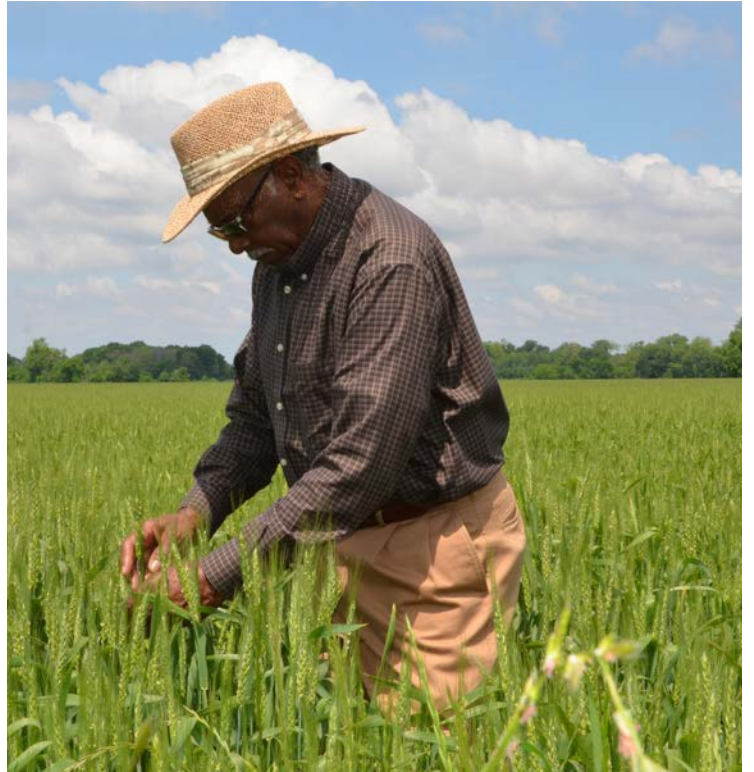




SUPPORTING AMERICA'S  
WORKING LANDS





# Supporting America's Working Lands

At the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we have a proud history of supporting America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. For more than 80 years, we have helped people make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, boost rural economies, increase the competitiveness of American agriculture, and improve the quality of our air, water, soil, and habitat.

As the USDA's primary private lands conservation agency, we generate, manage, and share the data, technology, and standards that enable partners and policymakers to make decisions informed by objective, reliable science.

And through one-on-one, personalized advice, we work voluntarily with producers and communities to find the best solutions to meet their unique conservation and business goals. By doing so, we help ensure the health of our natural resources and the long-term sustainability of American agriculture.

**“We didn't inherit this land. We borrowed it from our children. It's about the future and not about the past.”**

Joseph McKinney, Alabama producer

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**On average, NRCS invests upwards of \$9 million every day of the year into conservation systems that help producers stay profitable and productive.**

# America's Working Lands Support Rural Economies

Farmers, ranchers, and foresters are the backbone of America. Shouldering the tremendous responsibility of feeding a rapidly growing Nation, their critical work also provides economic stability across the country side — supporting rural economies and creating jobs in local communities.

Rural America depends on productive working lands to fund local labor. Local jobs include not just agronomists and foresters, but also land improvement contractors, seed suppliers, irrigation specialists, and others. Their stewardship and careful management of these vital landscapes builds resilient local economies with profitable farms and ranches, clean air and water, healthy food, and abundant wildlife.

**“We are a business and have to be profitable, so the programs that we utilize with NRCS help us incorporate conservation practices. It’s important to us because we love this land and want to leave it to our children better than we found it.”**

Alan Herbert, Louisiana producer

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A man wearing a grey cap and a brown jacket is smiling while harvesting purple radishes in a greenhouse. He is holding a radish in his right hand and a knife in his left. The background shows the curved structure of the greenhouse and rows of plants.

**Organic is the fastest growing segment of the U.S. food industry, with demand currently outpacing supply. Urban farms, rapidly increasing in number, provide an entryway for new farmers and build appreciation for farming among all citizens.**

# America's Working Lands Support Consumer Demand

America's producers are responding to today's increasing consumer demand for organic products and fresh, local food. While rising to meet this new challenge, organic and urban farmers are conserving natural resources, diversifying the farming sector, and bringing new and non-traditional farmers into agricultural production.

