

## Fact Sheet

### **Conservation Opportunities for:** **- American Indians and Alaska Natives** **- Beginning Farmers and Ranchers** **- Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers**

November 2002

---

#### **Overview**

Many conservation opportunities in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) address the unique circumstances and concerns of American Indians and Alaska Natives, beginning farmers and ranchers, and limited resource farmers and ranchers. The 2002 Farm Bill promotes conservation of natural resources on agricultural land and land under the jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe. It provides for voluntary participation, offers incentives, and focuses on equity in accessing U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and services. Enhancements include streamlined delivery of technical and financial assistance; improved programs and services; and flexibility in decision making with most decisions made at the Tribal, State, or local level. The Farm Bill recognizes the unique challenges of farmers and ranchers who are just beginning their agricultural operations, of those with limited financial resources, and of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes who have a special relationship with the U.S. government.

For the conservation programs and other opportunities available through the 2002 Farm Bill, the following definitions are used:

*American Indians and Alaska Natives:* Federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and their members; any Alaska Native village or regional corporation established in accordance with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; or a citizen of the United States who is one-fourth or more Alaska Indian, Eskimo, and/or Aleut.

#### *Beginning farmers and ranchers:*

Individuals who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less.

*Limited resource farmers and ranchers* is being defined as part of the Federal rule making process.

#### **Program Enhancements**

A number of programs were extended as part of the 2002 Farm Bill and revised to be more responsive to customer needs. For example, by removing the requirement of Conservation Priority Areas, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) now provides all producers an equal opportunity to participate. One enhancement to the program is increased cost-share assistance for conservation practices of up to 90 percent for beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers. The “bid-down” provision was eliminated. (Previously, producers who offered to pay more of the cost for practices were given higher priority.) The minimum length of contracts was reduced from five years to one year after the last practice is completed. Sixty percent of the EQIP funds will be directed to livestock producers who address environmental concerns. Payments will be made more quickly than in past years. After an EQIP contract has been signed and as soon as the landowner’s conservation practices have been completed and approved, the cost-share payments will be made. (Previously, landowners had to wait until the next fiscal year to implement the first practice and receive payment.)

Other programs were continued, including those that provide payments for the protection or restoration of wetlands (Wetlands Reserve Program), protection of wildlife habitat (Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program), adoption of agricultural management activities in selected states (Agricultural Management Assistance), and protection of farmland from conversion to non-agricultural uses (Farmland Protection Program). Also, there will be technical assistance available for protection of private grazing land.

### ***New Programs and Provisions***

The **Conservation Security Program** will offer payments to producers for addressing resource concerns on their operations. The program focuses on support for all farms and ranches regardless of size or location and offers three tiers of involvement with increased payment levels based upon increased levels of conservation efforts. Beginning farmers and ranchers will be eligible for up to 90 percent cost-share assistance.

The **Grassland Reserve Program** will assist producers in protecting or restoring their grasslands. Producers can receive payments for options of 10, 15, or 30 years or for permanent easements to keep the land as grassland.

The Secretary of Agriculture may also provide **special incentives** for American Indian Tribes and beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers to encourage participation in conservation programs and special projects or innovative activities to get conservation practices on the land.

Also, innovative projects may be funded under a new **Conservation Innovation Grants** initiative. This initiative requires 50 percent matching funds by Tribal, State, or local governments or private organizations or individuals. Innovative projects could include new management techniques, specific treatments, or procedures such as structural or vegetative measures that solve or reduce

natural resource problems. These projects must promote environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production.

The 2002 Farm Bill also authorizes certified **technical service providers** (private individuals, non-government organizations, and Tribal, State, or local governments) to provide assistance to agricultural producers and receive payments. This will increase the number of qualified technical experts available to help farmers and ranchers conserve natural resources on their land.

### ***For More Information***

If you need more information about these and other programs and opportunities, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information, including program specific fact sheets, also is available on the World Wide Web at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:  
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

**Please note:** This information is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.