

# CONSERVING NATURAL RESOURCES IN VERMONT

May 2013

## NRCS National Funding FY 2012 \* (in Millions)

### Discretionary funding:

Conservation Technical Assistance	\$762
All Other Conservation Operations Programs	<u>\$137</u>
Total, Conservation Operations	\$899

### Mandatory funding:

Total, Farm Bill Programs	<u>\$3,648</u>
<b>Total, NRCS Programs</b>	<b>\$4,547</b>

\*rounded to the nearest million

Seventy percent of the land in the United States is privately owned. Farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, tribes and others who own rural lands make daily decisions about natural resource use and management, impacting soil, water, and air quality and wildlife habitat. NRCS provides technical assistance and offers financial assistance to producers who install conservation practices through Farm Bill programs.

NRCS technical assistance is supported with discretionary and mandatory funds. Discretionary funding, provided annually through the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA), is pivotal to NRCS' success. CTA supports everyday operations, scientific research, technology transfer, and is key to the development of individual conservation plans. The land user, in consultation with NRCS specialists, develops a conservation plan that is suited to his or her individual operation. Once a producer has a conservation plan, he or she can implement it with or without further assistance from NRCS.

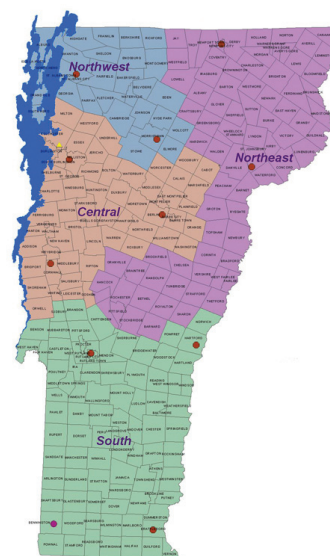
Financial assistance is available to eligible applicants to implement their conservation plans. Mandatory funds provided through Farm Bill programs are used to cover the costs of detailed planning needed to implement conservation practices and provide financial assistance to help defray some of the costs of conservation practices installation.

The table above describes NRCS' national discretionary and mandatory funding in fiscal year 2012. Farm Bill Program funding details specific to Vermont are on page 4.



Photo: John Thurgood, NRCS

Vermont farmers, Arlo, Tony and Don Pouliot have worked with NRCS through a series of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts.



### Vermont Quick Facts:

Number of NRCS Employees = 63

Number of NRCS Field Offices = 10

Acres of Cropland = 516,924

Acres of forestland = 4,591,280 acres



Photo: Joanne Yousien, NRCS

The Branon Farm of Fairfield, VT has implemented many substantial conservation practices, such as Heavy Use Area Protection, Waste Storage Facility and Runoff Control (shown above).

## Historic Vermont Farm Applies Modern Management Systems With NRCS Programs

Edward Branon, his wife Elizabeth, and son Jonathan operate a 200 head organic grass-based dairy farm in Fairfield, Vermont. The family has farmed the land for over 100 years and is a shining example of what can be achieved through a partnership approach to conservation. Working together with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) since 2004, the Branons have been able to transition to organic production, extensively improve their agricultural waste management infrastructure, and develop a grazing system that meets their farming objectives while simultaneously protecting natural resources.

Through two Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts the Branons received federal reimbursement for the installation of a myriad of conservation practices. These practices include an access road, animal trails, a stream crossing, fence, manure storage, a manure transfer system, watering facilities, roof runoff structures, and a pipeline. Through NRCS federal funding the Branons were able to recover much of the cost of implementing conservation crop rotations, follow a prescribed grazing plan, and develop their own comprehensive nutrient management plan, which constitute major steps toward protecting water quality,

improving soil health, and promoting biodiversity within an impaired watershed. In addition, many projects around the farmstead proved to be complex because of the farm's historic nature.

In 2012, by implementing some of the last planned practices in their conservation plans, the Branons have come one step closer to achieving the goals they collaboratively established over seven years ago. That they have accomplished so much is a testament to the Branon family's strong commitment to environmental stewardship. It is because of their hard work that Edward, Elizabeth, and Jonathan were recognized locally by receiving the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District 'farmer of the year' award in 2006.

NRCS staff working closely with the family farm believes the partnership succeeded largely because of the family's willingness to engage in the planning, design and construction process. As Jon Branon aptly summarized during an interview, "Our experience [with NRCS] as a whole has been terrific...we found great guidance with NRCS, very good technical support, and we were able to benefit from their knowledge...it's been a terrific relationship".



Landscape initiatives tackle pressing natural resource concerns by strategically investing federal funds and leveraging partner resources.

## Landscape Initiatives Target Water Quality Resource Concerns in Vermont

Through the America's Great Outdoors Initiative (AGO) and the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), the Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offered financial and technical assistance to farmers located in the Missisquoi Bay Basin in 2012. The Missisquoi Bay Basin is a 460,000 acre drainage area in northwest Vermont, dominated by forest and agricultural land. The entire basin drains to Missisquoi Bay, which has significant water quality concerns associated with nutrient loading and toxic blue-green algae blooms.

