

Agricultural Conservation Programs

In 2017 there were several programs available to help agricultural producers implement structural and management conservation practices that optimize environmental benefits on working agricultural land.

In 2018 the SWCD plans to enhance the agricultural services provided by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) by implementing a targeted agricultural outreach plan and hiring a technical staff person to assist the NRCS in meeting their conservation goals.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program is a federal program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP provides technical and financial assistance to assist crop, livestock and other agricultural producers with environmental and conservation improvements to their operations.

EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application “cut-off” or submission deadline dates for evaluation, ranking and approval of eligible applications.

EQIP is open to all eligible agricultural producers and submitted applications may be considered or evaluated in multiple funding pool opportunities.

In Isanti County, EQIP most often funds Water and Sediment Control Basins, Cover Crops, Grazing Systems, pollinator habitat and Seasonal High Tunnels.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary 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. Some examples of common enhancements include: forest openings to improve hardwood stands, establishment of pollinator habitat, extended filter strips for water quality protection and use of cover crop mixes.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and to plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts are typically 10-15 years in length. Funds are periodically available.

In 2017 the SWCD used Pheasants Forever funds as a supplemental incentive to enroll in the CRP program.



Agricultural Conservation Programs

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)

MAWQCP is a unique program that ensures MN's farms and waters can prosper together. Producers who implement and maintain agricultural best management practices and overall exemplary stewardship receive MAWQCP certification. In turn, they obtain "regulatory certainty" and are regarded as in compliance with any new water quality regulations for a period of 10 years. Mille Lacs and Carlton SWCDs assist Isanti SWCD with this program. To date, Isanti has 10 producers signed up for the program in, 2 have been Certified through the program thus far.



Through this program, certified producers receive:

- **Regulatory certainty:** certified producers are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality rules or laws during the period of recognition.
- **Recognitions:** certified producers may use their status to promote their business as protective of water quality.
- **Priority for technical assistance:** producers seeking certification can obtain specially designated technical and financial assistance to implement practices that promote water quality.

Pheasants Forever Planting Assistance

The Isanti County Chapter of Pheasants Forever offers cost sharing grants to landowners for habitat enhancement. Isanti SWCD serves as the point of contact and administrator for these grants. Cost share is typically paired with federal funding for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). In 2017 3 projects totaling 56 acres of tall grass prairie

District No-Till Seeding Program

The Isanti SWCD owns a seed drill suitable for planting native grasses and wildflowers. This drill is rented to landowners for habitat projects. In 2017 the drill was used to plant 25 acres of pasture/hay and 117 acres of native prairie.

Buffer Law Compliance Assistance

The Buffer Law was passed in 2015 and requires landowners to install buffer strips along State Protected Waters and Public Drainage Ditches. In addition to providing habitat for many forms of wildlife; buffer strips filter nutrients, sediment and other pollutants from surface water runoff. The law requires a 50-foot perennial vegetative buffer along public waters and 16.5 foot buffer on public ditches.

In 2017 the SWCD focused on providing outreach and technical assistance to landowners in need of buffers along public waters. Staff sent out 4 mailings to notify landowners of potential non-compliance, conducted over 15 site visits to determine compliance or flag required buffer boundaries, and assisted 12 landowners with filling out compliance waivers to extend the buffer deadline to July 1, 2018.