

2013 Indiana NRCS Annual Report

Conservation
Successes

Program
Successes

Special
Initiatives

1

2

3



Fiscal Year 2013 was a year of challenges, changes and opportunities for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with uncertainty over the budget, a continuing resolution, impending government shutdown, and farm bill negotiations. However, I am so proud to say, Indiana NRCS employees handled it all professionally, going above and beyond expectations to work with customers and meet our conservation goals.

For the first few months of the year I was on special detail in Washington, D.C. and I found that almost everywhere I went Indiana NRCS was mentioned as a leader when it comes to our ability to get conservation delivered in the most efficient way. And without question, our Indiana Conservation Partnership is known throughout the country as a model for working together to achieve conservation goals.

In 2013, we refocused our efforts on the importance of conservation planning. Making sure our landowners have a written record of their management decisions and the conservation practices and systems they plan on their farm is an important first step in working with NRCS. All field employees received training during the year, and several employees and partners became certified.

From a Farm Bill program standpoint, it is challenging each year to obligate dollars, especially if we do not know when those dollars will be released, but our staff came through in getting the funds obligated. We obligated 99% of EQIP, 89% of HFRP, 95% of CSP, 93% of WREP/WREP-MRBI, and 99% of WRP dollars. Despite the WRP program being unauthorized for a portion of the year, a very limited sign-up period, and continued high crop and land prices, the accomplishments show the dedication of employees to promote habitat conservation and protect the natural heritage of Indiana.

Indiana continues to lead the nation in our soil health efforts thanks to our soil health leaders and partnership with the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative. I am looking forward to even more opportunities in 2014 for farmers, partners, and employees to build their knowledge of the soil health principles and conservation cropping system philosophies.

A highlight this year was celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Pathway to Water Quality, an outdoor exhibit at the Indiana State Fair. This joint Indiana Conservation Partnership project is one of our most successful outreach events to nontraditional audiences about the importance of conservation.

I expect FY-2014 to bring more challenges and opportunities for NRCS with a new farm bill to implement and continued uncertainty about the budget, however whatever happens I am positive our employees will deliver the same exceptional service our customers have come to expect.



JANE HARDISTY
State Conservationist
317-295-5801
jane.hardisty@in.usda.gov
www.in.nrcs.usda.gov



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Family Controls Flooding While Providing Habitat

Year after year, anywhere between six to ten acres of a crop field on James and Cindy Newkirk’s Farm washed out during storm events, leaving standing water for long periods of time. The field lies adjacent to a wooded area and near where the Shawnee Creek flows in from the north. The only time a crop could be harvested off the field was during a drought year. The loss of top soil from the field, flooding of the road, and lack of income from planting a crop that did not produce was troublesome for the Newkirk family.

In 2012, the Newkirks decided to do something and inquired about enrolling the field in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP), one of the Farm Bill programs administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). After talking with the NRCS District Conservationist about their goals, they selected conservation practices that would benefit wildlife and eliminate their concerns about water runoff, loss of crops and standing water.

In 2013, the Newkirks created a one-acre shallow wetland and a one-

acre pollinator habitat. The wetland includes a banked berm area to help reduce the overflow of water on to a nearby road, two small mounded areas for wildlife habitat, and an area to hold water and slowly release it back into Shawnee Creek, which reduces flooding downstream. Next year, they plan to plant trees as a buffer near the creek. Planting these trees will add over two acres to their existing woodland and will provide additional water quality protection and wildlife habitat.

Newkirk Farms has been in James’ family for eight generations so good land stewardship is very important to both him and Cindy. They took a wet, unproductive field out of production and turned it into a wildlife viewer’s paradise that eliminates flooding and erosion and, in turn, improves local water quality. With CSP and NRCS technical assistance, this land is being transformed into a healthy and safe habitat for native and migrating birds and other wildlife. In fact, the Newkirks recently discovered a new resident on their farm—ground-nesting bees, an important Indiana pollinator. When asked about their progress so far, the Newkirks describe the benefits of converting their land as immeasurable.



Beginning Farmer Utilizes EQIP to Improve Operation



Darby Simpson, a beginning farmer in Morgan County, owns and operates Simpson Family Farm where he raises natural beef and poultry for local markets. Simpson’s goals are to maintain a diverse natural, sustainable and efficient livestock operation with minimal economic inputs, without the use of feeds that include antibiotics, steroids or growth hormones and to coexist with the native environment surrounding the farm and their way of life.

A few years ago, Simpson began experimenting with raising chickens in “chicken tractors” - a mobile pen on wheels that allows the birds to be moved around the farm while keeping them contained and protected with their food and water. NRCS and other conservation partners began working with Simpson two years ago to develop a conservation plan and discuss possible funding sources to implement the plan. Recommended practices included converting cropland to no-till pasture and hay and installing perimeter and interior fencing and watering facilities as a first step in implementing an extended rotational grazing system.

With EQIP funds, Simpson was able to install more than 4,000 feet of interior fence to create paddocks; an estimated 2,960 feet of pipeline, eight watering facilities and a water pumping plant all to serve 28.8 acres of prescribed rotational grazing.

