

THE NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL WATER RESOURCES ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (AgWRAP)
Fiscal Year 2015 Detailed Implementation Plan
September 2014

Background

The North Carolina Agricultural Water Resources Assistance Program was authorized through Session Law 2011-145, and became effective on July 1, 2011. This program, herein referred to as AgWRAP, was established to assist farmers and landowners in doing any one or more of the following:

- Identify opportunities to increase water use efficiency, availability and storage;
- Implement best management practices (BMPs) to conserve and protect water resources;
- Increase water use efficiency;
- Increase water storage and availability for agricultural purposes.

AgWRAP is administered by the North Carolina Soil and Water Conservation Commission and implemented through local soil and water conservation districts. The commission meets with stakeholders to gather input on AgWRAP's development and administration through the AgWRAP Review Committee. AgWRAP has received the following state appropriations:

- FY2012: \$1,000,000
- FY2013: \$500,000
- FY2014: \$1,000,000; \$500,000 available statewide, \$500,000 limited to counties affected by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) settlement: Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga and Yancey counties.
- FY2015: \$1,477,500

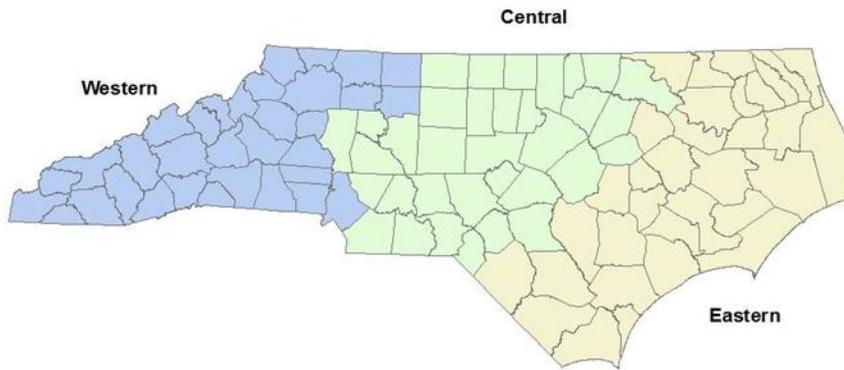
Up to 15% of these funds can be used by the Division of Soil and Water Conservation and districts to provide technical and engineering assistance, and to administer the program.

Fiscal Year 2015 Allocation Strategy

Due to the high cost of some of the program's eligible best management practices, and the limited funding for the program, the Commission will award two allocations for AgWRAP.

- 1. Competitive regional application process for new pond construction and pond repair/retrofits: 55% of available BMP funding.**
 - a. The regions, as depicted in Figure 1, will be eligible to receive 1/3 of the amount of funds in the regional pool.
 - b. Applications will be approved using the same ranking criteria for each region.
 - c. Should a region not have sufficient applications to fund, the commission will allocate the remaining funds by approving applications in other regions, funding applications by highest score.

Figure 1: Regions for AgWRAP allocations



2. District allocations: 45% of available BMP funding.

- a. Allocations will be made to all districts requesting funds in their PY2015 Strategy Plan.
- b. Allocation parameters are as follows:

Parameter	Percent
Number of farms (total operations): Census of Agriculture	20%
Total acres of land in farms (includes the sum of all cropland, woodland pastured, permanent pasture (excluding cropland and woodland), plus farmstead/ponds/lvstk bldg): Census of Agriculture	20%
Market Value of Sales: Census of Agriculture	10%
Agricultural Water Use: NCDA&CS Agricultural Statistics Division, 3 year average of most recent NC Water Use Published Survey Data	20%
Population Density: State Demographics NC, Office of State Budget and Management, latest certified data available	30%

Conservation plan requirement

All approved AgWRAP applications must have a completed conservation plan prior to contract approval or the district requesting design assistance from division engineering staff. The commission is requiring this plan, which is the cooperator’s record of decisions, to help districts evaluate water supply resource concerns including inadequate water for livestock, inefficient water use for irrigation and/or inefficient moisture management. Conservation plans will ensure that alternative practices are considered and that the recommended practices address the identified resource concerns to maintain AgWRAP BMPs through their contract life.

Program Guidelines

AgWRAP will be implemented using a pilot approach for this fourth year. Rule drafting is currently underway.

