

THE NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL WATER RESOURCES ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (AgWRAP)
Fiscal Year 2012 Detailed Implementation Plan
January 2012

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 is required to meet with stakeholders annually to gather input on AgWRAP's development and administration. This year three workgroups comprised of numerous agencies, organizations, and partners met regularly to develop recommendations for Commission consideration for this pilot year of the program. This fiscal year, AgWRAP received \$1,000,000 in non-recurring state appropriations, of which up to 15% of 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 2012 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 awarded two allocations for AgWRAP.

1. State allocation for new pond construction: \$340,000 (40% of available BMP funding)
Funding for the state allocation is only available for the agricultural water supply pond BMP.
2. District allocations: \$510,000 (60% of available BMP funding)

These percentages allow the majority of AgWRAP BMP funding to remain at the district level. This will continue the districts' locally led process of program implementation, similar to the Agriculture Cost Share Program and Community Conservation Assistance Program.

Program Guidelines

AgWRAP will be implemented using a pilot approach for this first year. Rule making will be based on program implementation this year, and will incorporate lessons learned from implementation.

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 2012 Annual Goals

- I. Determine best management practices for the program.
 - a. Approve BMP standards and specifications.
 - b. Develop an average cost list for approved BMPs.

- II. Conduct a competitive state allocation for new agricultural water supply ponds
 - a. Fund a minimum of one pond per geographic area: Coastal Plain, Piedmont, Mountains
 - b. Fund a minimum of 15 ponds with this year's appropriated funding.
 - c. Distribute funding for ponds 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).

- III. 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.

- IV. Develop a Job Approval Authority Process for AgWRAP BMPs
 - a. Create job approval categories.
 - b. Construct and maintain a job approval database.

- V. Develop a water balance tool to assist districts in conducting site assessments
 - a. Work with technical experts to create the tool.
 - b. Provide training and support to districts once tool is available.

- VI. Conduct programmatic training for districts
- a. Provide an orientation for districts on the new program.
 - b. Work with districts to answer frequently asked questions for the program.
 - c. Maintain the AgWRAP website (<http://www.ncagr.gov/sw/agwrap.htm>) with all relevant information.

Best Management Practices

- (1) Agricultural water supply pond: Constructing 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 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.
- (3) 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.
- (4) Conservation Irrigation Conversion: Modifies an existing overhead spray irrigation system to increase the efficiency and uniformity of irrigation water application. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.
- (5) Micro-irrigation System: An environmentally safe system for the conveyance and distribution of water, chemicals and fertilizer to agricultural fields for crop production. A micro-irrigation system is 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.
- (6) Well: Constructing a drilled, driven or dug well to supply water from an underground source. The minimum life expectancy is 10 years.