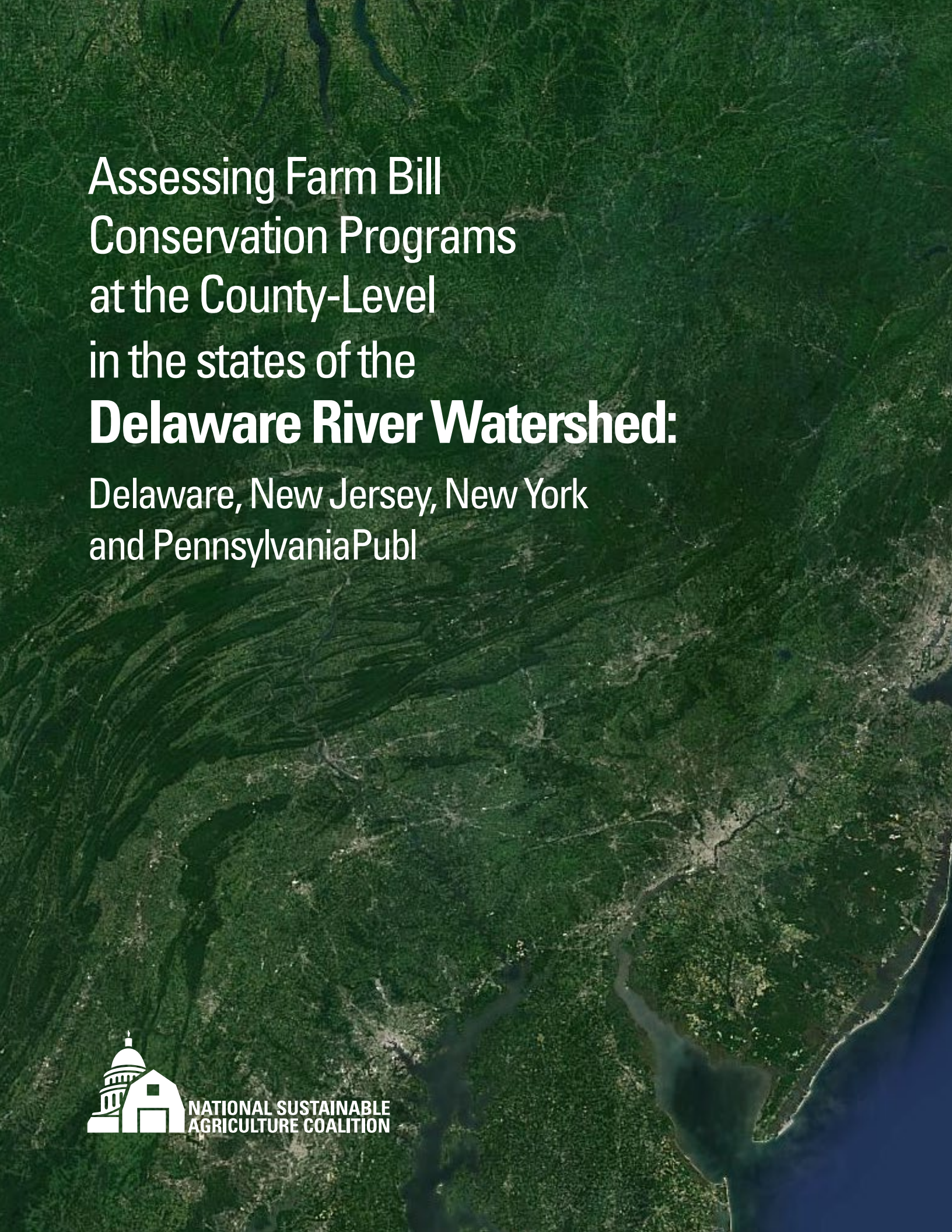


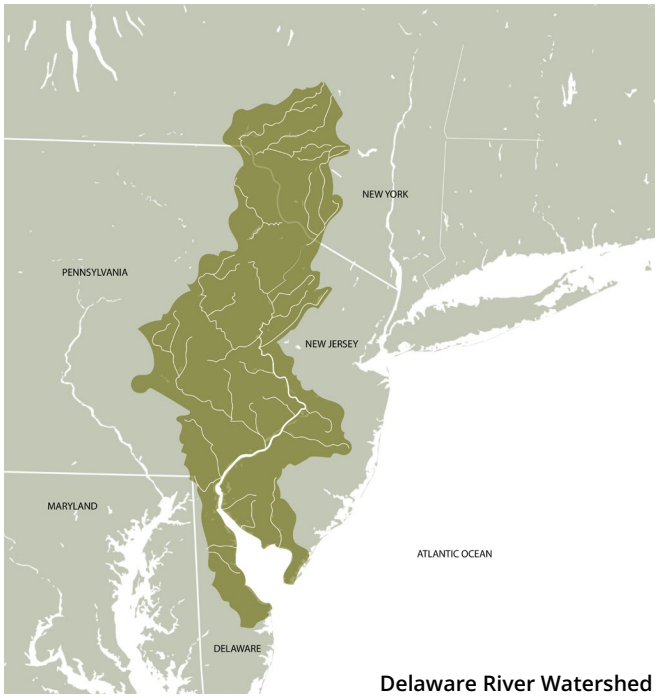
Assessing Farm Bill Conservation Programs at the County-Level in the states of the **Delaware River Watershed:**

Delaware, New Jersey, New York and PennsylvaniaPubl

NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

INTRODUCTION

In the first portion of this report, we provide a brief overview of each of the major farm bill conservation programs. We then examine challenges and opportunities for conservation programs in the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill, and conclude with a detailed analysis of conservation program utilization in key counties of the Delaware River Watershed (DRW) states: Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.



Delaware River Watershed

FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS 101

The farm bill's conservation programs provide farmers, ranchers, and landowners across the country with a wide range of tools and incentives to conserve and enhance our shared natural resources. These voluntary programs offer both financial and technical assistance that supports participants to adopt practices that can improve water quality, build soil health, enhance wildlife habitat, and increase the resilience of their own operations. Although most farmers understand and value the potential benefits of conservation activities, many do not have the technical skills or financial resources to undertake them. Voluntary federal conservation programs can help bridge that gap.

Federal conservation programs can be organized into several categories – working lands conservation, land protection, and partnership programs. Working lands conservation programs include programs through which participants keep their land in agricultural production while simultaneously adopting and managing conservation activities on their land. Land protection programs often take land out of active production - though not entirely in some cases - through the use of long-term contracts and easements to protect agricultural land, wetlands, grasslands, and highly erodible land. Partnership programs bring farmers together with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and an outside partner so that together they can address targeted resource concerns in a particular region.

FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS 101

NRCS administers most farm bill conservation programs with the exception of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which is administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). However, NRCS assists FSA's administration of the CRP program by overseeing land eligibility determinations, conservation planning, and implementation on the ground. Key USDA conservation programs and their intended conservation impacts include:

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – CSP is the nation's largest working lands conservation program with more than 68 million acres currently enrolled nationwide. This program provides financial and technical assistance to help participants comprehensively enhance natural resources across their entire operation. CSP offers farmers the opportunity to earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, rotational grazing, buffer strips, and more.

CSP is unique in that eligibility is based on an applicant's level of stewardship at the time of application, as well as their commitment to address additional resource concerns over the course of a five-year contract. Participants in this program are eligible to renew their contracts for an additional five years, provided they have met the terms of the original contract and agree to maintain and expand their current conservation efforts. After the 2018 Farm Bill, qualified renewals are no longer automatically accepted. Rather, renewal applications go through a competitive process similar to first time applicants.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – EQIP provides cost share assistance for farmers and ranchers to help them implement conservation practices on their working agricultural lands. EQIP reimburses participants for a percentage of the costs of installing conservation practices, including costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance, training, and income foregone.

Participants can use EQIP to install management, vegetative, and structural practices – like improving irrigation efficiency, restoring pasture, or nutrient and pest management – on eligible agricultural land and nonindustrial private forestland. EQIP may reimburse up to 75% of the costs of conservation practices. Socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning, and veteran farmers and ranchers are eligible for cost share rates of up to 90% of project costs and may be eligible for up to 50% advance payment for eligible expenses. Additionally, EQIP includes an Organic Initiative that specifically targets conservation support to certified and transitioning organic producers.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – ACEP is a conservation easement program that was created in the 2014 Farm Bill by combining three previously separate easement programs – the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). ACEP is divided into two tracks: a wetland easement component, which largely mirrors the former WRP, and an agricultural land easement component, which largely retains the purposes and functions of the former GRP and FRPP.

The purpose of the wetland easement component is to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands that have been in production. The Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) component of ACEP protects farms from non-agricultural development to ensure farm viability for future generations and to conserve grazing land, including rangeland, pasture, and shrubland. The 2018 Farm Bill removed and weakened many of the conservation planning requirements within ACEP, though farmers must still have a conservation plan in place for Highly Erodible (HEL) cropland covered by an ACEP easement.

FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS 101

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – The primary purpose of CRP is to preserve and improve the quality of soil, water, and wildlife habitat by establishing long-term cover (primarily grasses and trees) on highly erodible land or land in need of conservation buffers that has previously been in row crop production. In exchange for cost-share and rental payments, farmers remove environmentally sensitive land from production and plant resource-conserving ground cover.

The 2018 Farm Bill established a new, higher acreage cap for CRP of 27 million acres nationally by 2023. Historically, most of this acreage cap has been met through periodic 'General Sign-Ups' where land is bid into CRP on a competitive basis and ranked using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). In recent years, in part due to NSAC's advocacy, more and more acres are enrolled through alternatives to the General Sign-Up. The Continuous CRP (CCRP) enrollment option provides significant conservation benefits. CCRP pays farmers to install partial field conservation practices, including conservation buffers to protect water quality as well as wildlife habitat. CCRP eligible practices include riparian buffers, wildlife habitat buffers, wetland buffers, filter strips, wetland restoration, grass waterways, shelterbelts, windbreaks, living snow fences, contour grass strips, salt tolerant vegetation, and shallow water areas for wildlife.

FSA is required by law to enroll 8.6 million acres in CCRP as part of its effort to meet the total CRP acreage cap. Within CCRP, the 2018 Farm Bill established the CLEAR Initiative which includes targeted practices to help protect water quality by reducing sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms. USDA is required to devote at least 40 percent of all CCRP acres to CLEAR. Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill established CLEAR30, a pilot program allowing farmers and landowners with expiring CCRP contracts to re-enroll buffers with a new 30-year contract. The Trump Administration implemented the CLEAR30 pilot program in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watersheds, but the Biden Administration has expanded the program nationwide.

Finally, USDA may also enter into a Conservation Reserve Enhancement (CREP) agreement with a state. Under a CREP agreement, the state and USDA together pay farmers to address targeted conservation issues identified by local, state, or tribal governments or non-governmental organizations.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – Through RCPP, NRCS and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities that address priority natural resource concerns in a state or region. The 2014 Farm Bill created RCPP by consolidating four previously separate programs that had been focused on a specific region or water quality protection. The 2018 Farm Bill made RCPP a standalone program with dedicated funding and added CRP and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention program to the list of programs available through RCPP.

RCPP differs from other programs in that farmers and ranchers do not apply directly for funding, but rather partner entities (e.g., non-profit groups, conservation districts, farmer cooperatives, or other state or local agencies) are awarded RCPP projects covering a specific geography identified in their applications. Then, eligible farmers and ranchers in that area wishing to participate in the RCPP project can apply through NRCS or through the lead partner entity, depending on the type and design of the RCPP award. RCPP projects may focus on a specific resource issue of heightened concern in a given watershed or region or a given set of farmers within a state or area interested in pursuing innovative conservation objectives.

These farm bill conservation programs provide critical support to our nation's farmers and ranchers, and are a key resource in catalyzing the preservation and enhancement of natural resources.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES: BETWEEN FARM BILLS

The first farm bill - or rather a collection of 3 different bills introduced from 1933-35 - centered on the prices paid to farmers for their products and the conservation practices and plantings they could use to preserve topsoil. However, between 1938 and 1985, there was no farm bill funding for conservation at all. The 1985 Farm Bill was the first to reprise and provide direct farm bill funding to conservation programs in a new Conservation Title. For decades, USDA conservation programs enjoyed broad support and repeated funding increases in farm bills. The 2014 Farm Bill marked the first time that the Conservation Title was cut since its creation over three decades prior; in total, the bill cut roughly $6 billion from conservation programs (factoring in automatic sequestration cuts). Since the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, those cuts have severely hindered farmers' ability to access conservation support and implement conservation activities. The 2018 Farm Bill exacerbated this problem by cutting long term funding for the entire Conservation Title. This was done in such a way that permanent baseline funding for the Conservation Title is likely to be $5 billion less at the start of the 2023 Farm Bill negotiations.

The 2018 Farm Bill will expire on September 30, 2023, and Congress is beginning to discuss legislation that will ultimately become a new Farm Bill. Given that farmers' demands for conservation assistance far exceed available funding and given the increasingly dire need for federal conservation programs to address climate change and other challenges, the 2023 Farm Bill is an excellent opportunity to re-elevate conservation programs and reinvest in our long-term agricultural sustainability. Those campaigning to improve the Conservation Title will likely seek to reverse the shortsighted cuts of the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills and make much needed changes to programs that would increase accessibility and improve conservation outcomes. With passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, some short term relief to existing funding shortfalls has been made available, but it remains an open question whether or not short term wins will translate into long term, durable funding in the next Farm Bill.

By using federal conservation program utilization in the counties of the Delaware River Watershed as a lens through which to understand conservation needs and outcomes, stakeholders across the region will be better positioned to shape the policies that preserve our shared natural resources at the state and local levels.

PROGRAM UTILIZATION IN THE WATERSHED COUNTIES

Given the unique water quality and natural resource challenges in the counties of the Delaware River Watershed, farm bill conservation programs serve as a critical source of support to farmers and ranchers in their management of our shared resources. This report includes all available data on programs up to the current Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. However, there are some components of program data that have not yet been compiled by USDA - including final enrollment data for FY 2021 for some programs - so this report includes the examination of data ranging from FY 2019 – FY 2021.

FY 2019 is the first year that conservation programs authorized under the 2018 Farm Bill were in effect so analysis of program utilization since implementation will provide valuable insights on the funding levels and programmatic changes needed in the next bill.

CSP

The Conservation Stewardship Program's (CSP) footprint is immense. At the end of 2020, more than 68 million acres were enrolled across the country and over 622,000 acres were enrolled in the states of Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Cumulative CSP Program Reach in DRB States in FY 2020

State	Acres	Contracts
Delaware	73,605	91
New Jersey	9,116	43
New York	273,518	437
Pennsylvania	265,770	809
Grand Total	**622,010**	**1,380**

Active enrollment within CSP changes each year as new participants enroll and current participants either choose to reenroll or let their contracts expire. CSP contracts are for five-year fixed terms. It is therefore valuable to examine snapshots of how many acres are enrolled at the program at any given time.

In FY 2019 and FY 2020 combined, over 25,000 acres across the counties of the Watershed were enrolled into CSP – either through a new contract or a renewal of an existing contract that would have otherwise expired. The chart below shows the combined number of acres enrolled in each state as well as within the Watershed counties during the FY 2019 and 2020 sign-ups.

TABLE 1: %State CSP Ac Enrolled in DRW FY 2019 & FY 2020

State	State Ac	DRW Counties Ac	%Ac in DRW
Delaware	6,427	6,276	98%
New Jersey	650	378	58%
New York	58,451	1,574	3%
Pennsylvania	79,812	17,099	21%
Grand Total	**145,340.00**	**25,327.90**	**17%**

CSP

Roughly 17% of the total FY 2019 and 2020 enrollments from Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania came from the counties of the Watershed. When this report was last produced using FY17 data, roughly 10% of CSP acres in DRW states fell within the DRW counties. This means that over time a larger portion of CSP acres enrolled in these states are located in the DRW, a positive trend highlighting its growing relevance as a tool for addressing water quality concerns in the watershed.

The chart below illustrates FY 2019 and 2020 combined obligations, contracts, and acres that went to CSP participants (for all contracts enrolled in those years) within the counties of the Delaware River Watershed. These obligations represent all five-years' worth of payments for all CSP contracts enrolled in these years.

TABLE 2: CSP FY19-FY20

State/COUNTY	**Obligations**	**Contracts**	**Acres**
Delaware	**$580,552**	**8**	**6,275.9**
KENT	$18,863	1	107.1
SUSSEX	$561,689	7	6,168.8
New Jersey	**$79,720**	**5**	**378.35**
BURLINGTON	$25,401	1	201.9
HUNTERDON	$23,590	2	31.56
MERCER	$7,500	1	12.39
SALEM	$23,230	1	132.5
New York	**$213,236**	**7**	**1,574.37**
BROOME	$71,627	2	507.86
CHENANGO	$59,549	1	242.73
DELAWARE	$68,752	3	703.78
SCHOHARIE	$13,308	1	120
Pennsylvania	**$2,133,048**	**34**	**13,162.18**
BERKS	$201,839	4	1,391.8
BUCKS	$30,813	1	208.89
LACKAWANNA	$123,116	2	866.8
LEBANON	$264,553	3	1,318.3
LUZERNE	$33,232	2	334.93
MONROE	$8,561	1	3.25
NORTHAMPTON	$570,805	3	3,617.98
SCHUYLKILL	$771,165	13	4,602.36
WAYNE	$128,964	5	817.87
Grand Total	**$3,006,556**	**54**	**21,390.8**

CSP

Prior to 2018, NRCS reported annual obligations for CSP contracts but has since changed this practice and now reports obligations over the full term of the contract. Therefore, the highest resolution of payment data available is one lump sum covering the full five-year contract period. As a result, the FY 2019 and 2020 data obscures valuable information regarding annual payments to farmers for CSP contracts within these counties. This is problematic as it misrepresents the level and timing of support flowing to farmers via CSP and should be corrected so farmers, conservation advocates, and Congress can better evaluate CSP's ability to support farmers year over year.

