

Technical Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical assistance to district cooperators and other land users in the planning and application of conservation treatments. Technical assistance is the backbone of NRCS. It entails our qualified staff doing on-site visits to farms and ranches, and analyzing map and computer data to adequately assess land units and concerns. The agency uses a 9-Point Conservation Planning process to identify resources and their concerns, complete designs, and realize implementation - to achieve the solutions that are needed by the land and that particular farmer/rancher.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program offers opportunities to landowners to improve and protect wildlife habitat on private and Tribal lands. NRCS approved \$327,662 for 20 wildlife habitat improvement projects in FY2006. It should be noted that improvement of wildlife habitat is also frequently included as one of several objectives in EQIP projects, particularly where range improvement benefits both livestock and wildlife.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. Participating landowners agree not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses and to develop and implement a conservation plan for any highly erodible land. In FY2006 NRCS received three applications for preservation easements on 19 acres. Some \$291,000 was awarded to the Corrales Farmland Preservation Program.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

NRCS and the Farm Services Agency share administrative responsibilities for the Grasslands Reserve Program, which is part of the 2002 Farm Bill. GRP provides technical and financial assistance to restore and conserve the functions and values of grasslands, land that contains forbs and shrubs. NRCS New Mexico is currently working to secure conservation easements on an 11,000 acre ranch in Roosevelt County and 4,000 acre ranch in McKinley County.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

CSP is a voluntary program authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill which rewards those farmers and ranchers meeting the very highest standards of conservation and environmental

management on their working agricultural lands. NRCS is currently managing almost 100 contracts with prior year program participants in selected watershed. More work with the best-of-the-best is anticipated next fiscal year, once our national office selects target watersheds.

Farm Bill Specialists Project

NRCS has partnered with the State of New Mexico in a program whereby the State and NRCS provide 50/50 funding for Farm Bill Specialists who assist New Mexico farmers and ranchers in accessing USDA Farm Bill Programs. These programs enable farmers and ranchers to get cost-share funding and technical support to install pipelines, make irrigation improvements, build fences, protect wildlife, and make other working land improvements.

Flood Control and Dam Rehabilitation

There are 101 larger flood control dams in New Mexico that NRCS has assisted with funding, and some are reaching their design life. NRCS is encouraging local sponsors to seek assessments of these older dams where appropriate, and participate in rehabilitation projects like that currently underway at the Piedre Liza Dam which protects the town of Bernillilo.

Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasts

Snowpacks are surveyed every winter in New Mexico by NRCS to provide farmers, ranchers, and other water users with water supply forecasts they can use in decision making. NRCS field staff collect and analyze data on depth and water equivalent of the snowpack at mountain sites and estimate water availability, spring runoff, and summer stream flows.

Soil Survey

NRCS is the agency that conducts the nation's soil surveys. Many are now published on the web for our state's many users.

Irrigation Efficiencies

While not a program as such, NRCS is continually striving to bring to New Mexico farmers the latest and best in efficient irrigation technically. The agency promotes efficient water use through such systems as micro-irrigation, high flow irrigation, and subsurface drip irrigation. Irrigation improvements are frequently one of the primary goals of EQIP.



Helping People Help the Land



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Since 1935, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (originally called the Soil Conservation Service) has provided leadership in helping America's private land owners and managers conserve their soil, water, and other natural resources. NRCS employees provide technical assistance based on sound science and suited to a customer's specific needs. We provide financial assistance for many conservation activities.

Access to our services typically begins with a visit to any of our 38 field offices located throughout New Mexico, and supported by Area Offices in Clovis, Carrizozo, Socorro, and Albuquerque. The State Office is located in Albuquerque, and a Plant Materials Center is in Los Lunas.

- Dennis Alexander
State Conservationist

Collaborative conservation may be a new and somewhat awkward buzz word in New Mexico conservation circles, but to Stacy Mills of the JC & Frances Mills Family Ptr. LTC of Carlsbad it means finally being able to access the benefits of USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in a way that makes sense.

Like most ranchers in the Carlsbad area, Mills runs an operation that has the West's famous checkerboard pattern where up to 80 percent of the land is federally owned – in this case by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). What Mills needed was a program that allowed him to address his land units as a whole, regardless of what parcel was under what ownership. He found the answer in NRCS New Mexico's collaborative conservation project that brought federal agencies and his private holdings together for unified conservation improvements on his ranching operation.

Under the FY2006 EQIP collaborative conservation effort, Mills was able to do brush management that was impacting the land's productivity and crowding out natural grasses. Managing the brush was important not only to Mills' cattle, but the large, indigenous deer population and local lesser prairie chickens. Early indications are that the collaborative brush management has an 80 percent effectiveness rate, and the Mills' ranch can look forward to enhanced resources and resource management that respects the integrity of natural land units.



Stacy Mills of the JC & Frances Mills Family Ptr. LTC in Carlsbad found EQIP's pilot project allowed him to address his land units as a whole, regardless of what parcel was under what ownership.

Jimmy Richardson, from Richardson Cattle Company in Carlsbad, by comparison has used NRCS programs before. The collaborative conservation effort gave him, however, an opportunity to address his brush management needs in a much more coordinated, sound resource management way. Because of the collaborative option he was able to do brush management, improve water storage, and install a pipeline to a different pasture area. This will help in stock rotation, and enhance habitat for wildlife.

The Carlsbad Soil & Water Conservation District and New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts are taking collaborative conservation yet another step further in the Carlsbad area. Uniting with BLM and landowners, they are rehabilitating abandoned oil field patches so they may be returned to production in concert with the surrounding land units. The soils are being cleaned and sites fenced so recovery can transpire.

The conservation districts and association, and federal agencies, are joining together to assist working ranches like the Mills' and Richardson's because it is these ranchers who are a mainstay locally and to the state. Richardson is important to the economy of Carlsbad where he sells his beef to a local meat market. Mills is involved with his kids in rodeo and 4-H.

Collaborative conservation may be a new buzz word to Mills and Richardson, but it means a sincere effort on the part of many agency people to overcome barriers and bring conservation in a more efficient and effective way to natural land units in the American West.

About NRCS

NRCS is the federal agency that is charged with bringing conservation to America's private lands. Because it works with private lands, participation in its programs is voluntary on the part of landowners. The success of this working relationship is dependent on trust the agency has built through years of offering excellent technical expertise to farmers and ranchers who need that extra edge to solve conservation concerns.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help working farms and ranches, and others, care for the land. The agency works on a variety of activities that include range management, irrigation efficiencies, farmland protection, riparian restoration, flood control, and acequias. To accomplish this work, NRCS frequently partners

Program Summary

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program is a nationwide voluntary conservation program administered by NRCS. The program's major goals are twofold: enhancing agricultural production and optimizing environmental benefits. Through participation in EQIP agricultural producers may receive financial and technical assistance in developing and implementing conservation plans which include structural and management practices intended to treat a wide range of natural resource concerns. EQIP is by far the largest Farm Bill program financially. NRCS New Mexico approved \$18.1 million in financial assistance to 497 farmers and ranchers in FY2006 for cost-shared conservation improvements. Of this \$18.1 million, \$6.1 million was approved for 195 contracts for improvements on irrigated cropland. Also included in this funding was \$1.05 obligated for environmental improvements at New Mexico dairies.

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