pioneer, La Crosse Seed, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Practical Farmers of Iowa, USDA NRCS

Objectives/Mission

Boost the use of cover crops through cost-share programs, technological demonstrations and one-on-one sessions with other farmers who have successfully implemented conservation strategies.

Benefits to Farmers/Landowners

Up to \$25 per acre, discounts on certain brands of cover crop seeds, demonstrations and field days to learn more about the practices. Applies to farmers within a 100 mile radius of Des Moines.

Source: [http://www.extension.iastate.edu/marshall/sites/www.extension.iastate.edu/files/marshall/15-2640%20ADM%20Unilever%20Brochure-6%20\(00000002\).pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/marshall/sites/www.extension.iastate.edu/files/marshall/15-2640%20ADM%20Unilever%20Brochure-6%20(00000002).pdf)

Dates

August 2015, ongoing.

Contact: Maree Deventer at ADM at (515) 263-3266 or maree.deventer@adm.com

Sarah Carlson at Practical Farmers of Iowa at (515) 232-5661 or sarah@practicalfarmers.org

Summary

"The project will focus on integrating cover crops into the operation of farmers as part of a sustainable soy program led by Unilever and Archer Daniels Midland (ADM). The two companies, along with DuPont Pioneer, LaCrosse Seed, Practical Farmers of Iowa and farmers will provide more than \$1.2 million for the project to coincide with a WQI grant worth a little more than \$1 million."

Source: <http://www.iasoybeans.com/stories/2015/08/07/cover-crop-cost-share-program-available-iowa-soybean-farmers>

Boone River Watershed Nutrient Management Initiative

Organizations Involved

Part of Clean Water Iowa. Partners include Kossuth Soil and Water Conservation, District Humboldt Soil and Water Conservation District, Wright Soil and Water Conservation District, Iowa Soybean Association, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance, Hagie Manufacturing, The Conservation Fund, North Central Cooperative, Iowa State University Extension, Iowa Department of Agriculture, The Nature Conservancy

Objectives/Mission

"The Wright Soil and Water Conservation District has assembled a broad group of partners to help implement a demonstration project in the designated watersheds. Public and private groups are committed to creating a project that demonstrates the practices and approaches outlined in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The foundation of the project will be to develop and promote "Farmer Champions" as advocates of implementing conservation practices by providing an example for others to follow."

Source: <https://www.cleanwateriowa.org/boone-river-watershed-nutrient-management-initiative>

Benefits to Farmers/Landowners

Since the project began, the conservation practice goals set for acres of cover crops, strip-till/no-till and nitrification inhibitor have been met or exceeded. In the last three years, 12,000 acres of cover crops have been seeded in the project area. In addition, a drainage water management system and three Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) wetland have been constructed. Not only have promotion and cost-share assistance for these practices continued, additional practices have also been added to the project, including bioreactors, saturated buffers, filter strips and oxbows. Opportunity to observe and implement conservation practices. Demonstration practices available with the project or with project partners include strip-till, no-till, replicated strip trials, water monitoring, plant tissue sampling, cover crops, bioreactors, wetlands, drainage water management and nitrogen stabilizers.

Dates

Starting 2011

Summary

“The Nutrient Reduction Strategy was developed by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa DNR, and Iowa State University using science and technology to assess and reduce nutrients to Iowa waters and the Gulf of Mexico. This strategy uses a voluntary approach to reduce nutrient load in surface waters. The Boone River Watershed Nutrient Management Initiative is one of Iowa’s 13 demonstration watershed projects as a part of the water quality initiative.

Efforts for the Water Quality Initiative are focused on two areas within the Boone River Watershed: 1) the Prairie Creek watershed in Humboldt and Kossuth counties and 2) the Eagle Creek Watershed in Wright County.”

Source: <https://booneriver.org/project-area/water-quality-initiative/>