

Fact Sheet:

Conservation opportunities for
Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers
Beginning Farmers and Ranchers
Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers

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Overview

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) addresses the unique circumstances and concerns of socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers. It offers voluntary participation, incentives, and applies equity in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and services.

Legislative and Regulatory Changes

Enhancements include streamlined delivery of technical and financial assistance, improved programs and services, and flexibility in decisionmaking (with many decisions made at the Tribal, State, or local level).

The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to set aside:

- Five percent of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds for beginning farmers or ranchers and 5 percent for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers; and
- Five percent of available Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) acres to assist beginning farmers or ranchers and 5 percent to assist socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to “repool” unused funds and acres and make them available to all applicants. It

also provides up to 90 percent of costs associated with conservation planning and implementation for socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers or ranchers. Up to 30 percent of such payments may be provided in advance for purchasing materials or contracting.

Definitions

For program participation, the following definitions apply:

Socially Disadvantaged:

A socially disadvantaged group is defined as a group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group, without regard to their individual qualities. Gender designation alone does not define a covered group. The groups include:

- American Indians or Alaska Natives
- Asians
- Blacks or African Americans
- Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
- Hispanics

A socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher is defined as a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. For legal entity applicants, the majority of members and stockholders of the legal entity must be socially disadvantaged. Participants should self-certify as belonging to a socially disadvantaged group.



Beginning Farmer or Ranchers:

- Have not operated a farm or ranch, or have operated a farm or ranch for less than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of a legal entity.
- Materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.
- If under contract with an individual, or with the immediate family, material and substantial participation requires that the individual provides substantial day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch, consistent with the practices in the county or State where the farm is located.
- If under contract with a legal entity or joint operation, all members must materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch. This requires members to provide some amount of management, or labor and management necessary for day-to-day activities, without which the operation of the farm or ranch would be seriously impaired.

Applicants who self-certify eligibility as a beginning farmer or rancher may be asked to provide documentation. Accurate information is the responsibility of the applicant. False certifications are subject to criminal and civil fraud statutes.

Limited Resource Farmer or Ranchers:

- Have direct or indirect gross farm sales less than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years.
- Have a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county's median household income in each of the previous 2 years.

An entity or joint operation can be a limited resource farmer or rancher if all individual members independently qualify.

A Limited Resource Farmer Self-Determination Tool is available online at: <http://www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.

More Information

For more information about these and other Farm Bill topics, please visit the USDA Web site at www.usda.gov/farmbill or NRCS Web sites www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs and www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/.