



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Your Guide to Applying for USDA Conservation Programs - Individual

NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Below are guiding steps for an 'individual' applying for USDA Conservation Programs

An 'individual' applicant is any individual who controls the land being considered for program participation and the individual uses their personal social security number (SSN) to apply for conservation program assistance.

Application Steps:

1. To apply for USDA Conservation Programs, the applicant will need to first meet with USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) to establish or update their official Farm Records. The applicant will also complete the following forms to determine eligibility:

- *Highly Erodible Land & Wetland Conservation Certification*
- *Farm Operating Plan for Payment Eligibility Review*
- *Payment Eligibility Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)*

The following documentation will be needed to establish or update your Farm Record and to complete the eligibility forms:

- Proof of control of the land the applicant wishes to enroll by providing a lease or a copy of the deed to the property.
- Provide Social Security Number or Employer Identification Number, and contact information.

Note: The process of establishing applicant eligibility may take time, and to maintain eligibility, some forms may need to be updated annually. Applicants must maintain eligibility status throughout the life of the conservation program contract in order to receive program benefits.

2. Once a Farm Record is established or updated, and the eligibility forms are completed with FSA, the applicant sets up an appointment with their local NRCS office for a on-site farm visit, and works with NRCS to develop a current Conservation Plan. This process can take several visits—both in the office and in the field.
3. Finally, NRCS develops a program application package based on the approved Conservation Plan and the decisions made by the landowner. Upon applying for programs the following documentation will be need:
 - Proof of control of the land the applicant wishes to enroll by providing a copy of the deed or the completed *Agreement to Allow Installation of Conservation Practices Form*.
 - *Power of Attorney Form* if the authorized individual wants to allow another individual to sign on their behalf.
 - Provide your *Social Security Number* or *Employer Identification Number*, and contact information.
 - Complete a *Direct Deposit Form*. All program payments will be directly deposited to your identified banking institution.
 - Provide FSA *Farm* and *Tract* numbers of land being considered for program enrollment.
 - If the application involves forest land, provide a *Forest Management Plan* or *Forest Practice Plan*.

Application - Steps Continued ...

Applications for USDA Conservation Programs are taken anytime throughout the year. Because NRCS programs rely on funds being available, this step may occur weeks or months after a program application package is submitted.

Upon availability of funding, NRCS reviews all eligible program applications and ranks those applications based on the greatest environmental impact the application will have related to natural resource conservation. Applications ranked highest will be first priority for funding. All other ranked applications will be funded in ranking order until all available funds are exhausted.

All ranked applications that are not funded will be considered during future funding periods and if the applicant continues to meet the eligibility outlined in this document.

What should I expect now that I am in a conservation program?

NRCS requires the participant to adhere to the following once they enter into a Conservation Program Contract:

1. Start at least one practice in the contract within the first 12 months of the contract. Note: Secure prior approval from NRCS before initiating construction on practices requiring an engineering design.
2. Complete contract items as scheduled in the CPC. Contract items may be accomplished anytime prior to the year scheduled. (Exception: Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract items do not have funds obligated to them ahead of schedule and therefore cannot be completed in advance.) If a practice will not be completed on schedule, you will need to contact your local NRCS office and work with them to review your contract schedule. All required treatments must be installed at least 12 months before the end of the contract period.
3. Submit to NRCS an application for payment when practice(s) are completed.
4. Submit receipts for practices completed. This is not required, but encouraged to assist NRCS in maintaining current cost data.
5. Permit free access for NRCS and/or its agents to provide technical assistance and to inspect the work at any reasonable time during the life span of the installed practices.
6. Forfeit all rights to further payments under the contract, refund to NRCS all contract payments received, and pay liquidated damages upon termination of the contract as outlined in the CPC Appendix.
7. Forfeit all rights to further payments under the CPC if the land under contract is transferred.
8. Upon cancellation of the contract, refund to NRCS all payments made under the contract as outlined in the CPC Appendix and as determined by specific program requirements.
9. Maintain the conservation treatment or practice installed on the land for the life span of each practice, as identified on the contract documents.
10. Share responsibility for ensuring that your conservation plan and contract documents are accurate and complete. The NRCS has no authority to compensate participants for practices and/or activities that are not in the contract at the time of obligation.
11. Ask questions! If you do not understand specific items or terms of the contract and its associated Appendix, let your local NRCS know. They will be happy to answer questions you may have.

For More Information:

NRCS has a presence in every county in North Carolina. Contact your local North Carolina NRCS representative today to get more information about our programs, program eligibility, conservation planning and other USDA services. You can find local North Carolina NRCS contact information on our website at www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.