



**Natural Resources  
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# News Release

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## **Biden-Harris Administration Announces Availability of Inflation Reduction Act Funding for Climate-Smart Agriculture**

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark.**, Feb. 14, 2023 –Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making funding available for agricultural producers and forest landowners nationwide to participate in voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices. The [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA) provided an additional \$19.5 billion over five years for climate smart agriculture through several of the conservation programs that USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) implements. NRCS is making available \$850 million in fiscal year 2023 for its oversubscribed conservation programs: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

“The Inflation Reduction Act provided a once-in-a-generation investment in conservation on working lands, and we want to work with agricultural and forest landowners to invest in climate-smart practices that create value and economic opportunity for producers,” said Vilsack, who spoke at the National Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in New Orleans. “We know that agriculture plays a critical role in the nation’s effort to address climate change, and we are using this funding to bolster our existing programs, maximize climate benefits, and foster other environmental benefits across the landscape.”

The IRA funding includes an additional \$8.45 billion for EQIP, \$4.95 billion for RCPP, \$3.25 billion for CSP, and \$1.4 billion for ACEP. The increased funding levels begin in fiscal year 2023 and rapidly build over four years. These additional investments are estimated to help hundreds of thousands of farmers and ranchers apply conservation to millions of acres of land. Additionally, the IRA provides \$300 million to quantify carbon sequestration and greenhouse gases (GHG) through the collection and use of field-based data to assess conservation outcomes. Information gained through this effort will be used to improve practices and technical assistance to customers. Further guidance on this important work will be provided as the implementation of this portion of the IRA continues.

“These funds will provide direct climate mitigation benefits,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. “They will also expand access to financial and technical assistance for producers to advance conservation on their farm, ranch or forest land through practices like

cover cropping, conservation tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more.”

To ensure we can quantify the benefits of these IRA investments, NRCS is working to support Department-wide work on Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MMRV). The IRA provided targeted funding to support this effort. In administering the Inflation Reduction Act climate investments, USDA will also support other environmental co-benefits, including – among other things – water conservation, wildlife habitat improvements, and reducing runoff.

### **How to Apply**

NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs year-round, but producers interested in **EQIP** or **CSP** should apply by [their state’s ranking dates](#) to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Funding is provided through a competitive process and will include an opportunity to address the unmet demand from producers who have previously sought funding for climate-smart conservation activities.

### **IRA-EQIP**

NRCS Arkansas will offer a signup in several counties including: Clay, Greene, Craighead, Poinsett, Mississippi, Lawrence, Jackson, Woodruff, Lonoke, Prairie, Monroe, St. Francis, Lee, Phillips, Crittenden, Cross, Arkansas, Desha, Jefferson, Chicot, Lincoln, Ashley, Pulaski, Faulkner, and Conway to allow agricultural producers the opportunity to implement one Soil Health Management System contract per operation via the implementation of conservation practice standard (CPS) 340-Cover Crop, CPS 590- Nutrient Management, CPS 328- Crop Rotation and CPS 329- Residue and Tillage Management, No Till or CPS 345- Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till.

The IRA-EQIP application deadline is **March 14, 2023**, however through the streamlined application and contract approval approach, applications will be assessed and ranked as they are submitted to the USDA Field Service Center. Based on funds availability, application assessments with a ranking score of **180** points or greater will be preapproved immediately for the first batch of funding. Producers are encouraged to apply for the IRA-EQIP funds at their earliest convenience. Additional sign-up batches may be announced at a later date, subject to the availability of funding.

### **IRA-CSP**

Agricultural producers in Cross, St. Francis, Lee, Phillips, Desha, and Chicot counties will have the opportunity to apply to implement climate smart practices and enhancements on their operation via IRA-CSP. To be considered for this round of funding, producers should apply by **March 14, 2023**.

For **ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)** or **Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)**, applications for the current IRA funding cycle must be submitted by **March 17, 2023**, for the first funding round. This year, NRCS will prioritize ACEP-ALE for grasslands in areas of highest risk for conversion to non-grassland uses to prevent the release of soil carbon stores. Meanwhile, NRCS will prioritize ACEP-WRE for eligible lands that contain soils high in organic carbon.

NRCS plans to roll out the next **RCPP** funding opportunity in early spring, which will include IRA funds from fiscal year 2023.

Other opportunities for agreements and partnerships at the state level will be announced for fiscal year 2023 in the coming months. The IRA provides funding to support those strategic partnerships with local, regional and national organizations. This will include outreach to underserved producers to ensure IRA climate funding is reaching those who have been previously unable to access conservation assistance.

### **Water Supply Investments**

USDA also released the [Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action](#) that identifies 13 strategies that guide NRCS's investments for helping agricultural producers and communities respond to the significant challenges resulting from threats to the water supply in the Nation's most arid landscapes. Assistance delivered through these water-related strategies also helps build resilience to climate-change impacts such as droughts, wildfires and floods. Many of the resilience-focused activities and systems are also Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry mitigation activities, which support carbon sequestration or greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Climate-smart mitigation activities are supported by the additional investments available from the IRA. As part of the Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action, USDA is also announcing and highlighting other drought focused investments, including the [WaterSMART Initiative](#).

### **More Information**

On Nov. 21, 2022, USDA published a *Federal Register* Notice requesting public input on implementation of the funding provided by the IRA and sought comments on program delivery and outreach, especially for underserved producers. That notice closed on Dec. 21, 2022, and NRCS received over 450 comments from the public, which the agency is using to guide actions in fiscal year 2023 and will continue to identify and adopt additional changes based on that public feedback in fiscal year 2024 and in future years.

On Aug. 16, 2022, President Biden signed the IRA into law. It is a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for the agricultural communities that USDA serves. The IRA will help producers stay on the farm, prevent producers from becoming ineligible for future assistance and promote climate-smart agriculture by increasing access to conservation assistance.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).