



Natural Resources Conservation Service

A Passion for Conservation

By Terri Dux



Photo credit: Marie Faatuala

The heat of the afternoon sun takes a heavy toll when you are out in the field working your kalo. However, it is time well spent knowing you are providing fresh local food for your community and caring for the land, ecosystems, and the future.

Partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), farmers, ranchers, and private forest owners and managers can receive technical information and assistance and financial assistance for implementing conservation activities.

In the Pacific Islands Area (PIA), the mission is clearly defined:

“We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.”

The Farm Bill

The Farm Bill, first created to help struggling farmers in the 1930s, provides assistance related to food and farms. Through its conservation provisions, NRCS and other United States

Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agencies work with America's farmers and ranchers to protect our soil, water, and other natural resources.

"The challenges that farmers and ranchers face require innovative solutions to support their continued ability to produce the food and fiber we all depend on," says J.B. Martin, NRCS Pacific Islands Area Acting Director. "Invasive species are a continual problem, from strawberry guava in our forests to the two-lined spittle bug and other pests. Climate change has led to more extreme weather and less available water for agriculture. At the same time, we are seeing opportunities for growth. Urban farming has increased, along with an interest in local foods and resilient food systems. We're eager to help our nation's farmers and ranchers address these challenges and opportunities, and science and innovation will help get us there."

How to Get Started

NRCS offers to assist private landowners and agricultural producers interested in managing their natural resources in a sustainable manner. Through voluntary technical and financial assistance programs, the agency helps producers plan and implement conservation practices to address soil, water, plant, air, animal, and related natural resource concerns or help save energy, agricultural land, and non-industrial private forest land.

An NRCS conservationist will evaluate the natural resources on the producer's land at no cost and provide personalized advice and information based on sound science to help the producer make informed decisions that support both production and conservation goals. If a producer or rancher chooses to take the next step toward improving their conservation practices, NRCS can work with them to develop a conservation plan and identify opportunities for financial assistance through various conservation programs.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program offers financial assistance to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against increasing weather volatility. EQIP participants install or implement structural, vegetative, and management practices such as improving irrigation efficiency, restoring pasture, or nutrient and pest management on eligible agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a comprehensive working lands conservation program designed to help farmers and ranchers protect and improve their existing conservation systems. CSP enrolls whole farms and offers farmers the opportunity to earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, rotational grazing, ecologically based pest management, buffer strips, and the transition to organic farming, in concert with their production activities.

Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)

The Agricultural Management Assistance helps agricultural producers manage financial risk. In Hawai'i, producers may apply for AMA funding to install seasonal high tunnels and associated practices to help extend their growing period.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program helps to protect working farms and ranches, wetlands, and grasslands through long-term easements. ACEP has two components: Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) and Agricultural Land Easement (ALE). The WRE component restores, protects, and enhances wetland value and function on wetlands.-

The ALE component protects farms and ranches from development, specifically to ensure farm viability for future generations, and to conserve grazing land.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program NRCS co-invest with partners to implement conservation to address conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes. RCPP projects may include a range of on-the-ground conservation activities such as cover cropping and nutrient management implemented by farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

Conservation Innovation Grants, a sub-program of EQIP, funds innovative conservation projects that use creative problem solving and on-farm research to promote science-based solutions to benefit farmers and the environment. CIG partners work to address our nation's water quality, air quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat challenges.

For more information about conservation and NRCS programs, contact your [local NRCS Service Center](#) or visit www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov.

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