Organic agriculture and NRCS' goals are well aligned. Many USDA Organic requirements — such as soil health and biodiversity — can be addressed using NRCS conservation systems, which reflect these shared goals. Though often small, urban farms can make big impacts, beautifying neighborhoods and strengthening local communities while growing healthy food. Farmers throughout the country are now using high tunnels to meet the demand for fresh, local produce beyond the typical growing season.

**“We got assistance from the NRCS to put in the high tunnel, and it's completely changed the way we farm tomatoes... It's doubled production for us. We're also able to grow things during the winter.”**

Stacey Givens, Oregon producer

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**The healthiest soils are those with a diversity and abundance of life. Farmers with the healthiest soils nurture that life by creating a diversity of plant life above the soil surface, with year-round ground cover, no tillage, and judicious or no pesticide use.**



# America's Working Lands Support Healthy Soil

America's vitality is rooted in the soil. Today, private landowners across the country are partnering with NRCS to put soil health practices to work — growing profitable farms, vibrant rural economies, and healthy food and fiber to fuel our Nation today and into the future.

As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. By farming using soil health principles and systems that include no-till, cover cropping, and diverse rotations, more and more producers are increasing their soil's organic matter, reducing the need for expensive inputs, and improving microbial activity — all while harvesting better profits and often better yields.

**“I can't even imagine being a conventional farmer and looking to the future. I feel like those of us that have made the conversion have a future.”**