CSP payments are based on the participant's level of stewardship at the time of application, as well as the additional conservation activities that they implement to further address resource concerns over the life of the contract. Annual payments include three core components: payments for active management of ongoing conservation activities; additional activity payments; and supplemental payments for resource conserving crop rotations. Ongoing management payments include two different components: a payment of $350 for each resource concern that is addressed on each land use, plus a per acre payment rate based on the land use. Finally, and of particular relevance to smaller acreage participants, CSP offers a minimum payment of $1,500 per year. Previously, annual payments had been consistent for each of the five years of a CSP contract. This consistency simplified data analysis because one could easily estimate total payments in a given location over the life of cumulative five-year contracts. Due to a program "reinvention" undertaken by NRCS, however, the payment structure was changed beginning in 2017 such that annual payments vary each year depending on which conservation activities are implemented at various times over the life of the contract. This, coupled with the new five-year lump sum reporting convention post-2018 Farm Bill, makes assessing annual payments to producers a murky endeavor.

In addition to assessing acres and obligations, it is also valuable to take a close look at which conservation activities were adopted through CSP within these states. CSP offers several different types of conservation activities for participants, including enhancements, bundles, and conservation practices. Enhancements are conservation activities that go above and beyond the requirements of regular conservation practices, which are also offered through EQIP. Bundles are groupings of 8 conservation enhancements that NRCS determines may work well together to provide benefits when implemented together on particular types of farms. CSP offers a higher level of financial assistance to participants who utilize bundles as part of their efforts to encourage a holistic approach to conservation agriculture.

The following charts list all enhancements utilized by contract holders on at least 100 acres within the Delaware River Watershed counties (grouped by state) as part of the FY 2019 and 2020 signups. The 100 acre cut off used here is an aggregate number, meaning at least 100 acres of that enhancement are planned in a given county, not that a contract contains 100 acres of the enhancement. It is important to note that not all of these activities were necessarily adopted in each of the included counties. Enhancements can be implemented in any of the five years of a CSP contract, so while they are noted in the data here at the time of a contract's signing, that does not mean they have been installed on the ground. NRCS often refers to practices in the later years of a contract as 'planned activities'.

CSP

TABLE 3: Delaware - Acres of CSP Enhancements FY19-FY20

County	Acres
KENT	
Cover crop to suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles	536
Leave standing grain crops unharvested to benefit wildlife	428
SUSSEX	
Reduce risk of pesticides in surface water by utilizing precision pesticide application techniques	14,536
Leave standing grain crops unharvested to benefit wildlife	10,275
Reduce risks of nutrient loss to surface water by utilizing precision agriculture technologies	2,566
Leave standing grain crops unharvested to benefit wildlife food sources	1,088

TABLE 4: New Jersey - Acres of CSP Enhancements FY19-FY20

County	Acres
BURLINGTON	
Use of multi-species cover crops to improve soil health and increase soil organic matter	724
SALEM	
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses	530

TABLE 5: New York - Acres of CSP Enhancements FY19-FY20

County	Acres
BROOME	
Harvest of crops (hay or small grains) using measures that allow desired species to flush or escape	1,292
Improved grazing management for soil compaction on pasture through monitoring activities	290
Forage harvest management that helps maintain wildlife habitat cover, shelter or continuity	186
Herbaceous weed treatment to create plant communities consistent with the ecological site	186
CHENANGO	
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses	937
Resource conserving crop rotation	775
No till system to increase soil health and soil organic matter content	517
Intensive cover cropping to increase soil health and soil organic matter content	398
DELAWARE	
Harvest of crops (hay or small grains) using measures that allow desired species to flush or escape	454

CSP

TABLE 6: Pennsylvania - Acres of CSP Enhancements FY19-FY20

County	Acres
BERKS	
Reduce risk of pesticides in surface water by utilizing precision pesticide application techniques	2,878
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risks to air quality - emissions of GHGs	2,273
Cover crop to reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excess soil nutrients-surface water	480
Cover crop to reduce water erosion	296
BUCKS	
Use of soil health assessment to assist with development of cover crop mix to improve soil health	678
Reduce risk of pesticides in surface water by utilizing precision pesticide application techniques	126
Reduce risks of nutrient loss to surface water by utilizing precision agriculture technologies	126
LACKAWANNA	
Cover crop to minimize soil compaction	1,684
Reduced tillage to reduce energy use	1,684
Modify field operations to reduce particulate matter	1,535
Establishing native grass or legumes in forage base to improve the plant community	1,176
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses	1,176
Intensive cover cropping to increase soil health and soil organic matter content	1,176
No till to reduce soil erosion	1,176
Resource conserving crop rotation	1,176
Establish Monarch butterfly habitat	384
Clipping mature forages to set back vegetative growth for improved forage quality	267
Stream habitat improvement through placement of woody biomass	129
LEBANON	
Management Intensive Rotational Grazing	236
Crop tree management for mast production	100
Forest Stand Improvement to rehabilitate degraded hardwood stands	100
NORTHAMPTON	
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses	17,273
Cover crop to reduce soil erosion	7,048
Reduce risk of pesticides in surface water by utilizing precision pesticide application techniques	7,048

continues...

CSP

TABLE 6: Pennsylvania - Acres of CSP Enhancements FY19-FY20 (cont'd)

County	Acres
SCHUYLKILL	
Crop Bundle #19 - Soil Health Precision Ag	5,225
Reduce risk of pesticides in surface water by utilizing precision pesticide application techniques	3,508
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses to surface water	3,265
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses	2,758
Cover crop to reduce soil erosion	2,202
No till to reduce tillage induced particulate matter	1,955
Reduced tillage to increase soil health and soil organic matter content	1,759
Improved resource conserving crop rotation	1,133
Herbaceous weed treatment to create plant communities consistent with the ecological site	870
Use of soil health assessment to assist with development of cover crop mix to improve soil health	511
Cover crop to reduce water erosion	200
Using cover crops for biological strip till	192
Use of body condition scoring for livestock on a monthly basis to keep track of herd health	153
WAYNE	
Improved resource conserving crop rotation	744
Use of soil health assessment to assist with development of cover crop mix to improve soil health	642
Forage plantings that help increase organic matter in depleted soils	638
Forage harvest management that helps maintain wildlife habitat cover, shelter or continuity	527
Implementing Bale or Swath Grazing to increase organic matter and reduce nutrients in surface water	445
Brush management to improve wildlife habitat	278
Use of body condition scoring for livestock on a monthly basis to keep track of herd health	222
Pasture Bundle 5	166

Enhancements and bundles available through CSP are added, dropped, and adjusted nearly every year. Thus, they represent a unique opportunity for nearly constant engagement with NRCS at the national level. NSAC leads this engagement with our members and continues to work to improve available enhancements and bundles year after year.

EQIP

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance for participants to adopt individual conservation practices on their land in agricultural production. Approximately 170 conservation practices are available through EQIP, including management, vegetative, and structural practices. Additionally, EQIP has provided funding support for conservation activity plans (CAPs), which were developed to help producers identify conservation practices that can address a specific natural resource need. Typically, these plans were targeted toward specific kinds of land (e.g., transitioning to organic, grazing land, and forest land). CAPs also addressed a specific resource need, such as nutrient management. With a CAP plan, producers could then apply for financial assistance to implement the described conservation practices through EQIP.

While CAPs were utilized for both Fiscal Years analyzed in this report, it is worth noting that as of FY22, NRCS has reorganized CAPs into three separate kinds of plans: Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs), Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs), and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMAs). Monitoring the impact of this change will be important ahead of the 2023 Farm Bill cycle as NSAC and other organizations push to improve EQIP..

Within Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, EQIP participation has remained relatively steady over the past decade; this is reflective of larger enrollment trends under the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills. The recent EQIP sign up period, FY 2019 to FY 2020, provides insight as to the number of participants and financial obligations within Watershed counties and states since the 2018 Farm Bill. The chart below illustrates funding and contracts within each of the Watershed counties in FY 2019 and FY 2020 combined. In total, more than $40 million in EQIP funding went to contracts within the Watershed counties over this period.

