



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

LANDOWNER PROFILE

“As a taxpayer, I think conservation of the resources that produce our long term food supply is the best use of my taxes. The land is both our love and our livelihood, and it’s our job to take care of it. But we as farmers can’t do it entirely on our own.”

— **Craig McNamara**

The Farm at Putah Creek

Craig McNamara’s farm is protected from development by a permanent conservation easement through the federal Farm and Ranch Protection Program. On 40 acres of his prime farmland, Craig founded the Center for Land-Based Learning in 1993. The farm:

- Is devoted to hands-on learning about sustainable agriculture
- Hosts tours, workshops and educational field days
- Serves adults as well as high school students.
- Welcomes visitors to view wildlife-friendly demonstration projects

For more information, directions to the farm and reservations, go online to www.landbasedlearning.org

Craig McNamara became interested in conservation 30 years ago and that interest resulted in a wide variety of natural resource improvements to his farm.

Craig did not have a background in farming when he began growing walnut trees.

“I needed all the help and advice I could get,” said McNamara. “I talked to University of California Extension farm advisors, and farmer friends, and have done that ever since.”

Those conversations have led to a number of partnerships and cooperative projects over the years to improve natural resources on Sierra Orchards, his organic walnut farm near Winters, Calif.

He is careful with water, trying to ensure that no water is wasted and that his farming does not negatively affect waterways downstream. He hangs more than 40,000 pheromone devices each year to control codling moths and uses composted table scraps from San Francisco-area restaurants as fertilizer. In addition, he has a long history of working with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Dixon, Calif.

The conservation improvements have cost him tens of thousands of dollars, but often those have been matched with Farm Bill funding. He has completed conservation practices, with technical and financial assistance, through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

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The combination of conservation practices Craig McNamara uses on his land improves the water and aquatic life in Putah Creek.

long term food supply is the best use of my taxes,” said McNamara. “The land is both our love and our livelihood and it’s our job to take care of it. But we as farmers can’t do it entirely on our own.”

EQIP Contracts

McNamara used EQIP contracts for several irrigation projects. In addition, he has used the program to establish new orchards with drip irrigation, convert from flood irrigation to buried drip irrigation, convert to solid set sprinklers and micro sprinklers in his walnut orchards and establish tail water recovery ponds.

“It’s expensive up-front to convert to more efficient irrigation, but it can make a difference,” continued McNamara. “When you go from furrow to sprinkler, you cut water use in half. Then sprinkler to drip cuts water use in half again. When we made the change to drip it really made a significant savings in water use.”

McNamara received EQIP cost-share to establish cover crops that provide nutrients, retain winter moisture and reduce runoff from the orchard.

WHIP for Wildlife

In 2009, McNamara entered into a WHIP contract to establish multiple practices to boost habitat for wildlife on his farm. He established a riparian forest buffer along Putah Creek, established upland wildlife habitat, conservation cover plantings and restored declining habitat on his farm. In addition, WHIP helped him eliminate some stands of invasive plants like arrundo, eucalyptus and tree of heaven.

McNamara has a current WHIP pollinator initiative contract he is using to install a shelterbelt, hedgerow planting and more upland habitat on his farm.

Recognized by CSP

Not all of McNamara’s conservation work has been cost-shared. That’s what made him happy to be accepted into the highest tier of CSP on his 237 acres

of organic walnuts.

“CSP has a stringent application process that prioritized farms that were doing beneficial stewardship work and it rewarded us for that work with payments over three years,” said McNamara.

“CSP has been one of the most rewarding programs in my three decades of farming. The reason is, we

went out and did what we felt was right - for the land, for the environment, for our neighbors and for our downstream



McNamara and NRCS' Fanny Ye inspect a buffer that was planted specifically to give a boost to beneficials and pollinators.



users in California - by putting in sediment traps, tail water ponds, removing invasive species, planting hedgerows to create habitat for beneficial insects and many other things. We did that because we felt it was the right thing to do. And it cost us money. CSP was an acknowledgement that the practices we’ve been implementing are appreciated by the citizens of the United States,” added McNamara.

“We’re fortunate to partner with NRCS on doing the things that ensure we will be able to farm into the future. I’ve found the local conservation team here, including streamkeeper Rich Marovich and fellow walnut grower John Vickrey, to be proactive in assisting the farmer, encouraging us to look at our operation and then customizing the help from conservation programs to what works best for us,” McNamara concluded.