The Missisquoi Bay Basin was selected as a prioritized watershed in Vermont based on current NRCS and partner conservation efforts in the area, and the availability of an international independent study that identifies Critical Source Areas (CSAs) of phosphorus loading in the bay. Phosphorus is a nutrient essential for plant growth, commonly used as fertilizer and found in manure. Too much phosphorus in water causes algal blooms and excessive aquatic plant growth. Water quality problems caused by phosphorus can harm fish and other organisms and limit human use of Vermont waters. Areas identified as potential CSAs in this study are classified by their soil, landscape features, proximity and connectivity to streams, and land use. The model produced from this study shows CSAs disproportionately contribute to the pollution of Missisquoi Bay.

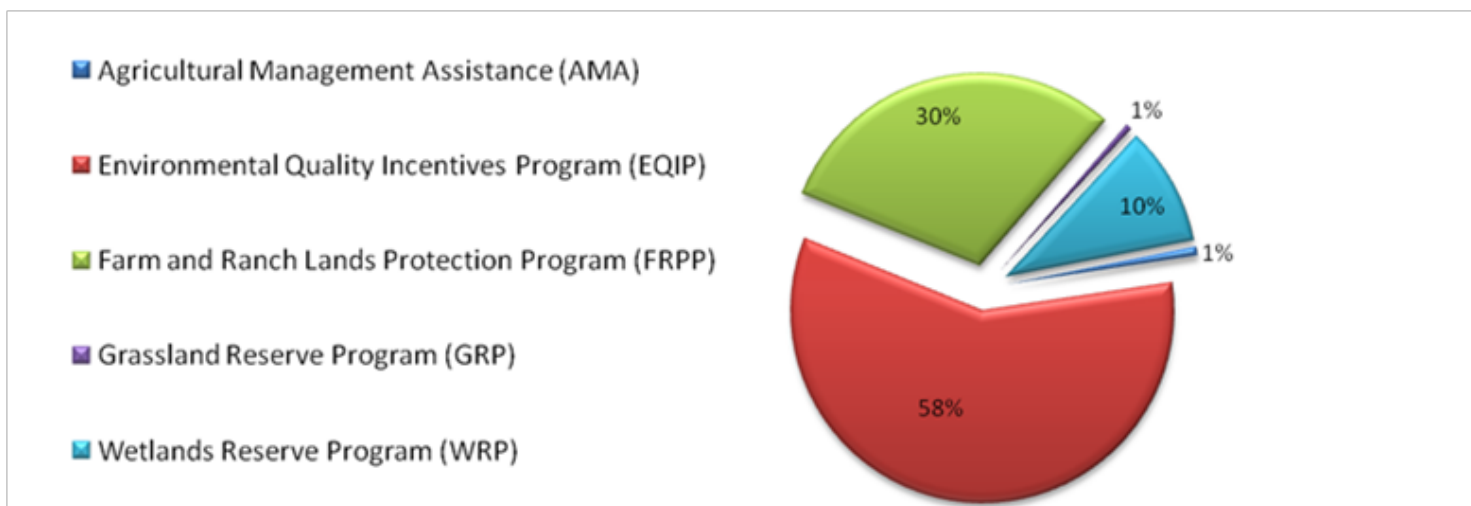
Technical assistance was provided on a site-specific basis to farmers in the basin to identify conservation practices

that will provide the best results to improve water quality. A variety of different conservation practices were planned on these CSA's including cover cropping, reduced tillage, manure injection and gully stabilization. These water quality conservation practices benefit farmers by lowering input costs and improving the productivity of working lands. Conservation investments benefit all Americans because well-managed farms limit pollution from runoff, produce food and fiber, sustain rural economies and provide food security for the nation. Communities benefit from conservation by enjoying cleaner waterways, safe drinking water and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

The AGO and NWQI programs resulted in 20 Vermont NRCS contracts with farmers in 2012. These contracts enabled conservation to be applied to 7,212 acres of farmland in the Missisquoi Bay Basin. Cover crop and gully stabilization structures were among the most common practices implemented. Cover cropping reduces soil erosion, nutrient loss, and promotes soil quality. Gully stabilization structures reduce soil erosion by preventing gullies from forming or advancing at field edges and other areas of concentrated water flow. These practices protect water quality by reducing sediment and nutrient loading to rivers, streams, ditches and wetlands and therefore contribute to improving water quality in the lake. The AGO and NWQI conservation initiatives in Vermont were so successful in 2012, the same program is being implemented again in 2013.

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NRCS FY 2012 Percentage of Financial Assistance to Vermont Participants by Program



FY 2011 and FY 2012 Contracts and Financial Assistance to Vermont Participants by Program

Program	Number of Contracts/Agreements		Financial Assistance to Producers	
	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2011	FY 2012
AMA	8	2	\$138,000	\$81,000
CSP	1	1	\$1,000	\$1,000
EQIP	373	522	\$9,095,000	\$6,446,000
FRPP	22	22	\$2,990,000	\$3,339,000
GRP	1	0	\$548,000	\$58,000
WRP	4	4	\$482,000	\$1,108,000
WHIP	142	0	\$1,056,000	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>\$14,310,000</b>	<b>\$11,033,000</b>

Discretionary funds through the Conservation Technical Assistance for Vermont in FY 2012 was \$3,132,770

Sources: FMMI, ProTracts 10/2/2012 and NEST 10/4/2012

NRCS strives to provide current and correct information in a timely manner. Please contact your state conservationist or an NRCS legislative specialist if you need assistance. You can reach NRCS Legislative Affairs Division at (202) 720-2771.