What will it cost?

It will cost you nothing to get your conservation plan. This service is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with your local Soil Conservation District.

Some conservation practices, such as changing your crop rotation, stripcropping and contour farming may only require a change in the way you operate your farm. Other conservation practices, such as grassed waterways and terraces, may require additional investment. But part of the cost of these practices may be shared through federal, state and local cost-sharing programs.

For other practices, such as conservation tillage, you may need to invest in different tillage or planting equipment. In some cases, you may be able to adapt your existing equipment for conservation tillage.

Identify Cost Share Opportunities

A conservation plan can help you decide which state or federal cost share assistance programs would be suitable for your operation. Your local NRCS or Soil Conservation District office can assist you.

Maintaining and Updating Your Plan

After you have made your decisions and the conservation plan is complete, you will receive your copy. Another confidential copy will remain on file at your NRCS office.

Changes in markets, weather, or technology may cause you to reconsider some of the choices you made in your plan. If something happens that would force you to change your decisions, you need to revise your plan. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office to discuss any changes you propose.

If you participate in USDA programs or the state Farmland Preservation Program, it is very important that you keep your conservation plan up to date. As a program participant you are required to certify every year that you are following your schedule.

To learn more about conservation planning, contact USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Soil Conservation District that serves your county. Trained conservationists are available to meet with you. NRCS office locations, updated program information and applications are available online at http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov.

March 2007

NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help the Land

What is a Conservation Plan?

A conservation plan is a tool designed to help you better manage the natural resources on your farm. An NRCS Soil Conservationist will meet with you to evaluate the soil, water, air, plant and animal resources on your property and offer several alternatives to address the resource conditions. The alternatives you decide to use are recorded in your conservation plan which includes a schedule for installation.

Implementing the conservation plan will help you protect the environment on and off your farm.

NRCS technical experts can help you develop a conservation plan for your farm.

What's in a Conservation Plan?

A conservation plan includes:

- an aerial photo or diagram of your fields;
- a list of your management decisions;
- the location of and schedule for applying new conservation practices;
- a soil map and soil descriptions;
- information sheets explaining how to carry out your specific management decisions;
- a plan for operation and maintenance of practices, if needed.

Benefits of a Conservation Plan

Following your conservation plan has many benefits:

- You will protect your soil and your farm's productivity;
- You will help improve quality of the water in your area;
- You will improve your soil's fertility and manage soil moisture;
- You may attract desirable wildlife by creating nesting sites and winter cover;
- You will protect the productive value of your land for future generations;
- You can more readily comply with environmental regulatory requirements;
- You may be eligible for USDA farm programs.

You make the decisions. The soil conservationist can show you many good alternatives and make some economic comparisons, but you decide what you want to do, when and how.

Example Conservation Plan
For a Grain-Beef Farm

What will you need to do?

You will need to know your crop sequence – what crops you plan to grow in each field. You'll also need to provide information on how your land is farmed, what kind of tillage equipment you use, existing conservation practices, and your crop and livestock plans for the future.

How is a plan developed?

With the soil conservationist, you will analyze your farm, field by field. You will learn the soil types on your farm, the slope and slope lengths of each field. The Revised Universal Soil Loss equation will be used to find out how much soil is eroding on each field.

You make the decisions

With your help, the conservationist will inventory the resource conditions existing on your farm. They will help you interpret the information about your land, its soil, and production capability. You can discuss resource concerns and solutions, field by field.

Then you will decide what changes you can make to protect and improve your land. The soil conservationist will help you by offering a variety of choices, based on the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide for your county.

Next, you will set up a reasonable schedule for applying any needed conservation practices. It may be several years before all your practices are installed. In addition to controlling soil erosion, you can get assistance on other resources concerns, such as pasture and woodland improvement, managing animal waste, wildlife habitat, irrigation water management, and stream bank protection.

You raise corn and soybeans and maintain a herd of beef cattle. You moldboard plow and disk in the spring, and plan to continue growing cash grain on most of your acreage. There are several fields on your farm and you want to control soil erosion.

Calculating soil loss on your field

The Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation estimates the amount of soil erosion caused by water. Five factors are used to figure soil loss:

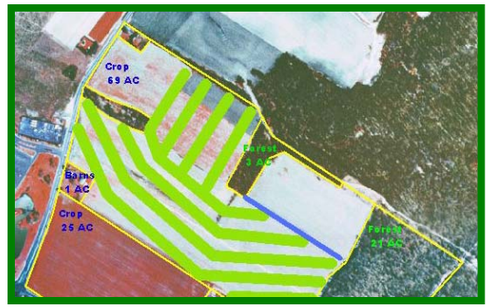
Soil Loss
- rainfall
- soil erodibility
- slope length and steepness
- cropping and management
- erosion control practices and row direction

Notice that only the last two factors, cropping and management and erosion control practices, are in your complete control. These are things you can change to reduce soil erosion.

Options to reduce erosion

After working the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation, you realize that excessive soil erosion occurs on a field.

1. You could farm close to the contour instead of up and down hill, chisel plow instead of moldboard plow, and install a grassed waterway. The waterway will stop the gullying in the lower part of the field.
2. You could use no-till planting and install a grassed waterway.
3. You could construct tile outlet terraces and moldboard plow on the contour.
4. You could add a close-grown crop, such as winter wheat, to your corn-soybean rotation, chisel plow on the contour, and install a grassed waterway.



RECORD OF COOPERATOR DECISIONS

Field	Date	Narrative Record
		CROPLAND
1,2	2007	Conservation Crop Rotation – Corn 3 yr – Soybean 2 yr
1	2007	Stripcropping - 86' wide strips to fit equipment
2	2008	Residue Management – No till - 60% residue left after planting
1	2008	Grassed Waterway
3	2007	Contour Farming – Grain crops planted on the contour
1,2,3	2009	Nutrient Management – Apply nutrients according to soil test results and yield goals
		PASTURE
5	2007	Prescribed Grazing – Maintain optimum forage quality through rotational grazing system.
		WOODLAND
4	2007	Wildlife Upland Habitat Management – Create openings for quail habitat
		FARMSTEAD
6	2008	Waste Storage Facility

Conservation planning makes a difference.

If your field had a 5% slope and a slope length of 200 feet, a tolerable soil loss might be 3 tons per acre per year. But, you and the NRCS professional assess the field and calculate that 8 tons per acre per year are being lost. A few adjustments in your practices can improve your operation by significantly reducing soil loss.

Before:
- Corn-soybean rotation
- Moldboard plow
- Up and down hill

Erosion = 8 tons/acre/year

After:
- Corn-soybean rotation
- Chisel plow
- Contour farming
- Grassed waterway

Erosion = 2 tons/acre/year