TABLE 7: EQIP FY19-FY20

State/COUNTY	Obligations	Contracts	Acres
Delaware	**13,867,186**	**307**	**56,016.6**
KENT	$5,532,502	82	14,457.2
NEW CASTLE	$664,143	37	7,234.5
SUSSEX	$7,670,541	188	34,324.9
New Jersey	**$9,262,134**	**398**	**31,289.4**
ATLANTIC	$218,806	7	122.7
BURLINGTON	$904,643	50	8,540.3
CAMDEN	$14,539	2	29.5
CAPE MAY	$35,191	5	79.2
CUMBERLAND	$574,426	18	1,768.8
GLOUCESTER	$1,089,521	22	3,544.0
HUNTERDON	$2,345,947	65	3,009.3
MERCER	$181,367	13	288.9
MONMOUTH	$440,521	34	1,339.2
MORRIS	$311,215	28	976.8
OCEAN	$293,854	9	37.6
SALEM	$1,910,579	38	5,298.2
SUSSEX	$454,038	61	3,854.0
WARREN	$487,487	46	2,400.9

continues...

EQIP

TABLE 7: EQIP FY19-FY20 (cont'd)

State/COUNTY	Obligations	Contracts	Acres
New York	**$4,454,789**	**132**	**7,818.5**
BROOME	$409,020	14	848.5
CHENANGO	$347,128	12	1,177.0
DELAWARE	$1,017,308	28	3,158.4
GREENE	$45,854	4	4.0
ORANGE	$555,603	27	768.4
SCHOHARIE	$1,366,57	14	631.1
SULLIVAN	$149,309	14	893.9
ULSTER	$563,991	19	337.2
Pennsylvania	**$12,906,962**	**206**	**21,508.6**
BERKS	$2,028,799	31	2,894.5
BUCKS	$556,447	14	807.6
CARBON	$61,952	4	507.9
CHESTER	$785,674	14	1,005.3
LACKAWANNA	$85,413	5	433.6
LANCASTER	$3,653,099	47	4,714.5
LEBANON	$2,849,199	27	4,091.3
LEHIGH	$449,421	8	810.6
LUZERNE	$65,605	3	84.0
MONROE	$156,773	10	1,373.2
MONTGOMERY	$142,189	8	226.3
NORTHAMPTON	$349,471	10	2,438.0
PHILADELPHIA	$29,640	1	6.3
PIKE	$8,873	3	514.3
SCHUYLKILL	$574,059	9	811.2
WAYNE	$1,110,347	12	790.0
Grand Total	**$40,491,071**	**1,043**	**116,633.1**

Among the counties of the Watershed, the ratio of contracts received to funds received as compared to totals in each Watershed state varied. In Delaware, 100% of both contracts and total dollars obligated went to counties within the Delaware River Watershed. In New Jersey, Watershed counties received 94% of contracts and 92% of funds, in New York 21% of contracts and 15% of funds, and in Pennsylvania 23% of contracts and 28% of funds. In both Delaware and New Jersey, Watershed counties received similarly high percentages of state funding and contracts. This is a positive sign that the Watershed's resource concerns are being targeted and prioritized in these states. In New York and Pennsylvania, where percentages of funding and contracts in the DRW were lower, this targeting appears to be less strong.

EQIP

Notably, percentages of both funds and contracts flowing to DRW counties in New York and Pennsylvania rose significantly since FY17. In FY17, only 41% of contracts awarded in Delaware, and 51% of total dollars obligated, went to counties within the Delaware River Watershed. In New Jersey in FY17, watershed counties received 60% of contracts and 86% of funds; in New York, only 4% of contracts and 2% of funds; and in Pennsylvania, just 12% of contracts and 10% of funds.[1]

TABLE 8: Percent of State EQIP Obligations in DRW Counties FY19-FY20

State	State Obligations	DRW Obligation	%$ in DRW
Delaware	$13,867,186	$ 13,867,186	100%
New Jersey	$10,059,045	$ 9,262,134	92%
New York	$28,864,306	$ 4,454,789	15%
Pennsylvania	$46,422,452	$ 12,906,962	28%
Grand Total	**$99,212,988**	**$ 40,491,071**	**41%**

TABLE 9: Percent of State EQIP Contracts in DRW Counties FY19-FY20

State	State Contracts	DRW Contracts	%Contracts in DRW
Delaware	307	307	100%
New Jersey	424	398	94%
New York	623	132	21%
Pennsylvania	883	206	23%
Grand Total	**2,237**	**1,043**	**47%**

EQIP payments are based on a cost share rate for the specific practices adopted. Payment rates vary significantly, depending on whether the practice is a management or vegetative change, or a structural activity that includes significant reimbursement costs for materials and equipment.

The charts below illustrate, for each watershed state, the combined amount of funding allocated to the top five practices adopted under the FY 2019 and FY 2020 signup periods within the Watershed counties.

TABLE 10: Delaware - Top EQIP Practices FY19-FY20

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Cover Crop	KENT	7,014	$ 377,471
	NEW CASTLE	6,058	$ 367,738
	SUSSEX	14,909	$ 833,523
	Total	**27,981**	**$ 1,578,733**
Heavy Use Area Protection	KENT	237,386	$ 973,593
	NEW CASTLE	17,775	$ 68,272
	SUSSEX	283,138	$ 1,171,723
	Total	**538,299**	**$ 2,213,588**

[1]https://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Farm-Bill-Conservation-Programs-in-the-Counties-of-the-Delaware-River-Watershed-9.6.pdf

EQIP

TABLE 10: Delaware - Top EQIP Practices FY19-FY20 (cont'd)

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Hedgerow Planting	KENT	37,196	$ 87,095
	SUSSEX	26,425	$ 74,932
	Total	**63,621**	**$ 162,028**
High Tunnel System	KENT	8,760	$ 28,294
	NEW CASTLE	6,904	$ 22,348
	SUSSEX	22,400	$ 68,044
	Total	38,064	$ 118,685
Windbreak/	KENT	8,790	$ 6,847
Shelterbelt Establishment	NEW CASTLE	1,100	$ 501
	SUSSEX	14,074	$ 44,340
	Total	**23,964**	**$ 51,689**
Grand Total		**691,929**	**$ 4,124,723**

TABLE 11: New Jersey - Top EQIP Practices 2019-2020

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Cover Crop	ATLANTIC	286	$ 16,356
	BURLINGTON	4,012	$ 183,377
	CAPE MAY	3	$ 220
	CUMBERLAND	5,376	$ 255,017
	GLOUCESTER	10,396	$ 519,478
	HUNTERDON	660	$ 34,196
	MERCER	294	$ 14,635
	MONMOUTH	2,669	$ 101,669
	MORRIS	60	$ 3,808
	OCEAN	1	$ 31
	SALEM	18,701	$ 740,788
	SUSSEX	376	$ 5,593
	WARREN	3,239	$ 178,799
	Total	**46,073**	**$ 2,053,966**

continues...

EQIP

TABLE 11: New Jersey - Top EQIP Practices 2019-2020 (cont'd)

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Fence	BURLINGTON	2,590	$ 7,066
	HUNTERDON	37,351	$ 90,017
	MONMOUTH	1,900	$ 6,148
	OCEAN	124	$ 358
	SALEM	940	$ 3,512
	SUSSEX	3,065	$ 8,266
	WARREN	1,550	$ 3,178
	Total	**47,520**	**$ 118,544**
Heavy Use Area Protection	ATLANTIC	2,039	$ 4,098
	BURLINGTON	564	$ 1,062
	CUMBERLAND	600	$ 1,978
	GLOUCESTER	2,882	$ 4,152
	HUNTERDON	25,828	$ 178,876
	MERCER	420	$ 1,938
	OCEAN	540	$ 309
	SALEM	17,020	$ 98,931
	WARREN	750	$ 4,225
	Total	**50,643**	**$ 295,569**
High Tunnel System	ATLANTIC	1,800	$ 6,012
	BURLINGTON	8,676	$ 25,778
	CAMDEN	4,356	$ 14,539
	CAPE MAY	5,760	$ 18,663
	CUMBERLAND	480	$ 1,296
	GLOUCESTER	17,424	$ 49,790
	HUNTERDON	5,160	$ 16,935
	MERCER	5,040	$ 15,825
	MONMOUTH	7,200	$ 23,761
	MORRIS	9,240	$ 30,976
	OCEAN	3,578	$ 10,301
	SALEM	8,712	$ 26,167
	SUSSEX	17,027	$ 51,073
	WARREN	2,880	$ 9,619
	Total	**97,333**	**$ 300,734**

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EQIP

TABLE 11: New Jersey - Top EQIP Practices 2019-2020 (cont'd)

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Irrigation Pipeline	BURLINGTON	3,579	$ 29,274
	CUMBERLAND	650	$ 6,607
	GLOUCESTER	12,920	$ 110,508
	MERCER	1,000	$ 2,900
	SALEM	6,136	$ 83,487
	Total	**24,285**	**$ 232,776**
Grand Total		**265,854**	**$ 3,001,590**

