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## *At a Glance:* **Specialty Crops**

### **Overview**

Specialty crops are critically important to the farm economy and for the quality and quantity of the food produced that feed people in the United States and around the world. Defined as “all cultivated plants or the products thereof, produced in the United States, except wheat, feed grains, oil seeds, cotton, rice, peanuts, sugar, and tobacco,” specialty crops account for nearly 50 percent of the domestic farm gate crop value in the Nation. The production of specialty crops can put stresses on natural resources, such as soil erosion and water quality impairment, similar to other farm production systems. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides the needed technical and financial assistance to specialty crop producers to address their soil, water, air, plant, and animal resource concerns.

### **Legislative Changes**

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) highlights the availability of NRCS technical and financial assistance to specialty crop producers. NRCS assistance helps producers plan and implement conservation practices and techniques that are energy efficient, sustainable, and protect their natural resources while continuing to provide safe, quality food to the marketplace. Examples include integrated pest management (IPM) techniques, irrigation management practices, and other conservation technologies.

The major programs to provide financial and technical assistance to specialty crop producers include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP).

EQIP is primarily used to provide financial and technical assistance to develop a plan and implement conservation practices and integrated pest management techniques that address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resources.

Examples of EQIP technical and financial assistance include:

- Assistance to develop a specialty crop pest management plan that reduces the potential risks to natural resources;
- Assistance to implement conservation practices and IPM techniques that are tailored to the producer’s operation; and
- Provide incentives to share in the cost and encourage the adoption of implementing conservation practices.

CStP is available to provide technical and financial assistance to those producers who already have applied the basic conservation practices and are willing to implement a higher level of conservation on their operations. Participating producers in CSP receive incentive payments for the specified higher levels of conservation treatment.

### **More Information**

For more information and updates about EQIP, CSP, and other Farm Bill topics please refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill> or the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web site [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008).

