

# The Farm Bill and Virginia



The federal Farm Bill provides nearly \$48 million per year in conservation assistance through conservation rental payments, easement payments, cost-share for practices, or technical assistance provided to Virginia farmers. That funding helped farmers and ranchers be better stewards of the Commonwealth's land, water, soil, forests, and wildlife, providing conservation and economic benefits throughout Virginia.

**Working Lands** – in 2018, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program committed over \$36 million for farmers in Virginia, providing conservation benefits on over 84,000 acres of land. EQIP helps farmers design nutrient management plans, adopt practices like cover crops and more diverse crop rotations, and install livestock waste facilities. The Conservation Stewardship Program committed nearly \$8 million to aid farmers in the Commonwealth, providing conservation on over 64,000 acres. CSP contracts help farmers improve their grazing management systems, adopt high-level Integrated Pest Management, and install wildlife-friendly fencing and other practices to provide conservation on their entire operation.



Jeff Vanuga, NRCS

*The Conservation Stewardship Program helps farmers improve their grazing systems.*

**Wetland and Grassland Easements** – The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program provides funds to restore and protect wetlands and other farm lands through conservation easements. In 2018 the program provided \$1.2 million in Virginia, and from 2014 through 2018, \$8.6 million has helped protect and restore 1,603 acres of wetlands and farmland in Virginia.

**Conservation Reserve Program** – nearly 2,800 Virginia farms have Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, covering 33,577 acres of land and providing about \$2.3 million in annual rental payments to farmers. That represents a drop of more than 11,000 acres in Virginia in just two years as USDA has been slow to enroll landowners in CRP contracts. 66% of those acres are enrolled in “continuous signup” practices like buffer strips, filter strips, and other high-value conservation measures that reduce polluted runoff of sediment, fertilizer and livestock manure into local streams.

Virginia has had an active Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program since 2000, and currently has 18,637 acres enrolled in streamside buffer strips and restored wetlands, towards a goal of enrolling 45,000 acres in CREP contracts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and along southern rivers. Nationally, just over one-third of CRP acres are in continuous signup special initiatives, so Virginia is doing far more to target CRP acres where they will do the most good.

**Targeted Conservation** – the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) focuses USDA conservation dollars where they will do the most good and will leverage state and private funds. In Virginia, five RCPP projects meet national, state, and local conservation needs, helping farmers reduce nutrient and sediment runoff through soil health practices, increasing oyster bed habitat in the Chesapeake Bay, and helping dairy farms protect water quality. Funds allocated through those RCPP initiatives for 2018 are included in the numbers shown above for ACEP, CSP, and EQIP.

**Forestry** — Forests cover 15.8 million acres of Virginia, about 62% of the Commonwealth. Two-thirds of those forest acres are owned by private individuals, and about 11% are in Virginia's two National Forests. All of the Farm Bill programs noted above, along with the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, can be used to conserve or protect nonindustrial private forest lands.

**Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education** — the SARE program funds on-farm research, driven by farmers, to identify, test, and provide educational outreach on farming and ranching methods that reduce the use

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*Virginia's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program helps farmers plant buffers that protect streams from polluted runoff.*

of off-farm inputs, improve productivity, and address conservation issues. SARE has provided over \$5 million to fund 118 SARE projects in Virginia, including recent projects that have addressed challenges related to cover crops, honey production, wine grapes, vegetable pests, dairies, and forage for livestock producers.

**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 (FOTO) program. Grants in Virginia helped fund the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program, the Arcadia Center’s Veteran Farmer Program, and beginning farmer education by Appalachian Sustainable Development.

**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). Past grants in Virginia have helped breweries, cideries, meat processors, organic farmers, peanut producers, and even a mushroom farm develop and market new products.

## *Other Conservation Programs*

**Conserving Wetlands** – the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funds partnerships that leverage state, federal, and private dollars to deliver wetland conservation projects that benefit a wide variety of ducks, geese, other waterfowl, fish and wildlife. Since its inception, the program has provided \$19 million in federal funds to leverage \$71 million in partner contributions that are conserving 55,430 acres of wetlands in Virginia. Another \$10 million in NAWCA grants has leveraged \$31 million in partner contributions to conserve over 103,000 acres of wetlands through 11 regional projects that include Virginia and neighboring states. Virginia has lost about 40% of its historic wetlands, which provide vital habitat for migrating birds and local wildlife, filter polluted runoff, recharge groundwater, and help reduce flooding.



Lynda Richardson, 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. In Virginia, more than 400 projects have benefitted from more than \$80 million in LWCF funding. That includes protection of the Rappahannock River Valley and Back Bay National Wildlife Refuges, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, many Civil War battlefield sites, and many local parks and sports fields.

## *Izaak Walton League and Virginia*

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, 17<sup>th</sup> 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 first Izaak Walton League chapters in Virginia were organized in the 1920’s. Over the decades, the League helped establish the Virginia State Park system, secure passage of the federal Pittman-Robertson Act (named in part after Senator Willis Robertson, a League leader in Virginia), and enact Virginia’s water pollution control law. The League defeated the Salem Church Dam on the Rappahannock and a proposed oil refinery on the James River, helped secure a ban on phosphate detergents, and established and continue to support the Virginia Save Our Streams program. Today the Izaak Walton League has 18 local Chapters in Virginia, and over 8,500 active member families in the state.

