

SUPPORT YOUR CONSERVATION, PRODUCTION AND ON-FARM ENERGY GOALS THROUGH THE USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has numerous programs to assist farmers, ranchers, and foresters with their land stewardship and production goals through the Farm Bill. The Inflation Reduction Act, passed through Congress in 2022, bolstered these programs with additional incentives and funding, providing an unprecedented amount of opportunity to boost conservation, energy, equity, and community revitalization. *Read below to learn about a few key conservation and energy programs and where you can go to learn more.*

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the USDA's conservation arm, where landowners and producers can receive free technical assistance to determine best conservation practices for resource concerns (i.e. soil health, erosion, forest management, etc.) and recommendations for cost-share programs. Cost-share refers to a funding process through which NRCS will share in the cost of a practice with a producer. The amount of cost-share will depend on the program and the type of producer applying. Two popular programs include EQIP and CSP.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that incentivizes agricultural and forestry producers and landowners to conserve and enhance natural resources on their land. EQIP promotes agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals. Numerous cost-share programs are available for practices such as irrigation equipment, high tunnels, grassed waterways, wildlife enhancement, cover crops, prescribed grazing management, and integrated pest management, among many others.

Conservation Stewardship Program

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary, comprehensive working lands conservation program designed to help farmers, ranchers, and non-industrial private forestland producers continue to protect and improve natural resources and the environment on their farm. CSP focuses on assisting in improving priority natural resources of concern such as soil erosion, water quality, and air quality; provide increased biodiversity; reduce greenhouse and sequester carbon to mitigate climate change; and conserve water and energy.

Who is eligible for these programs?

An applicant must be the owner and/or operator of eligible land, which includes cropland, rangeland, pasture, nonindustrial private forest, and other farm or ranch lands. For CSP, all acres must be enrolled in the program under the applicant's effective control. Those who lease or rent land are also eligible.

How to apply for EQIP or CSP:

Applications are accepted ongoing through the year, though each state will have respective deadlines, called "batching" or "ranking" dates when they rank and approve applications for the current funding cycle. **It's important to get your application in prior to these dates to maximize your chance of getting ranked and funded during the current funding cycle.** Applications are ranked according to local resource concerns, the amount of conservation benefits the work will provide and the needs of applicants. Stay tuned to the state NRCS website for updates on the next round of ranking dates, which will be determined after the start of the federal fiscal year/October 1.

TO LEARN MORE

The Wisconsin NRCS website has a wealth of information for details on these and other federal programs, including resources for small-scale, diversified producers. You can also find your local service center (by county) on the website:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/wisconsin

Rural Development

USDA's Rural Development agency provides numerous funding and support opportunities to rural communities and agricultural producers, with attention to water, energy, housing, internet access, and more. One of its most popular energy programs is REAP.

Rural Energy for American Program

Rural Energy for American Program (REAP) provides grants and loans to help provide financial support to install renewable energy systems or to improve energy efficiency of existing operations. Common improvements include wind turbines, solar panels, geothermal pumps, anaerobic digesters, energy upgrades for refrigeration units, and more.

Who is eligible for these programs?

Small businesses in eligible areas and agricultural producers with at least 50% of gross income coming from agricultural operations are eligible. Agricultural producers may be in rural or non-rural areas.

How to apply:

Applications for "guaranteed loans" are accepted year round through your local Rural Development office. Grants or combined grant and loan applications are accepted at certain times of the year. For WI, the upcoming deadlines are June 30th and September 30th. **Note: IRA fund incentives for this program are set to expire on September 30, 2024**

Note: these are fairly technical applications. We recommend reaching out to your local Rural Development officer to discuss your energy goals and intention to apply. For WI, that is the following:

Kristin Peterson,
USDA Rural Development 5417 Clem's Way Stevens Point, WI 54482
Tel: (715) 345-7640
kristin.peterson@usda.gov
www.rd.usda.gov/wi

For other Federal programs, you can reference our MFAI website to download or request a mailed copy of "Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities: A Guide to Federal Programs for Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Entrepreneurship, Conservation, Food Systems, and Community Development."

**MICHAEL FIELDS
AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE**



TO LEARN MORE

The Wisconsin NRCS website has a wealth of information for details on these and other federal programs, including resources for small-scale, diversified producers. You can also find your local service center by county on the website:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/wisconsin

Information adapted in part from "Building Sustainable Farms, Ranches and Communities: A Guide to Federal Programs", MFAI/NSAC, with funding support from USDA, 2020.

