



The Farm Bill and Minnesota

The federal Farm Bill provided over \$252 million in 2018 for farm and ranch conservation through cost-share assistance, rental payments, easement payments, or technical assistance provided to Minnesotans. That funding helped Minnesota farmers be better stewards of Minnesota's land, water and soils, and it provided conservation and economic benefits throughout Minnesota.

Working Lands – in 2018, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provided \$80 million in payments to Minnesota farmers, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program provided nearly \$36 million in payments to farmers in Minnesota. CSP funds helped Minnesota farmers put in place advanced Integrated Pest Management systems, improve their nutrient management system, install wildlife-friendly fencing, widen buffer strips and adopt other conservation systems. EQIP funds helped farmers upgrade livestock confinement systems, implement better grazing management plans, install conservation buffers and adopt other practices.

Minnesota has a variety of Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects, which have coordinated CSP, EQIP, and ACEP contracts with state and private partner funding to target resource concerns in a specific area. Examples of projects include restoring trout habitat in the Driftless Area, improving working lands for monarch butterflies, managing prairie grasslands for pollinators, and better management of feedlots. Under the 2018 Farm Bill, the RCPP is now a free-standing program that will continue to leverage state and private funds to focus conservation solutions in a targeted watershed or area.

Wetland and Grassland Easements – in 2016 Minnesota celebrated the 1,000th USDA conservation easement in the state. Over 129,000 acres of critically important wetlands, native prairie and other lands are now protected thanks to USDA conservation easement programs, including the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. In 2018 the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program provided \$2.4 million which was used to protect 321 acres of wetlands in Minnesota. From 2014 through 2018, ACEP provided \$13 million in Minnesota which provided protection on 1,907 acres, mostly wetlands, in Minnesota. Demand for easements continues to far out-strip available funding in Minnesota.

Conservation Reserve Program – over 28,600 Minnesota farms have Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, covering over 1 million acres of land. They provide over \$136 million in annual rental payments to farmers. About 68% of CRP acres in Minnesota are high-value contracts, including over 444,000 acres of wetland practices like wetland restoration and buffers to protect wetlands -- 3rd most of any state. Over 95,000 acres are now enrolled in State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement program to restore tallgrass prairie in Minnesota. Other special initiatives provide for buffer strips along streams to protect water quality and pollinator habitat. Nation-wide, about one-third of CRP acres are in special initiatives, so Minnesota is doing far more to target CRP acres where they will do the most good.

Minnesota has a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program initiative which currently includes over 27,500 acres enrolled in the state. The Minnesota CREP combines USDA payments for buffer strips and restored wetlands with state payments to put conservation easements to protect the land long-term. However, the vast majority of Minnesota's high-value practices, over 626,500 acres, are enrolled in non-CREP continuous sign-up contracts. In late 2019, USDA opened the first CRP General Signup since 2013.

USDA also re-opened enrollment for some CRP continuous signup practices focused on water quality, but not many wildlife practices. USDA also announced it would re-open enrollment under some CREP agreements.

Crop Insurance – federally subsidized crop insurance provides many benefits to farmers, but current premiums don't recognize that farmers who build the health of their soil through conservation practices reduce their risk of a crop loss. These low risk farmers deserve a 'good driver discount' that would recognize their reduced risk to the crop insurance system and encourage conservation practices.

Izaak Walton League and Minnesota

The Izaak Walton League of America was founded in 1922 to conserve outdoor America for future generations. The League's 54 founders, who were 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 the earliest of America's conservation organizations, setting a course to defend wild America by changing public policy.

The Izaak Walton League has 16 local Chapters throughout Minnesota, and over 1,000 active members. Our organization has been involved in agricultural policy since 1937, when a League resolution called for a national program to retire fragile fields in mountainous areas from agricultural use.