

The Farm Bill and Indiana



The federal Farm Bill provides over \$100 million per year in conservation assistance to Indiana farmers, including paying a share of the cost of installing conservation practices, rental payments and easement payments for vulnerable land taken out of production, and conservation planning and other advice provided to Indiana farmers. The funds help Indiana farmers be better stewards of the state's land, water, soils and wildlife, providing conservation and economic benefits throughout the state.

Working Lands: in 2019, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provided nearly \$32 million in assistance in Indiana, and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provided nearly \$19 million more in Indiana. 1,503 EQIP contracts put conservation measures in place on nearly 228,000 acres of land in Indiana in 2019. 92 CSP contracts helped farmers address resource problems by putting in place measures like nutrient management strategies, reducing the impact of pesticides on waterways, or planting cover crops, on over 44,000 acres.

Wetland and Grassland Easements: in 2019 the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program provided nearly \$13 million that funded conservation easements protecting 1,244 acres of wetlands in Indiana. From 2014 through 2019, the program protected nearly 9,000 acres of Indiana wetlands that remain in private farmland.



Ron Nichols, NRCS

The Conservation Stewardship Program helps farmers improve their grazing systems.



Jeremy Singer USDA ARS

USDA Conservation programs help farmers add cover crops to their conservation system.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) provides funding for specific conservation practices that address critical natural resource problems through partnered initiatives in carefully targeted areas. In 2018, an RCPP project was funded in Indiana that will create at least 2,000 acres of grassland pollinator habitat. Through 2018, contracts provided through RCPP funding are included in the CSP, EQIP, and ACEP totals. Beginning in 2019, as a result of the 2018 Farm Bill, the RCPP is a free-standing program and contract information will be reported separately. USDA decided to award RCPP projects at the national level rather than allocating some RCPP money to each state, and none of the FY 2019 RCPP awards were for projects in Indiana.

Conservation Reserve Program: in January, 2020, over 18,000 Indiana farms had Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, covering over 214,000 acres of land. The program provides \$40 million in annual rental payments to farmers. Nearly 169,000 acres of Indiana CRP — 79% of the state's CRP acres — are high-value 'continuous signup' contracts, including wildlife habitat, wetland restoration, and buffer strips. That includes over 20,000 acres enrolled in Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts, toward a goal of 26,500 acres. These 14-15 year CREP contracts reduce polluted agricultural runoff in targeted watersheds by restoring wetlands and planting filter strips and forested and grassland buffers along streams.

Indiana CRP contracts average less than 12 acres per farm, and about \$2,200 per year in rental payments. Because of their small size and small annual payment, the CRP does not provide a large incentive for Indiana landowners to enroll in the program. USDA has substantially reduced annual rental rates for CRP contracts, and reduced or eliminated the incentive payments that once made CRP contracts attractive to farmers. As a result, enrollment in continuous CRP contracts plummeted nationwide in 2018 and 2019. In the General CRP signup in 2020, USDA accepted about 18,500 Indiana acres in new CRP contracts. However, 34,579 acres of CRP contracts expire in 2020 — about one-sixth of Indiana's CRP acres. With the low CRP rental rates and incentives now in place, that could mean a net loss of over 16,000 acres of CRP.

Grassland Loss: Since pioneers settled in Indiana, over 99% of the state's native tallgrass prairie has been lost to agriculture or urban development, and the small remnant prairies that remain are of tremendous biological value. The loss continues: From 2007 to 2017, Indiana lost 27% of its remaining privately owned pasture, a loss of over 420 square miles of grassland. The Farm Bill's Sodsaver provision reduces the federal crop insurance subsidy for farmers who break out native prairie to produce crops, but it should be expanded beyond the six Prairie Pothole states in the Northern Great Plains where it operates. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program can provide permanent protection for native prairies, and the CRP Grasslands program can provide long-term protection and management, but neither has been used extensively yet in Indiana to protect grasslands.

Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education: SARE funds on-farm research, driven by farmers, to identify, test, and provide educational outreach on farming and ranching methods that reduce the use of off-farm inputs, improve productivity, and address conservation issues. SARE has funded 137 projects in Indiana, from creating an online budget tool for livestock producers to support for the IndyGrown urban farm cooperative.

Farming Opportunities Training & Outreach: The 2018 Farm Bill combined the Beginning Farmers & Ranchers Development Program and the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers program (Section 2501) into a Farming Opportunities Training & Outreach program. Past projects funded include a Purdue University effort to provide educational resources needed by beginning farmers.

Local Agriculture Market Program: the 2018 Farm Bill combined several USDA programs that support farmers markets, local and regional food systems, and value-added initiatives by farmers into the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP). Local food systems proved critical when the pandemic disrupted food supplies.

Other Conservation Programs

Conserving Wetlands: Indiana has lost over 85% of its historic wetlands, which provide vital habitat for migrating birds and local wildlife, filter polluted runoff, recharge groundwater, and help reduce flooding. The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funds partnerships that leverage state, federal, and private dollars to deliver wetland conservation projects. Since its inception, the program has provided \$13 million in federal funds to leverage \$45 million in partner contributions that are conserving 60,725 acres of wetlands in Indiana.

Lynn Betts, NRCS



Land & Water Conservation Fund: The Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established in 1964 to direct a portion of federal offshore oil and gas lease revenue into conservation projects across the nation. LWCF projects acquire, build, and maintain public parks, ballfields, and swimming pools; improve access to public land through the purchase of inholdings and easements; and support hunting and fishing access on public lands. Indiana has received more than \$207 million in LWCA funds that helped protect areas like the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Hoosier National Forest, and Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge.

Izaak Walton League and Indiana



The Izaak Walton League of America was founded in 1922 to conserve outdoor America for future generations. The League's 54 founders, all avid anglers, named the organization after Izaak Walton, 17th century author of *The Compleat Angler*, a classic book about the art and spirit of fishing. We are one of America's oldest conservation organizations, defending America's soil, air, woods, waters, and wildlife by bringing good science and common sense conservation to public policy.

The Izaak Walton League has 21 Chapters throughout Indiana, with over 4,200 active members. We have been involved in agricultural policy since the 1930's, when the League argued for better soil conservation in the first federal Farm Bill. In the 1950's the League's Walton Soil Plan presaged the federal Soil Bank. Today the League is focused on promoting soil health practices that improve water quality, reduce flooding, store carbon, and restore healthy soils, and on restoring and protecting America's wetlands and waterways.