TABLE 12: New York - Top EQIP Practices FY19-FY20

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Fence	DELAWARE	8,921	$ 33,215
	SCHOHARIE	4,490	$ 36,367
	Total	**13,411**	**$ 69,582**
Heavy Use Area Protection	CHENANGO	225	$ 2,025
	DELAWARE	10,741	$ 113,421
	SCHOHARIE	28,920	$ 186,280
	Total	**39,886**	**$ 301,726**
High Tunnel System	DELAWARE	10,470	$ 44,777
	GREENE	11,520	$ 45,547
	ORANGE	58,728	$ 239,789
	SCHOHARIE	9,984	$ 32,442
	SULLIVAN	25,708	$ 103,735
	ULSTER	37,504	$ 153,681
	Total	**153,914**	**$ 619,971**
Irrigation Pipeline	DELAWARE	2,200	$ 13,688
	ORANGE	12,762	$ 69,284
	SULLIVAN	1,653	$ 8,063
	ULSTER	11,974	$ 118,370
	Total	**28,589**	**$ 209,405**
Pond Sealing or Lining, Geomembrane or Geosynthetic Clay Liner	SCHOHARIE	27,176	$ 31,525
Grand Total		**262,976**	**$ 1,232,209**

EQIP

TABLE 13: Pennsylvania - Top EQIP Practices 2019-2020

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Fence	BERKS	39,630	$85,287
	BUCKS	5,925	$18,739
	CHESTER	19,269	$33,697
	LACKAWANNA	160	$679
	LEBANON	27,086	$75,027
	LEHIGH	11,604	$21,793
	LUZERNE	10,847	$14,000
	MONTGOMERY	1,580	$3,612
	NORTHAMPTON	9,318	$25,334
	PHILADELPHIA	1,270	$4,661
	SCHUYLKILL	1,873	$2,800
	WAYNE	26,078	$58,699
	Total	**154,640**	**$344,328**
Heavy Use Area Protection	BERKS	44,146	$277,122
	BUCKS	30,564	$28,242
	CHESTER	16,020	$87,100
	LACKAWANNA	750	$5,723
	LEBANON	29,674	$157,948
	LEHIGH	11,232	$60,164
	MONTGOMERY	10,200	$16,584
	NORTHAMPTON	6,200	$41,567
	PHILADELPHIA	30,492	$14,013
	SCHUYLKILL	8,960	$80,528
	WAYNE	17,161	$178,633
	Total	**205,399**	**$947,624**
High Tunnel System	BERKS	19,380	$36,441
	BUCKS	4,464	$14,000
	CHESTER	5,136	$12,916
	LEBANON	4,230	$11,131
	MONROE	2,215	$7,000
	MONTGOMERY	4,675	$14,000
	WAYNE	7,092	$21,000
	Total	**47,192**	**$116,487**

continues...

EQIP

TABLE 13: Pennsylvania - Top EQIP Practices 2019-2020 (cont'd)

Practice	County	Acres or Feet	Financial Assistance
Terrace	BUCKS	15,400	$52,673
	CHESTER	2,610	$6,502
	LEBANON	4,100	$12,635
	MONTGOMERY	850	$2,797
	SCHUYLKILL	1,525	$5,598
	Total	**24,485**	**$80,206**
Underground Outlet	BERKS	6,321	$48,379
	BUCKS	5,646	$44,000
	CHESTER	1,700	$10,268
	LACKAWANNA	632	$4,155
	LEBANON	11,720	$72,213
	LEHIGH	855	$6,359
	MONTGOMERY	2,045	$13,157
	NORTHAMPTON	2,345	$17,232
	PHILADELPHIA	816	$5,698
	SCHUYLKILL	2,478	$16,016
	WAYNE	8,803	$63,156
	Total	**43,361**	**$300,634**
Grand Total		**475,077**	**$1,789,279**

Adoption of EQIP practices within the Watershed counties is different when compared to trends that we see across the country. In other parts of the country, the most frequently adopted practices include a mix of management or vegetative practices (such as cover crop or brush management) and structural and equipment practices that support irrigation infrastructure or concentrated animal feeding operations (such as waste storage facilities). Data in the DRW for FY 2019 and 2020 show more structural practices in each state's top five than management or vegetative practices. This may be due to a normalized view of certain structural practices as creating 'the most bang for the buck' held by key members of the conservation community in these states. NSAC members in the region report some NRCS State Technical Advisory Committees as having a long-standing preference for using EQIP to fund infrastructure related to livestock operations. Such high dollar projects use an outsized amount of available EQIP funding. This leads to fewer farmers receiving program assistance on the whole, and thus a greater proportion of awards made going to infrastructure projects.

As a potential example, it is worth examining the Heavy Use Protection Area practice noted in the charts above. This practice, which appeared in all states' top five and accounted for over $3.7 million in spending over the two years analyzed, is meant to provide, "a stable, noneroding surface for areas frequently used by animals, people, or vehicles." It supports the creation of concrete slabs, and other durable surfaces, to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality wherever livestock are kept. This can be an essential practice for addressing water quality concerns, but it can also represent a long-term investment in CAFO style animal

EQIP

agriculture instead of regenerative, pasture-based systems. While it is clear that additional research is needed to understand this trend in the DWR, it is also clear that stakeholder participation in state and local level NRCS processes is essential to ensuring EQIP is utilized for the greatest environmental outcome. Below, we examine the cumulative adoption of key types of management and vegetative conservation practices in the Watershed counties during the FY 2019 to FY 2020 period. The data (delineated in terms of number of acres enrolled in each type of practice) show that EQIP is being used for the protection and enhancement of water and soil quality in these states. For example, across the Watershed counties, EQIP supported the adoption of roughly 86,000 acres of cover crops from FY 2019 to FY 2020 and over 34,000 acres of nutrient management in the same time period.

TABLE 14: EQIP Practices Protecting & Enhancing Water and Soil Quality 2019-2020

State	County	Conservation Cover	Cover Crop	Nutrient Management	Prescribed Grazing
Delaware	KENT		7,014	2,982	36
	NEW CASTLE		6,058	307	
	SUSSEX	1	14,909	9,126	
	Total	**1**	**27,981**	**12,416**	**36**
New Jersey	ATLANTIC	33	286		
	BURLINGTON	22	4,012		12
	CAPE MAY	1	3		
	CUMBERLAND	103	5,376		
	GLOUCESTER	8	10,396		
	HUNTERDON	5	660	3,192	258
	MERCER		294		
	MONMOUTH	26	2,669		
	MORRIS	102	60		
	OCEAN		1	7	
	SALEM	44	18,701	1,126	
	SUSSEX	26	376		5
	WARREN	6	3,239	1,197	
	Total	**376**	**46,073**	**5,522**	**276**
New York	CHENANGO			1,047	
	DELAWARE			2,963	
	MONROE		67	36	
	MONTGOMERY			532	
	ORANGE		1,843	113	
	SCHOHARIE				103
	ULSTER		15		
	Total	**-**	**1,924**	**4,691**	**103**

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EQIP

TABLE 14: EQIP Practices Protecting & Enhancing Water and Soil Quality 2019-2020 (cont'd)

State	County	Conservation Cover	Cover Crop	Nutrient Management	Prescribed Grazing
Pennsylvania	BERKS	13	557	2,639	249
	BUCKS	1	19	206	13
	CARBON		405		
	CHESTER			265	346
	LACKAWANNA	1	47	39	115
	LEBANON	0	396	3,013	364
	LEHIGH	3	1,947	47	47
	LUZERNE	2			30
	MONROE		964		
	MONTGOMERY			3	
	NORTHAMPTON	6	11	43	23
	SCHUYLKILL		876	793	10
	SULLIVAN		540		
	WAYNE	2		266	172
	Total	**26**	**5,763**	**7,312**	**1,370**
Grand Total		**402**	**81,741**	**29,942**	**1,784**

Through the farm bill, as well as through administrative reform proposals, NSAC will continue to advocate for increased adoption and utilization of management practices that focus EQIP more on the higher-scoring management and vegetative conservation practices that will improve the program's net environmental impact.

RCPP

The Regional Conservation program (RCPP) differs from the previously highlighted conservation programs because RCPP projects are first awarded to eligible entities (e.g., non-profit groups, conservation districts, farmer cooperatives, or other state or local agencies), and then farmers and ranchers are invited to apply to participate in an approved project.

Since the adoption of the 2014 Farm Bill, NRCS has awarded 22 projects with either Delaware, New Jersey, New York, or Pennsylvania as the lead state. Combined, these projects represent a $50.5 million investment in joint conservation efforts within the region.

Partners in RCPP projects bring an array of financial and technical contributions to the table, including cash contributions and one-on-one technical assistance with planning, management, and engineering activities. RCPP aims to leverage partner contributions to double the federal conservation investment.

The chart below details the individual awards in DRW states between 2014 and 2018. Data for these awards is not available at the county level; however, at least 7 RCPP projects during these years are clearly identifiable as Delaware River and Bay oriented.

