



## **Funding available for farmers, forest owners to implement conservation practices**

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Financial assistance is available for implementing a wide variety of practices or activities to reduce soil erosion, improve wildlife habitat, protect water quality and manage private forest land.

Michigan farmers and forest owners must submit their applications by Jan. 22 to be included in the current selection for U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation financial assistance.

"Helping Michigan's agricultural producers and forest owners improve conservation on working lands benefits everyone," said USDA State Conservationist Garry Lee in a news release. "This funding will help protect our natural resources including our lakes, rivers and wildlife, while supporting production of the food and forest products we rely on."

Conservation financial assistance, in the form of cost-share, is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Complete applications received by Jan. 22 will be ranked and selected for funding on a competitive basis statewide for fiscal year 2021.

Financial assistance is available for implementing designated for conservation practices such as windbreaks, nutrient management plans, cover crops, forest management plans, crop residue and tillage management, animal waste storage facilities and more.

In Manistee County, common activities include forest management plans, brush management (autumn olive removal), forest stand improvement, pollinator habitat and tree and shrub plantings. Activities on farms often include nutrient management, cover crops, chemical and fuel storage facilities, livestock fencing, livestock watering facilities and pasture improvements.

A portion of USDA conservation funding is targeted to state-level conservation priorities. These include funds for farmers seeking Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) verification; honey bee habitat; organic producers and producers transitioning to organic production; creating or improving monarch butterfly habitat; practices to address concentrated flow erosion; energy conservation and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects.

Forest owners can obtain further tax benefits following participation in these programs.

Forest management plans funded through EQIP meet the requirements to enroll in MDARD's Qualified Forest Program. Qualified Forest Program participants receive a property tax exemption on their forested parcel in exchange for implementing a forest management plan to improve wildlife habitat and create healthy forests.

To get started on a forest management plan, contact Manistee and Mason-Lake Conservation District forester and wildlife biologist, Josh Shields, at (231) 889-9666.

In many areas of the state, conservation district foresters are available to help navigate this process and connect landowners with credentialed service providers. Services, site visits and technical advice

provided by conservation district foresters are free of charge thanks to Forestry Assistance Program grants provided by MDARD. For more information on the Qualified Forest Program, visit [www.michigan.gov/qfp](http://www.michigan.gov/qfp).

NRCS provides higher levels of financial assistance for beginning farmers and historically underserved producers. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis and producers and forest owners are encouraged to submit applications at any time. Applications are selected for funding on a competitive basis based on their conservation benefits.

Conservation activities receiving financial assistance must be part of an agricultural or forest operation's conservation plan. Applicants should work with their local NRCS or Manistee Conservation District staff to develop a conservation plan and submit an application. Successful applicants enter into a contract with NRCS to implement conservation activities and are reimbursed for a portion of the cost.

For further information or to submit an application contact Scott Hughey, district conservationist with NRCS, at (231) 889-9666 ext. 3 or Tyler Dula, conservation technical assistant with Manistee Conservation District at (231) 889-9666 ext. 3 or visit <https://www.manisteed2.org/>. All technical advice, site visits and assistance with applications are free to the public, through grants held by the conservation district. For more general information about conservation financial assistance through EQIP and CSP, visit [www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov).

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