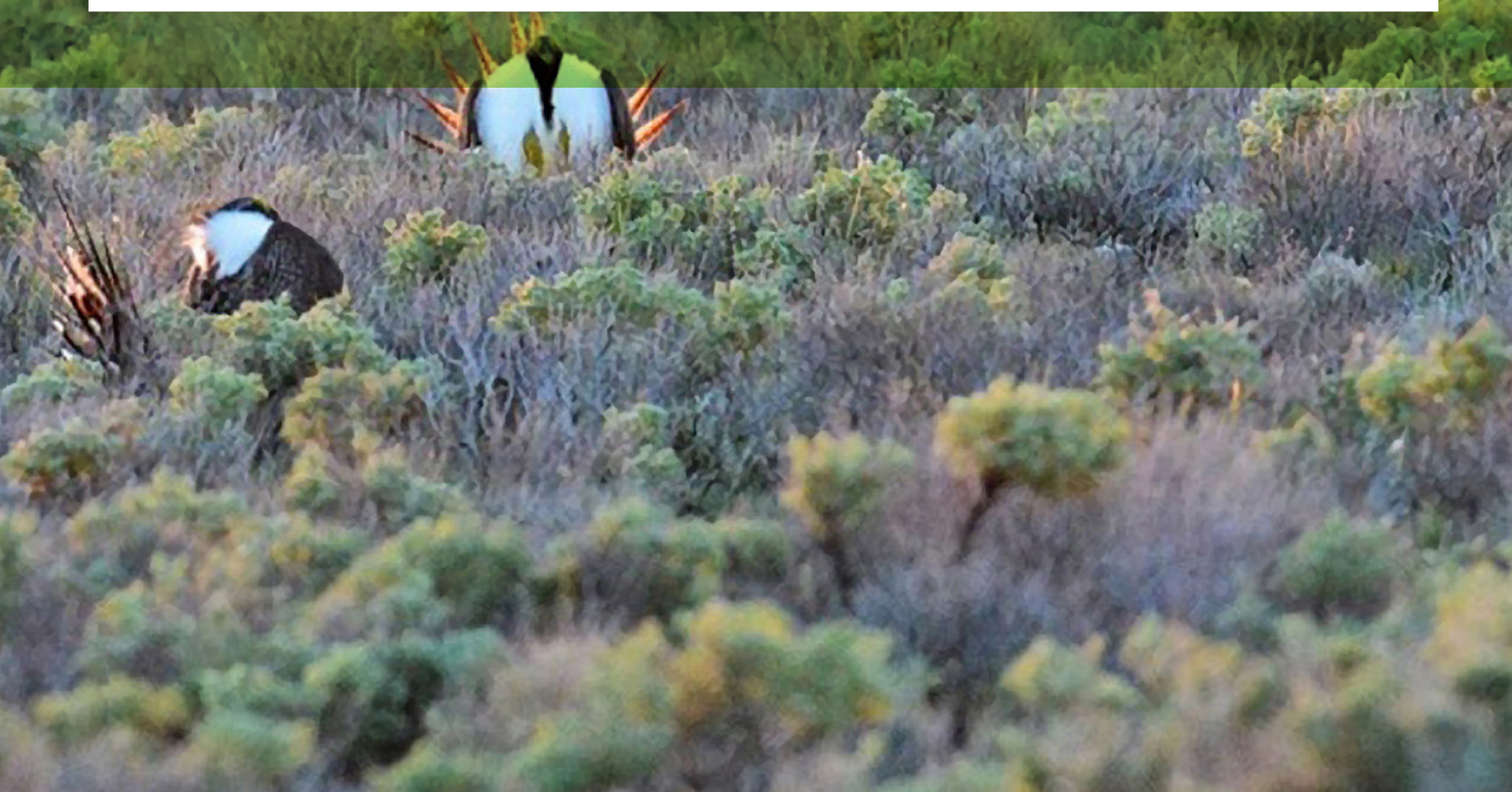
Douglas Poole, Washington producer

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Out West, ranchers have restored more than 5 million acres of the sagebrush ecosystem, helping the greater sage-grouse rebound while providing top-notch grazing lands for livestock.



# America's Working Lands Support Healthy Ecosystems

Agriculture and wildlife both thrive together through landscape-scale conservation. Two-thirds of the land in the lower 48 States is privately owned, and these productive working farms, ranches, and forests provide critical ecosystems for wildlife as well as the food and fiber that sustains us all.


From the Louisiana black bear to the Oregon chub, and from the sage grouse to the New England cottontail, many species have rebounded and recovered largely because of the conservation work by producers on private lands. NRCS uses a science-based, targeted approach to guide producers on how to best manage ecosystems to maximize beneficial outcomes, both for wildlife and agricultural operations.

**“Sustainable forestry practices  
recommended by NRCS are  
benefiting our personal lives  
as well as wildlife.”**

Natalie Love, Pennsylvania producer

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A large center pivot irrigation system is shown in a lush green field. The system consists of multiple long metal arms radiating from a central point, with numerous smaller pipes and nozzles attached. The background features a range of mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The foreground shows a large, dark, circular wheel or component of the system. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark blue rectangle in the center of the image.

**Agriculture is a major user of ground and surface water in the United States. By implementing efficient irrigation systems and other water management practices, producers increase the supply of both food and water.**

# America's Working Lands Support Clean Water

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners recognize water as our Nation's most precious resource. Every day, new producers are stepping up to work hand-in-hand with NRCS to implement systems that conserve water and keep valuable nutrients on the field and out of local waterways.