TABLE 15: RCPP Project Descriptions, FY14-FY18

LEAD STATE	LEAD PARTNER	AMOUNT	GRANT TYPE	AWARD TITLE	PARTNERS	YEAR
Delaware	Sussex Conservation District	$600,000	State Funding	Watershed Channel Restoration Projects in Sussex County, Delaware	5	2014-2015
New Jersey	New Jersey Conservation Foundation	$700,000	State Funding	Delaware Bay Soil and Water Quality Protection Initiative	10	2014-2015
New York	Greater Adirondack Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.	$1,500,000	State Funding	Greater Adirondack Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program	9	2014-2015
Pennsylvania	American Farmland Trust	$13,000,000	National Funding	Delaware River Watershed Working Lands Conservation and Protection Partnership	27	2014-2015
Pennsylvania	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	$7,000,000	CCA	Comprehensive Watershed Conservation in Dairy and Livestock Landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay	20	2014-2015
Pennsylvania	Stroud Water Research Center	$1,500,000	State Funding	Productive Farms and Clean Streams for Berks and Chester Counties	13	2014-2015
Delaware	Sussex Conservation District	$1,000,000	State Funding Pool	Assisting Beginning Farmers with Poultry HQ BMPs	8	2016
New Jersey	New Jersey Water Supply Authority	$700,000	State Funding Pool	Raritan Basin Partners for Source Water Protection	3	2016
New York	New York State Soil & Water Cnoservation Committee	$3,000,000	CCA	Genesee River Sediment and Phosphorus Reduction	4	2016

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RCPP

TABLE 15: RCPP Project Descriptions, FY14-FY18 (cont'd)

LEAD STATE	LEAD PARTNER	AMOUNT	GRANT TYPE	AWARD TITLE	PARTNERS	YEAR
New York	Tioga County Soil & Water Conservation District	$4,100,000	CCA	Upper Susquehanna Agricultural BMP Implementation	2	2016
New York	Watershed Agricultural Council of the NYC Watersheds, Inc.	$1,200,000	State Funding Pool	Enhancement to the NYC Watershed Ag. Program	1	2016
Delaware	Cost-share Opportunities for Beginning Farmers	$475,300	State	Kent Conservation District	4	2017
Delaware	Energize Delaware Farm Energy Efficiency Program	$475,300	State	Delaware Sustainable Energy Utility	1	2017
New Jersey	Whole Farm Systems Conservation Trial	$644,000	State	New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee	5	2017
New York	Agricultural Stewardship in the Peconic Estuary	$1,212,000	State	Suffolk County - Department of Economic Development & Planning	10	2017
Pennsylvania	Soil Health: Improving Land, Water and Profitability	$396,800	State	Chesapeake Bay Foundation	8	2017
Delaware	Protecting DE Bay & Inland Bays with Cover Crops	$1,020,000	State	Sussex Conservation District	6	2018
New Jersey	Columbia Dam Removal & Restoration on Paulins Kill	$567,000	State	The Nature Conservancy	3	2018
New Jersey	Black River Greenway – Soil and Water Protection	$922,000	State	New Jersey Conservation Foundation	12	2018
New York	East of Hudson Watershed Water Supply Protection	$590,000	State	Watershed Agricultural Council	3	2018
Pennsylvania	CCCD Partnership for Chesapeake Bay Water Quality	$3,600,000	CCA	Chester County Conservation District	10	2018
Pennsylvania	Implementing BMP's & CNMP's on PA Preserved Farms	$6,370,000	CCA	Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Farmland Preservation	3	2018

RCPP

The Delaware River Watershed Working Lands Conservation Protection Partnership (DRWWLCPP), which was established with support from the William Penn Foundation, was awarded a grant in the first round of RCPP projects (2014-2015). This project focused on target areas (also known as "cluster areas") within the Delaware River Watershed in New Jersey, including the Highlands Cluster and the Kirkwood Cohansey Aquifer Cluster. This proposal was one of the first multi-state RCPP projects selected for funding, and was established with a five-year $13 million agreement. Within these areas, farmers and landowners were able to apply for funding through EQIP or ACEP to receive funding for conservation activities as part of the project. Additionally, to complement the implementation of conservation systems through NRCS, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Open Space Institute administered competitive grants and capital programs to support restoration and land protection projects. The impetus for this project originated from a rigorous watershed-wide assessment and prioritization process that was initiated by key stakeholders in the Delaware River Basin in 2012 and again, led by the William Penn Foundation. The data in this report should provide insights similar to that of the DRWWLCP, from which the Foundation and its partners can further target resources and actions within the region.

Since the 2018 Farm Bill, only nine RCPP projects have been funded in DRW states, and only three appear to touch down in DRW counties in New Jersey. Only one of these projects appears focused on improving water quality at a larger scale in the basin, demonstrating that RCPP has become an underutilized tool for water focused work in the DRW in recent years.

TABLE 16: RCPP Awards in DRW States Post 2018 Farm Bill

LEAD STATE	LEAD PARTNER	AMOUNT	PROJECT NAME	START YEAR	END YEAR
NJ	New Jersey Water Supply Authority	$608,572	Protecting Source Water in the Raritan System	2021	2026
NJ	New Jersey Audubon	$710,000	Salem River Bog Turtle Protection and Restoration	2021	2026
NJ	Urban Agricultural Cooperative	$355,000	Northern NJ Small Farm Food Link Conservation Project	2021	2026

RCPP projects last up to five years, with the possibility of extensions or renewals. So while new awards have not been made in the DRW in recent years, older projects are still compensating farmers for improving conservation. The chart below gives a rough picture of this at the state level, detailing total dollars spent in each state as well as total contracts with farmers for Fiscal Years 2019-2021.

TABLE 17: RCPP Contracts and Spending in the DWRB States for FY19-FY21

	2019		2020		2021		3yr Totals	
State	Contracts	Dollars	Contracts	Dollars	Contracts	Dollars	Contracts	Dollars
Delaware	4	$190,429			33	$728,003	37	$918,432
New Jersey	6	$592,184			8	$226,038	14	$818,222
New York	46	$1,300,765	5	$54,675	10	$2,870,888	61	$4,226,328
Pennsylvania	43	$3,601,822	28	$1,919,652	6	$796,285	77	$6,317,759
Combined State Totals	**99**	**$5,685,199**	**33**	**$1,974,327**	**57**	**$4,621,215**	**189**	**$12,280,741**

CRP

Note: USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and has typically posted monthly CRP reports online. These reports detail changes to CRP enrollment, including targeted initiatives, across the country. While this is important for gaining a snapshot of where enrollment stands at the national and state levels, FSA has yet to update the county enrollment reports. NSAC will continue to urge FSA to update all reports regularly in order to provide data in a transparent, accurate, and timely manner. The data below reflects the most recent CRP enrollment information available at this point.

While the majority of acres in CRP are enrolled through the general sign up, the Continuous CRP (CCRP) provides an invaluable resource for targeting conservation efforts and protecting water quality within the Delaware River Watershed and across the country. The 2018 Farm Bill established a new, higher acreage cap for CRP of 27 million acres nationally by 2023 and FSA is required by law to enroll 8.6 million acres in CCRP as part of its effort to meet the total acreage cap. CCRP pays farmers to install targeted, partial field conservation practices on the most environmentally sensitive lands. This enrollment option includes conservation buffer practices (filter strips, riparian buffers, grass waterways, grass strips, saturated buffers, and the like), as well as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Farmable Wetland Program (FWP), State Acreage for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative, and other special initiatives.

The 2018 Farm Bill created a new such initiative of note for the DRW within the CRP Clean Lakes, Estuaries, And Rivers (CLEAR30) program. This pilot offers 30 year contract extensions for producers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed that installed select water quality practices through CREP. CREP facilitates agreements between states and USDA to pay farmers to address regionally targeted conservation concerns; SAFE is an initiative aimed at providing financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who implement a variety of practices that conserve high priority wildlife species; and FWP helps producers manage certain types of wetlands and install wetland buffer areas.

Within the states of the Delaware River Watershed, farmers and ranchers far more heavily participate in CCRP than they do within General CRP. Only about 3,300 acres were enrolled in the CRP General as of December 2021 in DRW states compared to over 104,000 acres of CCRP (including CREP). Unfortunately, disaggregated data is not available for CRP and CCRP enrollment at the county level – only cumulative program data is available by county, except in the case of expiring acres. The following chart shows cumulative CRP (all possible signups) enrollment in the Watershed counties as of FY 2021; currently more than 115,000 acres are enrolled in all CRP signups across these counties. This is a sharp increase from previous reports as the Administration has focused on increased CRP signups as a part of their strategy for addressing climate change in agriculture.

