The Conservation Partnership in Michigan

March 2006
NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Federal Agency under the United States Department of Agriculture
Founded during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930’s

Partners with the local Conservation District and MI Department of Agriculture
Partnership Agreements

بذ Mutual Agreement is between the Secretary of Agriculture, Governor and/or Tribal Chair and the Conservation District or Tribe
  – Umbrella agreement – basic framework
بذ Cooperative Working Agreement is between the Conservation District or Tribe, MI Department of Ag and NRCS
  – General guidelines of operation, reviewed annually at CD meeting, no expiration date
What does NRCS Do?

- Provides technical assistance to landowners and farmers with natural resource concerns and/or problems
- Administers various Farm Bill Programs
- Provides technical information to the public obtained through research and development
- Partners with Conservation District and others on various projects
Technical Assistance

- On site identification of potential resource concerns
- Discuss ideas that could solve resource concerns
- Landowners make decisions which are documented in a Conservation Plan
- Assist with installation of conservation practices
- Follow up
Conservation Plan

- A Conservation Plan outlines the planned practices and installation schedule.
- Updated as changes to operation, land base, and finances occur.
- Private document—not subject to the Freedom of Information Act
- All Conservation Plans are reviewed by Conservation District Directors
Conservation Plan Map

Conservation Plan

Conservation Cover (327)
Establish perennial vegetative cover on bare cropland to prevent erosion. Use minimum amount of tillage to establish a good seedbed. Lime and fertilize according to current soil test. Since this is a wetter site, seed area with 6 lbs/ac of ‘Viking’ Birdfoot Trefoil (with proper inoculant) and 2 lbs/ac of Kentucky Bluegrass. NOTE: Substitutions for grass or legume may be made. Contact NRCS for species and seeding rate. Cultivate after seeding if necessary. During establishment year, mow high to prevent damage to the permanent seeding. See enclosed Extension publication on Birdfoot Trefoil. Maintain for the lifespan of the practice (10 years).

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<th>Planned Amount</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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Conservation Cover (327)
‘Sod Centers’ will be established to control erosion, provide nutrients to the newly established orchard trees, and as an aid to beneficial insect habitat. Follow seeding recommendations from the MSU Horticultural Research Station: up to 6 lbs/ac each of White Clover and Alfalfa (with proper inoculant) and up to 5 lbs/ac each of Perennial Ryegrass and Chewings Fescue. Lime and fertilize according to a recent soil test (no older than 3 years). Maintain for the lifespan of the practice. (10 years)
Seeding Dates:
Spring seeding - April 20-June 10
Summer seeding - July 15-August 10

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<th>Tract</th>
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<tr>
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NRCS Programs

- CTA – Conservation Technical Assistance
- EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
- WRP – Wetland Reserve Program
- CSP – Conservation Security Program
- GRP – Grassland Reserve Program
- TA – Technical Assistance Funds for TSPs
- RC&D - Resource Conservation & Development Program
Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

- Work with landowner to evaluate existing Agricultural Operation and/or Property
- Free of Charge.
- First step towards participation in NRCS Programs that provide financial assistance.
- Technical advice for solving a resource problem.
- Partner with Districts and others on special projects
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Provides incentive payments and cost-share to offset the costs of correcting an existing resource problem.
- A competitive program – acceptance based on available funding and a environmental benefit score.
- Most popular NRCS financial incentive program.
- 15.2 million dollars in funding available for Michigan in Fiscal Year 2006.
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

- Provides financial incentives to develop and enhance areas for wildlife. (50 to 75 percent cost-share)
- Limited funding - $400,000 available for Fiscal Year 2006 contracts in Michigan. ($20,000 max per contract)
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

There are three types of contracts
- Restoration only
- 30 year Easement
- Permanent Easement

$7,750,000 in funding for fiscal year 2006
- 85% of funding goes towards permanent easements
- 15% of funding goes towards 30 year easements
- 1% or less of funding goes towards restoration only
Conservation Security Program (CSP)

- Very young program – Fiscal Year 2004 was the first year of implementation
- Provides base payments and enhancement payments to producers who have been actively applying conservation on their land.
- “Reward the best, motivate the rest”
- Funded by watershed
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

- Developed to protect privately owned grasslands.
- 40 ac. Minimum
- If grassland is grazed, a prescribed grazing plan is required
- Mowing of GRP fields is regulated or prohibited during the primary nesting season (April 15\textsuperscript{th} to July 15\textsuperscript{th}) to protect nesting habitat.
- Easements and Rental Agreements
Technical Assistance Funds (TA)

- NRCS’s workload has dramatically increased over last two Farm Bills
- Limited number of employees to implement Farm Bill Programs
- TA Funds provide dollars to landowners to hire certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to implement contracted conservation practices
  - Landowner is paid a Not To Exceed (NTE) rate developed nationally to hire a TSP to design, implement and certify the contracted conservation practice
TA Funds Continued

- TA Funds also provide opportunity to enter into Contribution Agreements (CAs) with sponsors
  - CA with MDA reimburses MDA 50% of NTE rate for practices implemented because they do not compete with private sector TSPs for funding
- Services paid for with TA $ will meet NRCS Standards and Specifications
- TA Funds can reimburse Conservation Districts or other sponsors for assisting NRCS with the administration of Farm Bill contracts
- Each year the State Conservationist is given a TA “earmark”
- It grows each year as the $ for NRCS staff shrinks
The Federal Budget Process

- NRCS is part of the USDA and must follow the Government Performance Results Act of 1994
  - Federal agencies MUST BE accountable for dollars spent
  - Local field offices are responsible for attaining set goals
  - National Performance Plan is negotiated annually with Congress
All activities are documented locally to prove accountability for funds

- Web based Performance Results System (PRS) is used to track conservation activities at a district, state, and national level
- Conservation Districts have access to and are encouraged to participate in the PRS process
  - Provides reports of your activities that you can use in fundraising
MI NRCS Training Courses

- Conservation District Staff welcome as room allows
- Practice modules for Critical Area Treatment, Grassed Waterways & Diversions, Pasture & Hayland Mgt, Grade Stabilization Structures, Wildlife Management, Agrichemical Containment Facilities, Tree Planting/Windbreaks, Fence, Warm Season Grass Mgt, Aquatic Habitat Mgt, Evaluating Wildlife, Forest Stand Improvement, Grassland Wildlife Habitat Mgt, Wetland Wildlife Habitat Mgt, Watering Systems
- Manure Application Risk Index, Crops 101, Concrete Inspection, Using Soil Surveys in Urban Areas, Basic Engineering Surveys, GIS, Customer Service Toolkit, RUSLE2
- Plant Identification – Grasses/Forbs, Wetlands, Trees
QUESTIONS?