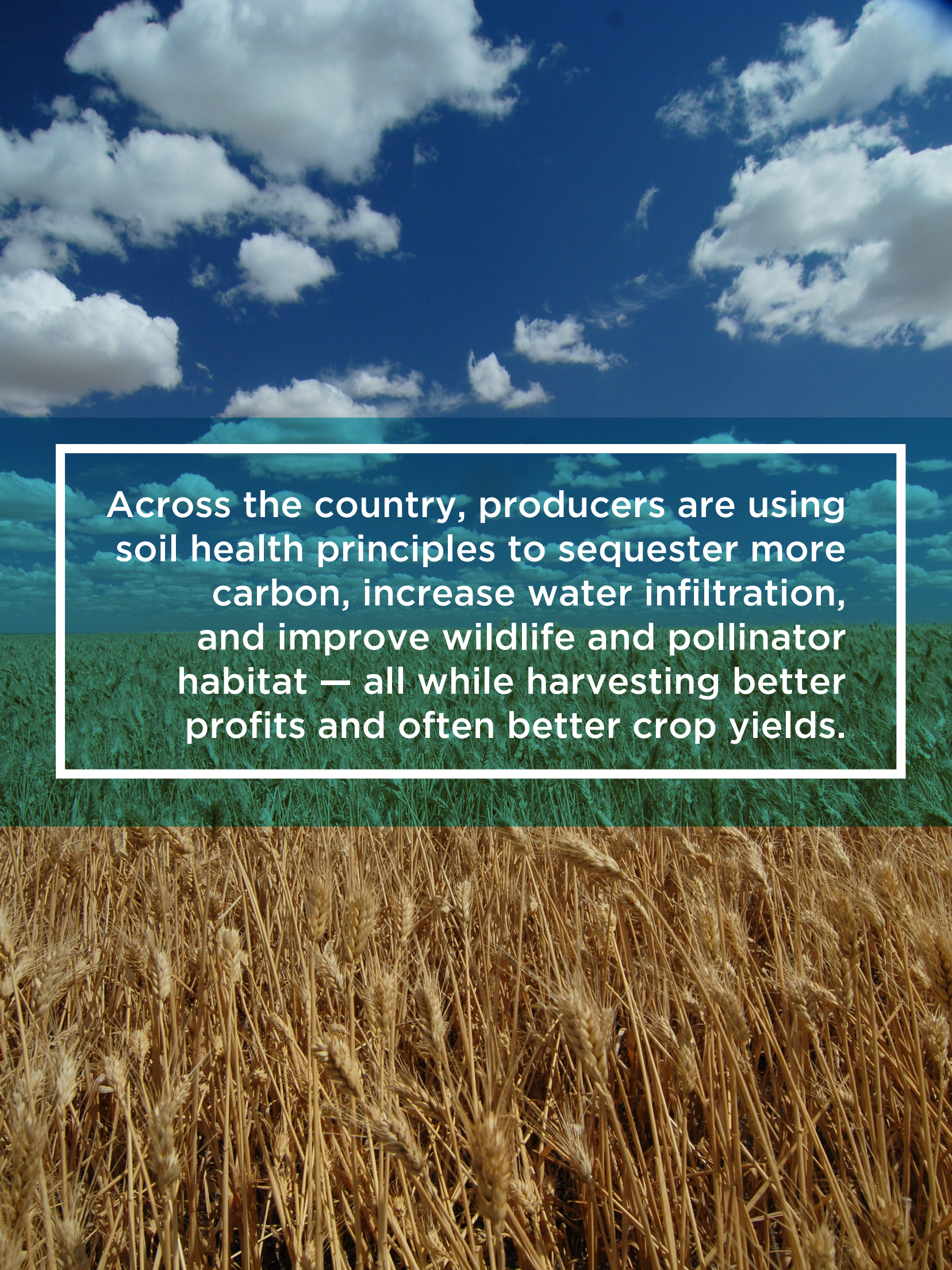
Many producers have joined their friends and neighbors in landscape-scale efforts to minimize agricultural impacts and improve water quality throughout watersheds. By improving soil health and adopting a systems approach to conservation across the landscape, these targeted efforts have resulted in an ever growing list of streams restored in working agricultural land.

**“I've always been conservation minded, so I'm working on using waterways and contour strips on the farm to combat erosion and fix some of the conservation issues.”**

Tim Servais, Wisconsin producer

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Across the country, producers are using soil health principles to sequester more carbon, increase water infiltration, and improve wildlife and pollinator habitat — all while harvesting better profits and often better crop yields.

# America's Working Lands Support Clean Air

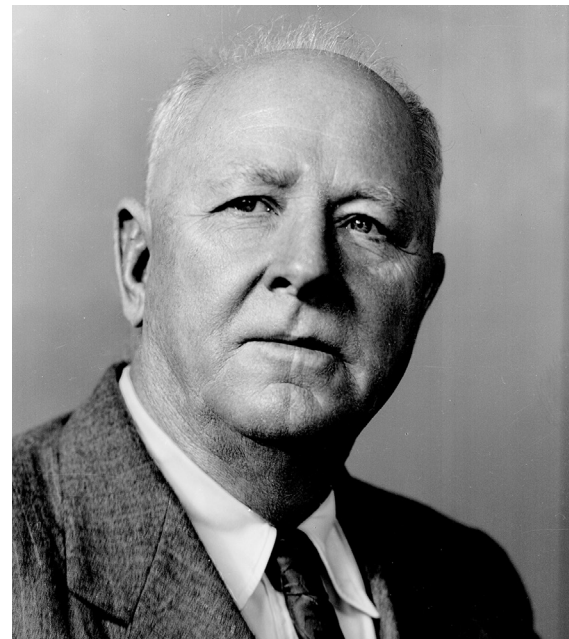
Thanks to the success of voluntary conservation and air quality assessment tools, many producers are discovering that the techniques that increase soil and crop resiliency are the same techniques that reduce carbon and nitrous oxide emissions — creating a win-win for private landowners and their communities.