TABLE 18: Cumulative CRP Totals for DRW States

State	Contracts	Farms	Acres	Annual Rent	
				Total ($1,000)	$/Acre
Delaware	270	164	3,239	$495	$152
New Jersey	315	184	1,819	$164	$90
New York	1,027	781	16,967	$1,514	$89
Pennsylvania	6,089	4,097	93,935	$13,598	$144

CRP

CCRP includes several different components, many of which provide significant benefits for water quality and other natural resource concerns. CREP, which is one component of CCRP, is of particular significance to the Delaware River Watershed states. Under a CREP agreement, states work with USDA and producers to address locally targeted resource concerns.

Pennsylvania leads the country in terms of the number of acres in CREP with over 92,000 acres enrolled as of December 2021, though almost none of these acres fell in the DRW.

The following chart illustrates the number of CREP contracts and acres enrolled within the states of the Watershed (data by county for CREP is not currently available):

TABLE 19: Cumulative CREP Totals for DRW States

State	Contracts	Farms	Acres	Annual Rent	
				Total ($1,000)	$/Acre
Delaware	244	158	3,048	$476	$156
New Jersey	239	143	663	$101	$152
New York	537	434	7,296	$980	$134
Pennsylvania*	8	6	90	$15	$164

*Totals for Pennsylvania reflect only CREP agreements in the DRW.
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/Conservation/PDF/Summary%20December%202021%20CRP%20Monthly.pdf

CCRP also offers partial field conservation buffer enrollments directly to farmers, without going through CREP, by which participants can install and maintain conservation buffers to protect sensitive acreage, water quality, and stream and streamside wildlife habitat. The following chart illustrates the number of acres cumulatively enrolled as of FY 2021 in key conservation practices through CCRP in each of the four states within the Watershed:

TABLE 20: Cumulative CCRP Practice by Acres Enrolled - Dec 2021

State	County	Tree Plantings	Grassed Waterways	Contour Grass Strips	Filter Strips	Riparian Buffers	Flood Plains	Pollinator Habitat
DELAWARE	KENT	735			203	13	89	
	NEW CASTLE		1		162	7		
	SUSSEX	1,242			35	37	17	
NEW JERSEY	ATLANTIC		9					
	BURLINGTON		3					
	CUMBERLAND		23		42	38		14
	GLOUCESTER		16			4		
	HUNTERDON		4			6		
	MERCER					7		

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CRP

TABLE 20: Cumulative CCRP Practice by Acres Enrolled - Dec 2021 (cont'd)

State	County	Tree Plantings	Grassed Waterways	Contour Grass Strips	Filter Strips	Riparian Buffers	Flood Plains	Pollinator Habitat
NEW JERSEY (cont'd)	MONMOUTH		1					
	MORRIS		2					
	SALEM		86	1	160	182		
	SUSSEX				8			
	WARREN		14		5	14		
NEW YORK	BROOME	8				500		
	CHENANGO	5			1	525		1
	GREENE					32		
	ORANGE							
	SCHOHARIE					22		
	SULLIVAN					15		
PENNSYLVANIA	BERKS	10			25	234	34	
	CARBON							
	CHESTER	1	13		7	239		
	LACKAWANNA					37		
	LANCASTER		7	4	22	1,273		
	LEBANON					124		
	LEHIGH		2					
	LUZERNE		1		5	65		
	NORTHAMPTON		1					
	SCHUYLKILL		13	4	21	231	6	
	WAYNE		1			187		

Also included within CCRP is the Grasslands Initiative, which helps grass-based livestock operations conserve and enhance their lands. Grassland enhancement and preservation efforts generate widespread benefits for priority wildlife species, as well as for water filtration, flood mitigation, soil health, and carbon sequestration.Of the four states in the Watershed, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania had producers enrolled as of December 2021. New Jersey had five active contracts for a total of 173 acres, New York had 67 contracts covering 2,755 acres, and Pennsylvania had 19 contracts with 865 acres. This represents a modest but growing interest in the Grasslands Initiative in DRW states.

CRP

CCRP enrollment remains high nationally, however, land still continues to expire from the program at a steady rate. The exiting of acres does not point to disinterest in the program, however. Instead, it reflects the fact that a new class of 10- to 15- year contracts expires each year. The charts below illustrate expiring acres from CCRP and CRP General within the Delaware River Watershed counties as of December 2021.

TABLE 21: Expiring CCRP Acres*

State/County	'22	'23	'24	'25	'26	'27	'28	'29	'30	'31	'32	'33	'34	'35	'36
Delaware	**133**	**156**	**105**	**104**	**284**	**99**	**76**	**168**	**226**	**953**	**264**	**178**	**188**	**117**	**204**
Kent	71	54	38	79	48	48	56	46	200	269	185	107	104	45	131
New Castle	49	94	2						12	14	16	2	5		18
Sussex	13	9	65	25	236	51	19	122	15	670	63	70	57	72	54
New Jersey	**257**	**113**	**55**	**184**	**138**	**206**	**71**	**32**	**106**	**204**	**21**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Atlantic	2	1		8	2										
Burlington							2			1					
Cumberland	85	4	30	6	46	11					9				
Gloucester	6	4	5	11		0	1	1	2	36	4				
Hunterdon	35	22		22		174	7	3		46					
Mercer	3	5													
Monmouth									1						
Morris	2	0		22			0								
Salem	108	42	21	96	85	11	47	24	101	87	9	2	1		
Sussex	6							2							
Warren	10	36		18	6	10	13	2	2	34					
New York	**1,007**	**337**	**295**	**281**	**349**	**301**	**133**	**203**	**317**	**333**	**134**	**115**	**108**	**218**	**82**
Broome	150	113	48	18	6	29			211	99	97	68	37	156	56
Chenango	189	166	139	39	33	21	1	9				21	7	48	
Delaware	144	44	109	223	292	230	131	194	96	219	37	26	64	5	26
Greene	7	15							10						
Orange	517														
Schoharie					13	20								9	
Sullivan					4					15					
Pennsylvania	**1,696**	**879**	**623**	**810**	**248**	**888**	**1,013**	**483**	**833**	**810**	**374**	**94**	**298**	**306**	**188**
Berks	624	129	261	112		126	90	43	303	117	81	13	78	4	39
Carbon				31			43	53	14						
Chester	194	45	4	51	25	39	51	9	70	61	21	10	10	80	23
Lackawanna	34	12	2	158		24		8							
Lancaster	247	215	84	222	122	213	113	55	222	241	149	37	131	134	88
Lebanon	31	27	3	3	14	105		5	53	39	5	1	8	87	
Lehigh					1	1	61		3	6					
Luzerne	75	62	233	170	2	142	184	164	41	32			14		
Northampton	1							11		8					
Schuylkill	378	222	14	55	66	238	454	114	52	305	117	32	58		20
Wayne	113	168	24	10	18		16	22	75						19
Grand Total	**3,092**	**1,486**	**1,079**	**1,379**	**1,019**	**1,494**	**1,292**	**886**	**1,481**	**2,300**	**793**	**389**	**572**	**641**	**474**

CRP

TABLE 22: Expiring General CRP Acres*

State/County	'22	'23	'24	'25	'26	'27	'28	'29	'30	'31	'32	'33	'34	'35	'36
Delaware	**26.2**	**65.5**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**8.21**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Kent	24.1							4	2						
New Castle		39.1													
Sussex	2.1	26.4							8.21						
New Jersey	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**131**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Cumberland									29.4						
Salem									86.6						
Warren									14.7						
New York	**5.6**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Schoharie	5.6														
Pennsylvania	**31.8**	**10.2**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**28.4**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1.4**	**0**
Bucks		10.2													
Lancaster									20.6						
Lebanon									7.8						
Montgomery	31.8														
Schuylkill										9					
Grand Total	**63.6**	**75.7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**167**	**9**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1.4**	**0**

Participants with expiring land have the choice between returning their land to production or re-enrolling in CCRP. Providing the proper outreach and incentives to encourage more producers to re-enroll sensitive areas (e.g., riparian areas and prime wildlife habitat) through the continuous sign-up is something on which NSAC has been actively working with FSA for the last several years. This signup opportunity remains open at the time of this writing.

The most recent CRP general signup began January 31 and closed March 11, 2022 and the Grasslands Initiative signup ran from April 4th, 2022, to May 13th, 2022. With 22.5 million acres currently enrolled, Farm Service Agency (FSA) hopes to reach the 25.5 million acre cap set for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 via these two signups. Last year, FSA enacted a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP General and Continuous signups, to better target CRP to address climate change. Producers can receive a 3-10% increase in their annual rental payment for utilizing practices that store carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This incentive still applies to the 2022 signups.

In order to best serve producers while also safeguarding our shared natural resources and taxpayer investments, USDA should manage CRP in a manner that maximizes environmental benefits. To accomplish this, applicants are ranked using the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) to help determine how much ecological good each bid creates. The maximum possible score is 545 and each signup includes a minimum required score to qualify for enrollment. The 2021 general signup saw historically low minimum required EBI scores of 175 and 165 in select states. This means that the 2021 signup created far less environmental benefit per acre compared to past signups.

