



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) North Carolina - The Update

Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Program Updates

Obligations for FY 2026

FY 2026 Farm Bill conservation financial assistance programs, special funding pools and initiatives in North Carolina included:

EQIP allocations received during the current sign up were allocated \$43,931,000. To date, 318 contracts have been obligated in EQIP totaling \$37,697,677, this includes both Classic and RPP.

CSP allocations received were \$23,749,770. To date, 258 contracts have been obligated in CSP totaling \$20,161,205, this includes Classic and RPP.

As we look ahead, NRCS-NC is preparing for FY2027. The agency will hold its annual programs strategic planning meeting to discuss the administrative timeline for our financial assistance programs from September 8th-11th. Our application deadlines for CSP, EQIP, and ACEP will be discussed for FY2027. A formal announcement for the deadline will be published at a later date.

Easements

It was a historic year for our easement team, between closing our 100th easement with NCDA&CS and unprecedented funding our team rose to the challenge. To date that funding has accomplished the following:

- 4 parcels in RCPP for \$2,967,226,
- 32 parcels in ACEP-ALE for \$26,256,292

General Updates

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)

TS Helene

35 Damage Survey Reports (DSRs) were approved by the National Headquarters (NHQ), covering 530 sites in the amount of \$115,988,411. Additionally, 4 DSRs that are still in the portal are pending, covering 78 sites for an estimated \$10,234,060.

TS Debby/Cyclone 8

Robeson: 1 reach, DSR:
37-07-26-5045-639 Funded
Robeson/Scotland: 8 reaches, DSR:
37-07-26-5045-693 Funded
Robeson/Hoke: 12 reaches, DSR:
37-09-26-5045-692 Funded
Robeson/Bladen: 7 reaches, DSR:
37-07-26-5045-691 Funded

Agreement document has been finalized for \$38,531,376 (FA) and \$5,300,000 (TA) and provided sponsors for review and signature. NRCS held a pre-award meeting on Aug13th.

TS Chantal

Orange County:DSR: 37-04-25-5046-001, total eligible sites: 1

The active agreement has been finalized for \$112,612 (FA), and \$15,000 (TA). NRCS held post-award meeting on July 15th.

North Carolina
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

NRCS Chief Priorities and Goals

1. Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land

Goal: Reduce the loss of productive working lands and safeguard the long-term viability of America's agricultural landscapes.

- Expand targeted conservation easement programs to slow the loss of 5,000 acres of farmland per day.
- Partner with local governments and land trusts to prioritize farmland preservation.
- Advocate for policies that incentivize keeping land in agricultural production.
- Promote regenerative practices that strengthen soil health and ensure long-term productivity and profitability.
- Integrate whole farm planning into conservation efforts to provide comprehensive support to farmers.

2. Shift to Outcome-Based Conservation and Farmer Empowerment

Goal: Measure success through outcomes and empower farmers with data, recognition, and market access.

- Move beyond acres and dollars to track real improvements in water management, soil health, and natural vitality.
- Recognize farmers as the heroes of conservation and highlight their accomplishments through data.
- Support precision agriculture and digital farming tools to enhance productivity and profit.
- Help farmers achieve their goals and receive regulatory and marketplace credit for the voluntary work they have accomplished.

3. Recenter Field Engagement and Technical Assistance

Goal: Re-establish NRCS's presence in the field to deliver hands-on, personalized support to farmers while building and equipping the next generation of conservation professionals.

- Reallocate staff time from administrative tasks to direct, field-based service delivery.
- Train and deploy certified conservation planners quickly and effectively.
- Build the next robust generation of technical service providers to ensure producers continue receiving expert, on-the-ground support.
- Flip the service model: meet farmers where they are, not just in the office.
- Use mobile tools and digital platforms to co-create conservation plans on-site.

4. Expand Wildlife Conservation and Outdoor Access

Goal: Strengthen voluntary conservation efforts that improve wildlife habitat, expand outdoor access, and support rural communities while respecting private property rights and keeping working lands productive.

- Support voluntary, landowner-led conservation that improves wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Expand access for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependent recreation through locally led partnerships.
- Work with farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, states, and tribes to deliver practical conservation solutions on working lands.
- Strengthen rural economies by connecting conservation outcomes with outdoor recreation and land stewardship.
- Ensure wildlife conservation efforts remain incentive-based, locally driven, and respectful of private property rights.

5. Strengthen Partnerships by Streamlining Processes and Accountability

Goal: Leverage partnerships as force multipliers while reducing internal friction to accelerate conservation outcomes.

- Accept third-party certified conservation plans that meet or exceed NRCS standards.
- Strengthen local decision-making while maintaining scientific integrity.
- Increase accountability while simultaneously improving responsiveness and services to producers.
- Align partner strengths to maximize measurable conservation plans for producers.
- Support on-farm partnerships that deliver Farmer First, direct-to-producer, conservation services and payments.

6. Optimize Mission Delivery by Strengthening Workforce Culture

Goal: Allow employees to thrive by empowering them to establish a culture based on trust, transparency, and individual growth.

- Recruit and employ candidates with up-to-date technology knowledge and expertise.
- Work to retain experienced and highly skilled employees to share their knowledge with early professionals, thus maintaining a knowledgeable workforce.
- Develop and implement a detailed and all-encompassing nationwide training plan to support workforce in acquisition of new skills and improvement of existing competencies.
- Ensure employees are participating in opportunities that enhance professional development.

7. Modernize NRCS Infrastructure and Technology

Goal: Transform NRCS into a digitally agile agency that empowers staff and farmers through modern tools and systems.

- Ensure adequate broadband connectivity in every county office to eliminate digital bottlenecks.
- Integrate core software systems into a unified, cloud-based platform for in-field technical service.
- Implement a "One Farmer, One File" system to streamline data access and reduce duplication.
- Replace paper-heavy workflows with real-time digital conservation planning.

National Updates

SE FireMap Viewer 2.0

The SE FireMap Viewer 2.0 is a geospatial platform tool that helps land managers, fire practitioners, and conservation partners better understand where wildfires and prescribed fires are happening across the Southeast. The latest version significantly expands on its predecessor's capabilities by offering improved, high-resolution tracking of historic fire patterns extending back 30 years, including fire frequency, fire free intervals, and the year of the last burn detection.

The tool is just one of NRCS' efforts to modernize its tools and systems to empower staff and producers – keeping working lands in working hands. The SE FireMap Viewer 2.0 integrates with the NRCS Conservation Desktop, helping technical planners advise producers on whole-farm planning that improves land health and long-term productivity.

USDA Clarifies Wetland Determinations to Provide Certainty to Farmers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is putting farmers first and supporting government accountability by providing clear guidance around wetland determinations, which helps inform agricultural producers' decisions for their operations. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) published an interim final rule that ensures most determinations made since 1990 are considered certified, and producers can rely on the determinations to work farmland.

Through this interim final rule, NRCS addressed inconsistencies in how wetland determinations have been certified and issued in the past. It aligns USDA policy with statutory requirements, protects producer reliance interests, and reduces unnecessary administrative burden by preventing the reinterpretation or replacement of previously certified determinations unless the producer asks for a review.

Specifically, the interim final rule ensures all wetland determinations issued after Nov. 28, 1990, are certified if:

- the producer was notified of the determination; and
- the producer was given appeal rights at the time.

Farmers can rely on the decision to install drainage, clear land, and conduct other land alternations without risking USDA program eligibility so long as the determination shows the area is not a wetland in accordance with the Wetland Conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985.

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