There are significant benefits to the environment from the implementation of this conservation plan. Conversion of the crop field to a permanent cover of pasture and hay will save one ton of soil per acre per year on the 17.6 acre field. This is a savings of 17 tons of top soil per year. In addition, there are immeasurable savings in fertilizer cost, pesticides not running off into nearby Stotts Creek, carbon lost to the atmosphere, and the fossil fuels used in this operation.



Financial Assistance Programs

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities. Indiana received over \$7.6 million in CSP funding in FY-2013. A total of 55 new contacts received funding to treat nearly 40,725 acres of cropland, pasture and forest.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In addition to financial assistance to landowners, NRCS is the USDA's principal agency for providing conservation technical assistance to private landowners, conservation districts, tribes, and other organizations. Conservation Technical Assistance allows NRCS and its partners to assist landowners with planning and resource assessment to make good natural resource decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands.

EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) responds to emergencies created by natural disasters and is designed to help people and conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, wind-storms, and other natural occurrences. One EWP contact for approximately \$217,000 was completed in FY-2013.

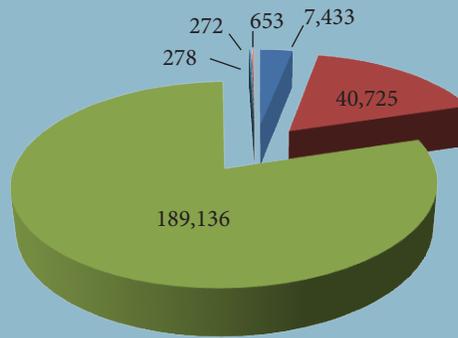
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

Indiana received over \$27.8 million in EQIP funding in FY-2013. A total of 972 contracts were entered into that will address natural resource concerns on 189,136 acres of land over the life of the contracts. These contracts provided financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. EQIP offered several targeted initiatives that provided funding to specific geographic areas and/or resource concerns. These included the On-Farm Energy Initiative, Organic Initiative and Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative.

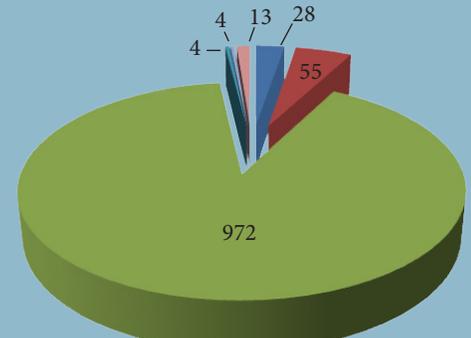
FY13 Program Funding



FY13 Program Acres



FY13 Program Contracts



- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
- Conservation Stewardship Program
- Emergency Watershed Protection Program
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Easement Programs

EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION - FLOODPLAIN EASEMENT

The Emergency Watershed Protection - Floodplain Easement Program (EWP-FPE) provides an alternative measure to traditional EWP recovery, where it is determined that acquiring an easement in lieu of recovery measures is the more economical and prudent approach to reducing a threat to life or property. In FY-2013, four contracts were signed, providing easements for 278 acres.

HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is a voluntary conservation easement program that emphasizes support for restoring, enhancing and protecting forestland resources on private lands. In FY-2013, a total of 272 acres were enrolled in four contracts providing approximately \$568,500 in financial assistance.

WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. During FY-2013, NRCS helped Indiana landowners protect and restore 653 acres of wetlands under WRP. Approximately \$4.6 million was brought to Indiana for the protection of wetlands in Indiana.





AGRICULTURAL WATER ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is a voluntary conservation initiative. AWEP provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land to conserve surface and ground water and improve water quality. Indiana NRCS allocated over \$834,000 to AWEP in FY-2013, treating 7,433 acres of farmland.

COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The CCPI is a voluntary conservation initiative that targets Farm Bill funding to specific geographic areas and/or resource concerns through a competitive proposal process. In FY-2013, CCPI provided landowners \$172,922 in financial assistance for conservation practices on 2,084 acres of land focused on water quality issues and forest management.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN INITIATIVE

Through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), NRCS and our partners work with producers and landowners to put in voluntary conservation practices that improve water quality, restore wetlands, enhance wildlife habitat, and sustain agricultural profitability in the Mississippi River Basin. There were 43 targeted MRBI contracts in Indiana in FY-2013 that provided over \$2,307,509 to landowners and treated 13,864 acres of land.



NATIONAL WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE

The EQIP National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) assists producers in addressing high-priority water resource concerns in watersheds identified as impaired by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). NWQI offers financial and technical assistance to farmers and forest landowners interested in improving water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams. In FY-2013, NWQI contributed \$766,345 to conservation efforts in Indiana to treat 4,303 acres of land.

WESTERN LAKE ERIE BASIN INITIATIVE

The goal of the Western Lake Erie Basin Initiative (WLEB) is to contribute to a reduction of phosphorus loading to Lake Erie. In FY-2013, WLEB contributed \$269,588 to conservation efforts in Indiana to improve 3,893 acres of land in the Western Lake Erie Basin watershed.



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