NSAC has advocated to USDA to keep this in mind as it proceeds with the 2022 general signup. We believe it would be ill-advised to attempt to reach the 25.5 million acres cap for the program with this signup if it interferes with the continuous signup, or if it requires accepting bids with low environmental value and thereby recreates the mistakes of 2021.

ACEP

Within the four states of the Delaware River Watershed, roughly $11.9 million in funding through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) was obligated to protect agricultural land in FY 2020.[9] While obligations data for 2021 is not available at this time, NSAC acquired data from NRCS detailing the agreements and acres enrolled in both ALE and WRE for FY 2020 and FY 2021. The chart below illustrates this for both ALE and WRE among those counties with available data during both Fiscal Years.

TABLE 23: ACEP Agreements & Acres FY20-FY21

		ACEP-ALE		ACEP-WRE		Totals	
State	County	Agreements	Acres	Agreements	Acres	Agreements	Acres
Delaware	Kent	11	1,406			11	1,406
	Sussex	12	1,399			12	1,399
New Jersey	Cumberland	1	29			1	29
	Hunterdon	2	73	1	13	3	86
	Salem	7	340	1	14	8	354
	Sussex			3	147	3	147
	Warren			1	4	1	4
New York	Orange	1	165			1	165
	Rensselaer	2	312			2	312
	Ulster	1	211			1	211
Pennsylvania*	Lancaster	2	161			2	161

Conservation activities included within agricultural land easements, as well as the restoration, protection, and enhancement of wetlands, can provide significant water quality benefits to ecosystems across the states of the Watershed. These activities can be particularly impactful in densely populated areas where sprawl and development pose threats to preserving agricultural land; in these areas, easements play a critical role in ensuring the continued productivity and protection of agricultural land. Additionally, wetlands and grasslands provide a wide range of ecological benefits such as water filtration, flood mitigation, and carbon sequestration.

[9] https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/NRCS_RCA/reports/srpt_cp_acep.html

ORGANIC

While no single farm bill conservation program is focused solely on organic agriculture, some of the aforementioned programs provide targeted support for certified organic producers, as well as those in process of transitioning to organic production. Organic production and practices can significantly contribute to improved water quality by reducing inputs on land in agricultural production. Additionally, soil health co-benefits obtained through organic agriculture also contribute to improved water quality through increased water retention and decreased erosion.

Organic and transitioning participants are tracked within both EQIP and CSP. Within EQIP, certified organic and transitioning to organic participants have the option to compete within the Organic Initiative – a separate and smaller funding pool, but within which they are subject to a stricter payment limitation. Due to the advocacy of NSAC and our organic partners, the 2018 Farm Bill increased the payment limit for EQIP Organic Initiative participants to $140,000 over five years, a step in the right direction, but still lower than the payment limit that applies to participants in the general EQIP program.

The charts below break down organic participation within the Watershed in CSP and EQIP by state, as data at the county level is not available. This data is offered by producers voluntarily during the application process to each program. It is not required or consistently collected by NRCS, and thus presents an incomplete picture of organic participation in conservation programs.

TABLE 24: Certified and Transitioning Organic Producers in CSP Sign Ups

	FY 2019			FY 2020			FY 2021			3-Yr Totals		
State	**Cont.**	**Financial Assistance**	**Acres**	**Cont.**	**Financial Assistance**	**Acres**	**Cont.**	**Financial Assistance**	**Acres**	**Cont.**	**Financial Assistance**	**Acres**
Certified												
NJ	3	$86,924					5	$69,869	128	5	$69,869	128
NY	2	$50,059	823	7	$228,923	2,446	5	$241,860	1,843	15	$557,707	5112
PA			63				7	$361,421	2,048	9	$411,480	2111
Transition												
NJ				1	$12,992	28	1	$15,820	20	2	$28,812	48
NY	2	$46,996	34	1	$9,139	16				3	$56,135	50
PA	1	$7,501	2	2	$37,889	22	1	$19,638	28	4	$65,028	52
Totals												
	8	**$191,480**	**922**	**11**	**$288,943**	**922**	**19**	**$708,608**	**4,067**	**38**	**$1,189,031**	**7,501**

ORGANIC

TABLE 25: Certified and Transitioning Organic Producers in EQIP FY19

	Certified			Transition		
	Contracts	Assistance	Acres	Contracts	Assistance	Acres
Delaware				1	$4,491	1
New Jersey	3	$34,365	12	3	$88,694	183
New York	4	$175,456	57	1	$12,575	0
Pennsylvania	4	$109,317	166	4	$71,201	283
Total	**11**	**$319,138**	**234**	**9**	**$176,961**	**466**

CRP also offers an organic-specific option through the Organic Buffers Initiative as a result of NSAC's advocacy. This initiative allows organic and transitioning participants to enroll conservation buffers, including any eligible CCRP practice, which provide critical conservation benefits and can also help protect organic farms against pesticide drift or genetic drift. Depending on a particular operation's needs, enrollment in the Organic Buffers Initiative could include the installation of filter strips, riparian buffers, windbreaks, upland buffers, pollinator habitat, and more. Data from the Initiative is only reported at a national level and offers no insight on the use of Organic Buffers in the DRW. NSAC will continue to advocate for better reporting on and promotion of this initiative.

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The data provided in this report can help advocates and producers better understand the adoption and utilization of major farm bill conservation programs within the counties of the Delaware River Watershed, and use those insights to inform their own advocacy and outreach. Given the still rudimentary levels of data collection on conservation programs at the federal level, however, agencies like NRCS remain unable to quantify the impact of their conservation investments in terms of environmental outcomes. Without this type of data, conservation programs remain vulnerable and subject to attack by critics who claim that their impacts are not worth the funds provided.

NSAC is actively working to improve data collection on conservation so that these critical conservation programs will be better insulated from attacks, and so that NRCS can improve program outreach and performance.

To date, NRCS has taken some action toward better data collection through the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), which measures and models the conservation of natural resources on a landscape scale. In 2014, NRCS published a CEAP report, Assessment of the Effects of Conservation Practices on Cultivated Cropland in the Delaware River Basin, which provides valuable insight as to the adoption of key conservation practices (though not focused solely on those adopted through federal conservation programs or even NRCS conservation activities). At the time the study was conducted, the CEAP report indicated that farmers were making progress in terms of conservation practice adoption, but there was still significant need for additional treatment. NRCS found there was a high level of need for conservation treatment on areas where nutrient and sediment loss was greatest: some 434,000 acres (or 51% of the cropped acres in the region) had a high level of need for additional conservation treatment.

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

They also found that there was a 44% reduction in sediment loss, and a 33% reduction in nitrogen lost from runoff, through conservation treatment, illustrating an opportunity and need to further understand the direct correlation between specific conservation activities and environmental outcomes. The information collected by NRCS through this report and other analyses is useful in understanding conservation on a landscape or watershed scale, and NRCS has taken steps to understand the adoption of conservation practices specifically within the Delaware River Watershed. As noted, however, they still lack the data to explain and quantify the environmental benefits obtained through the adoption of those practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Federal conservation programs play a significant role in supporting farmers and ranchers' stewardship efforts within the Delaware River Watershed. The diversity of programs available, including stewardship, cost share, easements, land protection, and partnership programs, provide farmers in the Watershed with a wide range of opportunities to protect and enhance our shared resources. This analysis of program utilization across Watershed counties (and across Watershed states where county-level data was unavailable) tells us that farmers are utilizing and benefiting significantly from farm bill conservation programs, and thus stand to gain (or to lose) greatly from any changes made to policies or funding levels in the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill.

The data also point to several opportunities to further enhance farm bill conservation programs' ability to protect and improve water quality across these counties. In particular, there is both an opportunity and a clear need to increase the adoption of high level resource-conserving crop rotations within CSP and EQIP, and to increase conservation buffer adoption through CCRP. These changes can be fostered and encouraged legislatively, but they can also be made administratively through agency action to reform the programs to get more bang for the buck. For example, administrative changes can adjust ranking criteria to select for high scoring, high payoff activities or increase payment rates to promote these activities. Additionally, NRCS offices can help to ensure that they are actively encouraging and supporting the adoption of high-level conservation activities when they interface with farmers. This is an area where NSAC can assist through its guidebooks and through its own farmer outreach.

NSAC will continue to advocate for a 2023 Farm Bill that protects and increases funding for key programs to help ensure fewer eligible participants are turned away. Additionally, NSAC will continue to seek policy changes that further encourage and incentivize key conservation activities, including resource-conserving crop rotations, cover cropping, conservation buffers, and managed intensive rotational grazing. See NSAC's 2023 Farm Bill Platform for a deeper dive on the specific policy changes we believe will help create these outcomes, including proposals to increase conservation program accessibility for historically underserved producers. With support from the William Penn Foundation and others, we will engage actively both with leadership on the Hill, and also – through our membership – with leaders and grassroots stakeholders at the local level to see these proposals take shape in the 2023 Farm Bill.

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