Many of these conservation-minded producers who are located in strong rural and urban land interfaces are also working with NRCS to implement moisture-management techniques and windbreaks that help minimize or diffuse dust and odors associated with livestock production.

**“If we take care of the land, it will take care of us.”**

Hugh Hammond Bennett, Father of Soil Conservation

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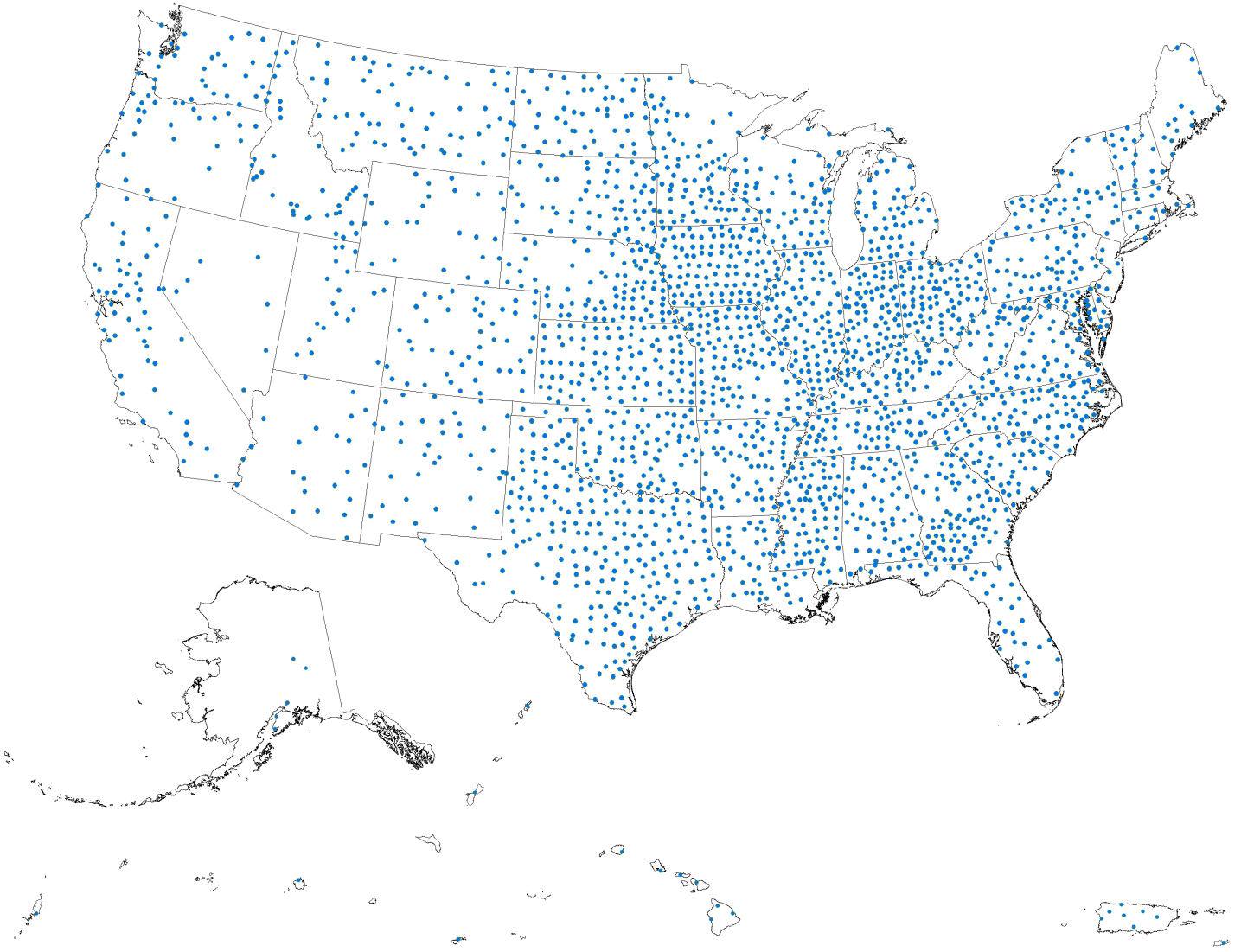




