

News Release

NRCS Pacific Islands Area
Public Affairs
300 Ala Moana Blvd
Suite 4-118
Honolulu, HI 96850
SM.NRCS.PIA.PublicAffairs@usda.gov

NRCS Pacific Islands Area Accepting Second Round of Applications for 2025 Funding

HONOLULU, Nov. 20, 2024 – The Natural Resources Conservation Service in the Pacific Islands Area is accepting a second round of applications through Jan. 31, 2025, for agricultural producers seeking funding for conservation projects in 2025.

NRCS, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, offers technical and financial assistance through conservation programs, such as the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#), [Agricultural Management Assistance program](#), [Conservation Stewardship Program](#), [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), and [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#). The initial deadline for program application submissions passed Nov. 15.

While NRCS accepts applications year-round, applications submitted after the program ranking will automatically be considered during future funding cycles. Applications and more information are available at [local USDA Service Centers](#) and online at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/get-started-with-nrcs>.

Funding is available from both the Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act, which provides additional resources to help producers expand conservation efforts that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase storage of carbon in their soil and trees. In many cases, applications for eligible practices meeting or exceeding state-determined minimum ranking thresholds will automatically be considered for priority funding when applying for EQIP and CSP because of additional flexibilities.

Act Now

In 2025, NRCS PIA will utilize [Act Now](#) minimum ranking thresholds to expedite contract obligation. States determine their respective Act Now minimum ranking thresholds, fund pools and eligible practices. The process enables states to pre-approve a ranked application in a ranking pool designated for Act Now when an application meets or exceeds a state's pre-determined minimum threshold ranking score. The state minimum thresholds for ACT Now will be published on the [NRCS PIA website](#) soon.

Producers do not need to apply separately to Act Now and will be considered for priority funding when applying to an eligible practice through EQIP and CSP. Applications are processed in the order they are received, and applications that rank at or above the state-established threshold ranking score will be preapproved, as long as funds are available. When the available Act Now funding limit has been reached,

remaining applications may be considered in other relevant ranking pools or rolled over to the next funding cycle.

Once a producer's application is pre-approved, they must still meet eligibility requirements including establishing a farm tract number with USDA's Farm Service Agency if they have not previously utilized USDA programs. After establishing eligibility, producers must complete the planning process and receive notice of approval from NRCS prior to beginning work. Projects started before final contract approval are ineligible for cost-share assistance unless the producer has been granted an early start waiver.

Agricultural Management Assistance Program

Agricultural Management Assistance helps agricultural producers manage financial risk through diversification, marketing or natural resource conservation practices. Producers eligible for AMA can apply for financial and technical assistance to voluntarily address resource issues such as water management, water quality and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, NRCS can offer to purchase an easement on land with two options – as an Agricultural Land Easement or a Wetland Reserve Easement. Agricultural Land Easements, or ACEP-ALE, offer easement opportunities for agricultural lands that are under threat of conversion to non-agricultural uses, protects cultural resources, and preserves unique and productive soils. To be considered for ACEP-ALE, agricultural operations must work with an approved land stewardship partner in order to apply. Approved land stewardship partners include the Hawaiian Island Land Trust and Moku O Keawe Land Conservancy.

Wetland Reserve Easements, or ACEP-WRE, help private landowners protect, restore and enhance farmed or converted wetlands which have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses. NRCS administers ACEP-WRE through purchase agreements with eligible landowners in a similar application process as other NRCS programs and prioritizes applications based on the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program offers rewards to producers for maintaining high stewardship standards and incentivizes them to take their efforts even further. The CSP program is a five-year program that requires producers to meet a minimum number of resource concerns while improving the resource concerns over the course of the contract. CSP offers the same conservation practices as EQIP but pays producers annually for both maintaining their existing benchmark conservation and implementing new activities.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

With the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NRCS provides agricultural producers with one-on-one help and financial assistance to plan and implement conservation practices to address a variety of issues such as water quality degradation, soil erosion, soil quality degradation and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife.

Special initiatives include:

- National Water Quality Initiative – open to producers and land operators in Hilo and Kawaihae watersheds wishing to address water quality concerns in nationally-identified impaired watersheds.

- Guam Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership – open to producers and land operators in Guam wishing to address fire mitigation and water quality issues.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program is a partner-driven approach to conservation whereby NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address. In the Pacific Islands Area, RCPP land management projects include:

- **Innovation in Kona's Upland Forests** – Lead partner Kona Soil and Water Conservation District helps private landowners increase forest cover, assist with reforestation efforts and improve wildlife habitat in Kona's Upland Forests. Interested participants should contact their local NRCS Service Center or the [Kona Soil and Water Conservation District](#).
- **O'ahu North Shore Working Wetlands** – NRCS partner O'ahu Resource Conservation and Development Council delivers technical and financial assistance to new and historically underserved farmers on O'ahu's north shore. This project focuses on indigenous wetland farming, including sediment reduction, addressing water temperature impairments and improving functioning of working wetlands of O'ahu's North Shore. Interested participants should contact their local NRCS Service Center or the [O'ahu Resource Conservation and Development Council](#).
- **'Āinapreneur Rural Farmer Conservation Collective Biochar Initiative** - Lead partner Changemakers Hawai'i works with producers on the Big Island to increase the adoption and application of biochar and other soil health related conservation practices. Interested participants should contact their local [NRCS Service Center](#) or [Changemakers Hawai'i](#).

Conservation Incentive Contracts

Conservation Incentive Contracts, an option available through EQIP, offer producers financial assistance to adopt conservation management practices on working landscapes. Producers may use incentive contracts as a “stepping stone” for correcting resource issues on specific land units through EQIP to achieving sustainable stewardship on their entire operation. Conservation Incentive Contracts are available nationwide and help producers address priority resource concerns, like sequestering carbon and improving water quality in high-priority areas.

More Information

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov).

#

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.