

The Farm Bill and Nebraska



The federal Farm Bill provided over \$175 million in 2017 in conservation dollars through cost-share assistance, rental payments, easement payments, and technical assistance provided to Nebraskans. That funding helps Nebraska farmers and ranchers be better stewards of the state's land, water, soils, and wildlife, and it provides conservation and economic benefits throughout Nebraska.

Working Lands – in 2017, the Conservation Stewardship Program committed nearly \$62 million in payments to Nebraska farmers and ranchers, covering 1.4 million acres of farm and ranch land. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program provided \$36 million for contracts that included nearly 458,000 acres of farm and ranch land in Nebraska. CSP and EQIP funds helped farmers and ranchers put in place nutrient management strategies, adopt conservation practices like cover crops and conservation crop rotations, and put in place rotational grazing systems for livestock.

Conservation Reserve Program – Nearly 12,000 Nebraska farms have Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, covering nearly 1.1 million acres of land. The contracts provide over \$72 million in annual rental payments to farmers. 41% of those acres are CRP General contracts, typically highly erodible cropland. 32% are CRP Grassland contracts which protect and conserve existing grasslands vulnerable to conversion. The remaining 27% includes high-value Continuous CRP enrollments, such as rare and declining habitats like tallgrass prairie that benefits greater prairie chickens. Nebraska has over 43,600 acres enrolled in a Republican – Platte Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) initiative that helps reduce consumptive water use by over 43,000 acre feet and provides wildlife habitat in central and western Nebraska. Nation-wide, about one-third of CRP acres are in CREP and other special initiatives.

Native Prairie – despite relatively low crop prices, Nebraska continues to lose native prairie that is being converted to cropland. In 2012, when crop prices were higher, Nebraska lost almost 55,000 acres (over 85 square miles) of native prairie converted to cropland in a single year. From 2016-2018, USDA accepted over 342,000 acres of Nebraska grassland into the CRP Grasslands program (above), which protects grassland from conversion to cropland or urban development and provides wildlife benefits.

Wetland and Grassland Easements – in 2017 the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program provided \$6.1 million that helped fund conservation easements in Nebraska. From 2014 to 2017, \$16.9 million provided funding for 9,082 acres of easements in Nebraska, protecting over 5,300 acres of working prairie and 3,775 acres of wetlands. Because of budget cuts for easements included in the 2014 Farm Bill, the number of wetland easements protected nationwide dropped dramatically from before.

Focused Conservation – the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) has helped target USDA conservation dollars where they will do the most good and will leverage state and private funds. In Nebraska, *that includes RCP projects that conserve grassland habitat for greater prairie chickens and bobwhite quail in southeast Nebraska,* For 2017, funding for those initiatives is included in the numbers shown above for ACEP, CSP, and EQIP.

Izaak Walton League and Nebraska

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

The Izaak Walton League Nebraska Division has 13 local Chapters throughout the state, and over 1,700 active member families in Nebraska. 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.