



## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

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### Partnerships and Cooperation Initiative

#### Overview

Section 2003 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 amended the Food Security Act of 1985 to establish a "Partnerships and Cooperation" initiative. This authority allows the Secretary to designate special projects and enter into stewardship agreements with nonfederal entities, including state agencies and nongovernmental organizations, to provide enhanced technical and financial assistance through the integrated application of conservation programs.

The goal of this initiative is to help producers solve special resource and environmental issues in geographic areas of environmental sensitivity or, within a given state or region, to reach particular types of producers or groups of producers willing to undertake special conservation initiatives.

#### Benefits

This initiative provides added flexibility, through the integrated application of conservation programs, to better reflect unique local circumstances. This flexibility coupled, with enhanced technical and financial assistance, helps producers better address natural resource issues associated with agricultural production.

Producers are also encouraged to cooperate in the installation and maintenance of conservation systems that affect multiple agricultural operations; sharing information and technical and financial resources, achieve cumulative conservation benefits across operations of producers, and to develop and demonstrate innovative conservation methods.

#### Scope

This is a voluntary initiative available to producers nationwide.

#### How This Initiative Works

State and local agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations submit a special project plan to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Partnerships between groups are encouraged. Matching funds are encouraged but not required.

The project plan must address natural resource issues affected by agricultural production and justify a need for enhanced financial and technical assistance through the integrated application of conservation programs.

The NRCS State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, recommends projects to the Secretary for approval.

Once a project is approved, State and local agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations may enter into stewardship agreements with producers to install and maintain conservation systems that achieve cumulative environmental benefits across operations of producers. The initiative also strongly encourages the development and demonstration of innovative conservation methods, as well as extensive monitoring and evaluation efforts.

In return, producers receive special incentive and cost-share payments, through existing conservation program authorities, to encourage partnerships and enrollments of optimal conservation value.

## **Eligibility**

Producers must meet person and land eligibility requirements of the underlying conservation programs.

## **Payments**

Special incentive and cost share payments may be provided, based on underlying conservation program authorities, but adapted to the particular needs and circumstances of the project.

## **Signup Period**

There is a continuous signup period consistent with underlying conservation program authorities.

## **Contract Determinations**

Conservation program contract approvals used to carry out this initiative are determining using underlying conservation program authorities.

## **Funding**

Funding can be drawn from any conservation program (CSP, EQIP, WHIP, WRP, CRP, FPP, etc.) to carry out special projects.

However, no more than 5 percent of the funds made available for each fiscal year for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) may be used to carryout special projects.

## **Program Assistance**

The NRCS provides program and technical assistance to eligible landowners in carrying out this initiative, consistent with the purposes of each conservation program.

In addition to NRCS, State and local agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations may also provide technical assistance as third-party vendors.