



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Vermont USDA Newsletter - December 28, 2022

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

In This Issue:

- [A Message From Travis Thomason, Vermont NRCS State Conservationist](#)
- [A Message from John Roberts, Vermont FSA State Executive Director](#)
- [Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance](#)
- [New Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers](#)
- [Save Money on Fuel with No-Till Farming](#)
- [NRCS Program Dates](#)
- [Events and Meetings](#)
- [USDA Releases Nationwide Farmer, Rancher and Forest Manager Prospective Customer Survey](#)

A Message From Travis Thomason, Vermont NRCS State Conservationist

Happy Holidays!

As we come up on the new year, I reflect on our conservation mission and all the work we've done to achieve that mission over the past year. Heading into the new year, we still have work to do. The NRCS is an agency that works with producers to conserve our natural resources, and we look forward to working closely with even more producers in the coming year to further our mission.



With the infusion of funds from the Inflation Reduction Act in addition to our ongoing conservation efforts, there are many opportunities for producers to enhance their operations in 2023. While there are still questions on how these funds are to be used, Vermont NRCS staff are ready to work with producers to make plans to achieve their goals. We look forward to serving producers and creating a world with abundant water, food, and natural resources for future generations.

Thank you to all the producers out there who create our nation's food and fiber and help conserve our natural resources.

A Message from John Roberts, Vermont FSA State Executive Director



With the end of the year upon us it is not only traditional but also useful to reflect on what happened in the last year. To celebrate successes, acknowledge shortcomings and evaluate actions so that we improve and learn from what has just happened.

Since the start of the pandemic there has not been a normal year, if there ever is. 2022 was possibly wilder than usual with Russia's unconscionable invasion of Ukraine. This act sent energy prices soaring along with fertilizer, livestock feed, particularly that for organic farmers, along with many other costs. The reaction to the invasion again highlighted the fact that we live in a global economy probably usually better than worse, but this event really upset things, and continues to do so. It wasn't just that Ukraine dominates the world trade in grains, but it is a vital part of the equation and once their exports became unreliable it had a domino effect throughout the world.

Vermont had weather extremes from south to north, very dry in the southern and eastern part of the state, almost about right in Chittenden County and periods of too much rain along the Canadian border. For conventional dairy farmers the price of milk rose and to some measure compensated for the rise in costs of production. This was not the case for the organic dairy industry where feed costs rose substantially, but the milk price even fell, especially in real terms. There was a fairly significant loss of producers in the organic sector.

Other areas of agriculture, meat production, vegetable production etc. maintained a fairly healthy economic stability.

The administration funneled a significant amount of capital to some distressed farmers but the tight rules for impacts of drought meant that unlike other parts of the country our producers did not benefit, even though they had significant losses in the amount of forage they were able to harvest off their farms.

It is always a dicey business to predict what is going to happen in 2023 but one action a dairy farmer can take if they've not already done so, is to sign up for the Dairy Margin Coverage program. Sign up is still open until the end of January 2023 and not only are many dairy economy experts predicting that this program will help to insure against uncertainty in the balance between the milk price and the feed costs but in the State of Vermont the state will reimburse a farmer's premium, up to a production ceiling of five million pounds of milk. Beyond that one item, it looks as though inflation will gradually moderate throughout the year although prices for inputs and outputs will probably not reach pre-pandemic levels for a while.

At the time of writing, we as Vermonters, and much of the country, are emerging from a significant winter storm. Electric power was cut for many Vermonters for several days and is still not restored in some areas. We have had reports of significant wind damage to

barns, roofs and trees in sugar bushes which will take some time to assess and clean up. Particularly for maple producers who are really getting geared up for the 2023 sugaring season, it will be important for them to assess their woods and come to their local county FSA offices to start the process of registering their losses. Most importantly before they start clean up.

I wish you all a very prosperous and Happy New Year.

Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance

The term “sodbusting” is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you’re proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.



Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification,” with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

New Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers



A new multi-agency guide for USDA assistance for underserved farmers and ranchers is now available. If you are a farmer or rancher and are a minority, woman, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producer, you can use this booklet to learn about assistance and targeted opportunities available to you. This includes programs offered through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. The guide is also

available in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese on farmers.gov/translations.

