

Christina Watershed Municipal Partnership (CWMP) **Funding Sources for Agriculture Operations**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is one of the largest resources for funding agricultural projects in the nation, including those that serve to protect water quality, watersheds, and the environment. NRCS has a number of cost share incentive programs that are applicable to agricultural operations and, in some cases, other landowners.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The NRCS granting program that Chester County Conservation District (CCCD) works with most often. EQIP addresses natural resource concerns such as soil erosion, excessive nutrients in surface and ground water, insufficient wildlife habitat, and elevated surface water temperature, among others. The process includes the following steps:

- Work with a soil conservationist to create a conservation plan.
- Undergo an evaluation process in which all eligible projects are ranked.
- The highest ranking projects that are verified as eligible may go forward, and a contract is drawn up.
- A producer awarded a contract will receive incentive payments towards the construction of BMPs.

The amount of funding is based on a set rate for each practice item, so the amount a producer would need to match varies depending on contractor costs. Generally, the amount the contract covers is approximately 60-75% of the overall project cost. There is no minimum contract amount, but the maximum is \$450,000 per contract. The application rounds are not consistent year to year, so you apply when you are ready to begin the process. In general, all agricultural operators are eligible for this program, but applicants should contact NRCS to find out if they are eligible.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Is very similar to EQIP, but is restricted to specific watersheds.

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

A funding program which provides cost share for agricultural operations to construct or protect irrigation structures.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

An NRCS program that provides incentive payments to improve the condition of natural resources on agricultural operations. Targeted specifically to agricultural operations who meet baseline criteria for addressing resource concerns, and allows them to be rewarded for going “above and beyond.”

Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)

This program is focused on innovative and novel techniques for protecting the environment and natural resources, anyone can apply, but all applicants must involve EQIP eligible producers. From their website, it is: “a competitive program that supports the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands.”

More information on NRCS Funding Programs can be found at:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/?cid=stelprdb1048817>

Contact Beth Sassaman the NRCS District Conservationist for Chester, Delaware, and Philadelphia Counties to get started at 484-786-7298.

In Chester County, you may also contact Dan Miloser at 610-455-1380 at Chester County Conservation District for financial and technical assistance for agricultural producers.

Watershed Specific Agricultural Grant Programs

CWMP Planning Team members may also have access to funding for specific agricultural practices that protect water quality. Brandywine Conservancy and Stroud Water Research Center are two potential partners in the headwaters of Brandywine Creek, Red Clay Creek and White Clay Creek Watersheds.

Brandywine Conservancy

The Brandywine Conservancy has a long history of protecting land, preserving water resources and the environment, and engaging with local communities to help protect the watershed. More information can be found [here](#).

Stroud Water Research Center

The Stroud Farm Stewardship Program enables farmers to earn funds to help pay for needed conservation work on the farm. For each acre of stream buffer planted with trees (buffer must be at least 35 ft wide on each side of stream), the program provides a participating farmer with \$4000 in the form of a "BMP voucher." Maximum voucher amount is \$20,000 per farm (*for cooperators with multiple/large holdings, this can be expanded*).

These Best Management Practice vouchers are to be used to help plan and install other conservation projects on the farm. Ideally, vouchers can be combined with funds from programs like [PennVest](#), [Resource Enhancement and Protection Program](#) (REAP), EQIP or RCPP, but they can also be used alone.

To earn vouchers, farmers need:

- a current Conservation Plan meeting PA Chapter 102 requirements,
- a Nutrient Management Plan or a Manure Management Plan, depending on which plan is appropriate for the farm.

In addition to vouchers, up to \$2,000 per farm is available to cover costs for the preparation of these plans. Contact David Wise, Watershed Restoration Manager, 610-268-2153 ext. 307, dwise@stroudcenter.org