

**Cropland Conversion
(Grass, Trees, and Wildlife Plantings)**

Definition/Purpose

Cropland Conversion is the establishment of a conservation cover of grass, trees or wildlife plantings on fields previously used for crop production to improve water quality. Benefits may include reduced soil erosion, sedimentation and pollution from dissolved and sediment-attached substances.

General Policies

1. Cropland Conversion can only be used on land that has a cropping history two of the last five years. This practice must not be used on idle farmland that has grown up in natural vegetation and that does not exhibit a water quality concern.
2. Cost Share Program funds can be used to convert cropland not eroding greater than "T" to grass and trees by demonstrating a reduction of nutrient loading to a nearby water source, due to reducing soil loss or reducing fertilizer application.
3. Trees, permanent wildlife food and cover, native herbaceous species for pollinators or other vegetation may be used instead of grass for cropland conversion if site specifications are met.
4. When determining the acreage for which payments can be made for this practice, only the measured acreage planted shall be considered. The area occupied by farm roads, best management practices, ditches, structures, etc., shall not be considered planted acreage.
5. Vegetative cover (grass, trees or wildlife plantings) must be maintained for a period of 10 years after the vegetation is planted.

Grass/Wildlife Policies

6. If converting crop fields for grazing, the cooperator must provide at their own cost any livestock exclusion fencing, watering facilities, stream crossing, etc., that are needed to protect water quality.
7. The cooperator must not allow cost shared fields to be overgrazed. The cooperator should manage grazing heights (shown in the North Carolina State University Forage Facts Grazing Guidance) to minimize the potential for cost shared fields to be overgrazed and to ensure that a good stand is maintained.
8. All NRCS standards and NC Agriculture Cost Share Program policies relative to vegetation are to be followed.

Tree Planting Policies

9. For Cropland Conversion to Trees only, a Forest Management Plan (FMP) written by a NC registered forester may serve as job approval authority.
10. Tree species selections must be based on suitability to the site and probability of successful establishment.
11. For cropland conversion to trees, to improve tree establishment and increase survival rates, cost share assistance is available for recommended competition control measures before and after planting. Refer to the average cost list for tree planting and establishment components.
 - a. Site preparation may consist of any combination of average cost list TREE ESTABLISHMENT components as specified on the FMP. **Each component may only be cost shared one time.**
 - b. Post-treatment may consist of any combination of chemical release, mowing, or burn components deemed necessary for competition control in the FMP. **Each post-treatment component may be contracted once annually.**
 - i. For loblolly and shortleaf pines, cost share will be limited to one post-treatment after planting.
 - ii. For hardwoods and longleaf pine, cost share will be limited to two post-treatments after planting.
 - iii. Cost share may be available for an additional post-treatment within the first 3 years after planting, upon recommendation and a site evaluation from the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) or a registered forester. The recommendation should accompany the supplement contract for the additional post-treatment control measure.
12. Cropland conversion shall not be used in conjunction with a CREP CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer when the cropland conversion eliminates the pollutant source. Agricultural pollutant sources can include un-buffered crop, hay, pasture, or other non-forest area that could contribute to sediment, nutrients, or chemicals to receiving waters.
13. To ensure tree plantings are established and provide the intended water quality benefit, cropland conversion to trees practice will receive annual status reviews (spot checks) for five years following implementation. Field offices unwilling to assist operators in achieving success and monitor tree establishment and stand quality should not offer this practice to cooperators in their district.

Agriculture Cost Share Program

CROPLAND CONVERSION	
Maintenance Period	5 or 10 years
BMP Units	ACRES
Required Effects	SOIL_SAVED NITROGEN_SAVED PHOSPHORUS_SAVED ACRES_AFFECTED (planted acres)
JAA	SWCC - 512 - Cropland Conversion (for grass/wildlife) OR Forest Management Plan signed by a NC registered forester (for Cropland Conversion to Trees) OR NRCS - ECS - 512 - Pasture and Hay Planting NRCS - ECS - 612 - Tree/Shrub Establishment NRCS - ECS - 490 - Tree/Shrub Site Preparation NRCS - ECS - 420 - Wildlife Habitat Planting
NRCS Standards	NRCS - ECS - 512 - Forage and Biomass Planting NRCS - ECS - 612 - Tree/Shrub Establishment NRCS - ECS - 490 - Tree/Shrub Site Preparation NRCS - ECS - 420 - Wildlife Habitat Planting
Additional Spot Check Requirement	All Cropland Conversion to TREES contracts must be spot-checked annually for five years following implementation.
CS2 Reference Materials	NC-ACSP-11 Signature Page Map with BMP location, fields, and roads Forest Management Plan (if applicable)