

Fact Sheet

Conservation Opportunities for: **- American Indians and Alaska Natives** **- Beginning Farmers and Ranchers** **- Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers**

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Overview

Many conservation opportunities in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) address the unique circumstances and concerns of Indian tribes, beginning farmers and ranchers, and limited resource farmers and ranchers. The 2002 Farm Bill promotes conservation of natural resources on agricultural land and land under the jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe. It provides for voluntary participation, offers incentives, and focuses on equity in accessing U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and services. Enhancements include streamlined delivery of technical and financial assistance; improved programs and services; and flexibility in decision making with most decisions made at the Tribal, State, or local level. The Farm Bill recognizes the unique challenges of farmers and ranchers who are just beginning their agricultural operations, of those with limited financial resources, and of Indian tribes who have a special relationship with the U.S. government.

For the conservation programs and other opportunities available through the 2002 Farm Bill, the following definitions are used:

Indian tribe: The term "Indian tribe" means any Indian tribe, band, nation, pueblo, or other organized group or community including any Alaska Native village or regional corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.), which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided

by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.

Beginning farmer or rancher: An individual or entity who: (a) Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than consecutive 10 years. (This requirement applies to all members of an entity.); and (b) Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

Limited resource farmer or rancher: (a) A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales of not more than \$100,000 in each of the previous two years (to be increased beginning in fiscal year 2004 to adjust for inflation using Prices Paid by Farmer Index as compiled by NASS), and (b) Has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, OR less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years (to be determined annually using Commerce Dept. Data).

Program Enhancements

A number of programs were extended as part of the 2002 Farm Bill and revised to be more responsive to customer needs. For example, by removing the requirement of Conservation Priority Areas, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) now provides all producers an equal opportunity to participate. One enhancement to the program is increased cost-share assistance for conservation practices of up to 90 percent for beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers. The "bid-down" provision was eliminated. (Previously,

producers who offered to pay more of the cost for practices were given higher priority.) The minimum length of contracts was reduced from five years to one year after the last practice is completed. Sixty percent of the EQIP funds will be directed to livestock producers who address environmental concerns. Payments will be made more quickly than in past years. After an EQIP contract has been signed and as soon as the landowner's conservation practices have been completed and approved, the cost-share payments will be made. (Previously, landowners had to wait until the next fiscal year to implement the first practice and receive payment.)

Other programs were continued, including those that provide payments for the protection or restoration of wetlands (Wetlands Reserve Program), protection of wildlife habitat (Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program), adoption of agricultural management activities in selected states (Agricultural Management Assistance), and protection of farm and ranch land from conversion to non-agricultural uses (Farmland Protection Program). Also, there will be technical assistance available for protection of private grazing land.

New Programs and Provisions

The **Conservation Security Program** offers payments to producers for addressing resource concerns on their operations. The program focuses on support for all types of agricultural operations, including farms, ranches, orchards, vineyards, and horticultural crops, regardless of size or location, and offers three tiers of involvement with increased payment levels based upon increased levels of conservation effort.

The **Grassland Reserve Program** assists producers in protecting or restoring their grasslands. Producers can receive payments for options of 10, 15, or 30 years or for permanent easements to keep the land as grassland.

Also, innovative conservation approaches and technologies may be funded through **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**, a component of EQIP authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill. This program funds up to 50 percent of projects carried out by Tribal, State, or local governments or private organizations or individuals. Examples of innovative projects allowed under this program include market-based approaches, such as credit trading mechanisms and the next generation of irrigation and nutrient management technologies. CIG must address identified natural resource concerns and involve agricultural producers.

The 2002 Farm Bill also authorizes certified **technical service providers** (private individuals, non-government organizations, and Tribal, State, or local governments) to provide assistance to agricultural producers and receive payments. This will increase the number of qualified technical experts available to help farmers and ranchers conserve natural resources on their land.

For More Information

If you need more information about these and other programs and opportunities, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information, including program specific fact sheets, is also available on the World Wide Web at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

Please note: This information is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.