The agricultural water definition, from Protecting Agriculture Water Resources in North Carolina Strategic Plan (February 2011) will be used to determine eligibility for AgWRAP.

Agricultural water is considered to be any water on farms, from surface or subsurface sources, that is used in the production, maintenance, protection or on-farm preparation or treatment of agriculture commodities or products as necessary to grow and/or prepare them for on-farm use

or transfer into any form of trade as is normally done with agricultural plant or animal commerce. This expressly includes any on-farm cleaning or processing to make the agricultural product ready for sale or other transfer to any consumer in a usable form. It does not include water used in the manufacture or extended processing of plants or animals or their products when the processor is not the grower or producer and/or is beyond the first handler of the farm product.

All eligible operations must have been in existence for more than one year, and expansions to existing operations are eligible for the program.

The percent cost share for all BMPs is 75%. Limited resource and beginning farmers and farmers enrolled in Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture Districts are eligible to receive 90% cost share. The contract maintenance period of the majority of practices is 10 years.

Soil and water conservation districts can adopt additional guidelines for the program as they implement AgWRAP locally.

Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Goals

- I. Conduct a competitive regional allocation process for selected AgWRAP BMPs.
 - a. Fund projects in each of the division's regions: western, central and eastern.
 - b. Distribute funding for BMPs among the following agricultural sectors identified in the Protecting Agriculture Water Resources in North Carolina Strategic Plan (February 2011): aquaculture, field crops, forestry, fruit and vegetable, green industry, livestock and poultry (and forages and drinking water for same).

- II. Allocate funds to soil and water conservation districts for all other BMPs
 - a. Award funds to all districts requesting an allocation.
 - b. Allocate funds to districts from all geographic areas of the state.
 - c. Encumber contracts for conservation practices in all agricultural sectors as described above.

- III. Implement Job Approval Authority Process for AgWRAP BMPs
 - a. Revise job approval category requirements to ensure technical competency.
 - b. Provide training for district employees to earn job approval.
 - c. Maintain the job approval database.

- IV. Conduct training for districts
 - a. Continue to train districts on the program.
 - b. Provide technical training for the required skills to plan and implement approved AgWRAP BMPs.
 - c. Maintain the AgWRAP website (<http://www.ncagr.gov/swc/agwrap.htm>) with all relevant information.

Best Management Practices

Additional practices may be adopted by the Soil and Water Conservation Commission and introduced during the program year.

(1) Agricultural water supply/reuse pond: Construct agricultural ponds for water supply for irrigation or livestock watering. Benefits may include water supply, erosion control, flood control, and sediment and nutrient reductions from farm fields. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.

(2) Agricultural pond repair/retrofit: Repair or retrofit of existing agricultural pond systems. Benefits may include water supply, erosion control, flood control, and sediment and nutrient reductions from farm fields. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.

(3) Agricultural pond sediment removal: Remove sediment from existing agricultural ponds to increase water storage capacity. Benefits may include water supply, erosion control, flood control, and sediment and nutrient reductions from farm fields. The minimum life expectancy is 1 year. Cooperators are ineligible to reapply for assistance for this practice for a period of 10 years; unless the sedimentation is occurring due to no fault of the cooperator.

(4) Agricultural water collection and reuse system: Construct an agricultural water management and/or collection system for water reuse or irrigation for agricultural operations. These systems may include any of the following: water storage tanks, pumps, and/or water conveyances. Benefits may include reduced demand on the water supply by reuse and decrease withdrawal from existing water supplies. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.

(5) Baseflow interceptor (streamside pickup): Improve springs and seeps alongside a stream, near the banks, but not in the channel by excavating, cleaning, capping to collect and/or store water for agricultural use. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.

(6) Conservation Irrigation Conversion: Modify an existing overhead spray irrigation system to increase the efficiency and uniformity of irrigation water application. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.

(7) Micro-irrigation System: Install an environmentally safe system for the conveyance and distribution of water, chemicals and fertilizer to agricultural fields for crop production. Replace and/or reduce other types of irrigation and fertilization with a micro-irrigation system for frequent application of small quantities of water on or below the soil surface: as drops, tiny streams or miniature spray through emitters or applicators placed along a water delivery line. This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to efficiently and uniformly apply irrigation water and maintain soil moisture for plant growth. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.

(8) Well: Construct a drilled, driven or dug well to supply water from an underground source for irrigation, livestock and poultry, aquaculture, or on-farm processing. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.