## Get Started With NRCS

Do you farm or ranch and want to make improvements to the land that you own or lease?





## NRCS Offices Across the Country

NRCS was born out of troubled times — the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s. Dust storms ravaged the Nation’s farmland, stripping away millions of tons of topsoil and carrying it all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. What originally began as the USDA Soil Conservation Service in 1935 is now known as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, a name change that highlights our broader mission of natural resource conservation.

Today, through voluntary conservation programs, NRCS helps producers, soil and water conservation districts, and other partners protect and conserve natural resources on private lands throughout the United States.

With approximately 2,500 offices in communities nationwide, NRCS employees continue to provide the information, tools, and delivery systems necessary for producers — in every State and territory — to conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. This locally led, science-based approach offers producers voluntary conservation solutions that enhance their environment and commercial viability.

Find your local service center:  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

# Helping People Help the Land

Each day, our 9,000 plus NRCS employees help people help the land by:

- Adhering to sound science principles;
- Using proven technical tools for on-the-ground application;
- Providing personalized advice and financial assistance to landowners and producers;
- Developing locally led conservation solutions with partners;
- Supporting innovation in agriculture, conservation, and economic markets; and
- Investing in people — including beginning, underserved, and veteran farmers.







USDA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER, EMPLOYER, AND LENDER.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT BACKED BY RESEARCH AND ON-SITE EXPERIENCE

We generate, manage, and share the data, research findings and standards that enable partners and policymakers to make decisions informed by objective, reliable research.

We believe farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners are the best stewards of our private lands, and that they want to voluntarily reduce the impacts of climate change on their businesses and way of life. Agricultural producers require the resources and the technical know-how to implement soil conservation, greenhouse gas reductions, carbon sequestration, pasture or rangeland management plans, and waste management programs. That's where we serve as a partner on using the best science, conservation tools, and targeted financial assistance to reduce the impacts of climate change and ensure USDA is doing its part to support clean air, clean water, and healthy rural communities. The conservation practices we promote are backed by science and proven to work. We use the latest research and technology to demonstrate the value of conservation and identify places that can most benefit from our programs. We provide the information producers, partners, and policymakers use to make informed decisions.

Our **COMET tools** demonstrate USDA's leadership in developing quantification tools that support climate smart agricultural practices. The [COMET-Farm tool](#) allows farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners to estimate carbon footprints for cropland, pasture, range, orchards/vineyards, livestock, agroforestry, and forestry operations. The [COMET-Planner tool](#) helps conservation planners and agricultural producers evaluate the benefits of implementing NRCS conservation practices. The COMET tools are free and publicly available.

Through our **Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP)** we examine how voluntary conservation impacts working lands. We look at the effects of conservation practices and how additional treatment could benefit that land and that producer. Findings from these studies provide a credible way for us to measure conservation outcomes and inform the scientific base we use to establish best practices for managing the land.

Through the **Conservation Innovation Grants** program we're funding cutting-edge ideas and projects, leveraging markets and finding new ways to measure the impact of conservation. We're supporting the development of conservation finance opportunities that offer producers new ways to benefit from the conservation practices they implement on their lands. Since 2014, NRCS has invested approximately \$25.5 million into 39 conservation finance projects – and our partners match these public dollars at least one-to-one.

Our **Snow Telemetry (SNOTEL)** data collection network collects snowpack and related climatic data needed to forecast water supplies for America's farmers. And through **Soil Survey**, we detail the make-up of soils across the country so farmers, ranchers and others can make choices for their land based on the make-up of the soil. NRCS has soil maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation's counties.

*The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). We have approximately 2,500 local offices across all 50 states, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin.*

To find out how we can help you or for more information visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



## HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

### GIVING ADVICE AND SOLUTIONS

We provide one-on-one, personalized advice on the best solutions to meet the unique conservation and business goals of those who produce our nation's food and fiber.

Simply put—NRCS helps American farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners voluntarily implement conservation that works for them. The majority of practices occur on working lands – productive agricultural lands and operations. The system of practices we promote helps U.S. agricultural producers improve production, reduce input costs, protect natural resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, sequester atmospheric carbon in perennial biomass and soils, build healthier soils, and adapt to the impacts of climate change to build agricultural operations that are productive, profitable, and resilient now and into the future. We also provide financial resources to help with the cost of getting working lands conservation on the ground.

Our **Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)** program enables every acre of conservation applied through every program NRCS administers. It is the foundation of our financial and technical assistance delivery system. Specifically, the program funds conservation planning and provides producers with the decision support and proven technology needed to achieve the benefits of a healthy and productive landscape.





# INVESTING IN RURAL AMERICA

## Investing in People

We help people make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, boost rural economies, increase the competitiveness of American agriculture, and improve the health of our air, water and soil.

Farmers and ranchers are the backbone of America. By supporting their operations and helping them make improvements on their lands, we're helping to provide economic stability in rural America. We're supporting rural economies and creating jobs in local communities. Our work is keeping working lands in production.

Our **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** is the largest conservation program in the United States with more than 43 million acres of productive agricultural and forest land enrolled. CSP offers financial incentives for producers to not only maintain the existing level of conservation on the land, but incorporate new or advanced conservation activities to take their stewardship to the next level.

Our **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is NRCS' flagship financial assistance program for working lands, helping producers make improvements to benefit agriculture and conservation.

Our **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** helps protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. The program also helps farmers protect and restore wetlands through wetland easements – improving water quality, reducing flooding, and providing habitat for wildlife.

These programs are helping producers prepare their operations for the challenges ahead – from an increasing global population to extreme weather events like severe droughts and flooding.

## Investing in Underserved Farmers

Over \$330 million was provided to **Socially Disadvantaged** farmers or ranchers through EQIP and CSP from 2017-2020; nearly \$83 million a year.

NRCS defines Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers as those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic

prejudice, including American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics. We are committed to ensuring equity in our program delivery, removing barriers to access, and building a workforce more representative of America.

NRCS set up a team to focus on how to increase service and outreach to Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers, which includes Socially Disadvantaged, resulting in a guidebook that explains some of the opportunities unique to these groups.

Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill established a cross agency Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production office, of which NRCS is the lead agency. Beyond this, many NRCS state offices have established new positions – Urban Conservationists – to focus exclusively on assisting urban farms.

**Heirs' Property** can also be a challenge for many Socially Disadvantaged farmers. The term refers to land that is passed down to heirs, often many in number, without a clear title of ownership. The 2018 Farm Bill expanded acceptance of certain documentation for heirs' property operators so they can establish a farm number and be eligible for USDA programs.

FROM 2017-2020

**\$4.5 BILLION**

WAS INVESTED IN **NEW & EXISTING** CONSERVATION PRACTICES.

GENERATING AN AVERAGE OF

**\$1.5 BILLION**

IN ANNUAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.

SUPPORTING

**20,600 JOBS**

EACH YEAR.

**CSP**

FROM 2017-2020

**\$5.3 BILLION**

WAS INVESTED IN **NEW** CONSERVATION PRACTICES.

GENERATING AN AVERAGE OF

**\$1.9 BILLION**

IN ANNUAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.

SUPPORTING

**26,000 JOBS**

EACH YEAR.

**EQIP**

FROM 2017-2020

**\$1.1 BILLION**

WAS INVESTED IN **EASEMENTS**.

GENERATING AN AVERAGE OF

**\$240 MILLION**

IN ANNUAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.

SUPPORTING

**2,800 JOBS**

EACH YEAR.

**ACEP**