Save Money on Fuel with No-Till Farming

How much fuel can farmers save each year by transitioning from conventional tillage to continuous no-till? According to a [new report from USDA's Conservation Effects Assessment Project \(CEAP\)](#), 3.6 gallons per acre is a reasonable estimate. With current off-road diesel fuel prices, this could translate into approximately \$17 per acre saved annually.



Nearly 87 percent of all cropland acres nationwide are farmed using some form of conservation tillage, where tillage is reduced for at least one crop within a given field. Continuous no-till accounts for 33 percent of this total.

[Improving soil health](#) is one known benefit of limiting disturbance. Farmers who minimize tillage across their operation may reduce soil erosion, maximize water infiltration, improve nutrient cycling, build organic matter, and strengthen resilience to disaster events or challenging growing conditions. Based on the latest data, they may also use significantly less fuel than with conventional tillage and reduce their associated carbon dioxide emissions.

According to CEAP, farmers who implement conservation tillage practices instead of continuous conventional tillage:

- Reduce potential nationwide fuel use by 763 million gallons of diesel equivalents each year, roughly the amount of energy used by 2.8 million households.
- Reduce potential associated emissions by 8.5 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalents each year, equivalent to removing nearly 1.7 million gasoline-powered passenger vehicles from the road.

How is this possible? Annually, farmers who practice continuous no-till use approximately 3.6 fewer gallons of fuel per acre than if they practiced continuous conventional tillage. Farmers who practice seasonal no-till – farming without tilling for at least one crop – use

approximately 3 fewer gallons of fuel per acre than they would with conventional tillage year-round.

Acre by acre, fuel saved is money saved. Let's assume an average off-road diesel fuel price of \$4.75 per gallon*. By transitioning from continuous conventional tillage to continuous no-till, a farmer can save just over \$17 per acre each year in fuel costs. A farmer who transitions from continuous conventional tillage to seasonal no-till can save more than \$14 per acre on fuel annually. These potential savings are significantly larger than with [CEAP's first fuel savings report](#), primarily due to the current price of diesel fuel.

The bottom line for farmers: Reducing tillage leads to fuel savings that deliver significant financial benefits while building healthier soils for a more resilient operation.

USDA Can Help

If you're a farmer interested in reducing tillage or pursuing other conservation efforts across your operation, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help.

- [This blog](#) offers five simple tips for farmers interested in trying no-till for the first time.
- [This 90-second video](#) provides a description of no-till and associated benefits according to a Delaware farmer.
- [This 23-minute video](#) follows five South Carolina farmers seeking to quantify the benefits of conservation practices that support soil health.
- [This webpage](#) details principles to improve soil health, including reduced tillage and complimentary conservation practices such as cover crops, crop rotations, and rotational grazing.

NRCS has local USDA Service Centers in nearly every county across the United States. You may [find contact information for your nearest Service Center here](#). NRCS staff are available to provide free, one-on-one assistance with a suite of practices to strengthen your operation, conserve natural resources, and boost your bottom line. [SMART nutrient management](#), for example, is important to consider with no-till and may help you [save money on fertilizer while improving water quality](#) – another win-win.

Visit the [new NRCS website](#) to learn more about conservation basics, getting assistance from NRCS, programs and initiatives, and resources to inform management decisions. Visit the [new CEAP webpage](#) for additional information about USDA's efforts to quantify the effects of conservation practices across croplands and other working lands.

NRCS Program Dates

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentives Contract** – The Agency has recently announced that States may proceed with their EQIP-CIC sign-ups in 2023. The fiscal year 2023 signup runs until January 13, 2023. Producers can submit their application and learn more at their local service center which can be located on the new [NRCS website](#).
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)** - NRCS is accepting ACEP-WRE applications from eligible producers through February 10, 2023. Applicants can apply at their local Field office or by contacting the NRCS State Wetland Specialist, james.eikenberry@usda.gov.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)** - NRCS is accepting parcel applications from eligible entities through February 10, 2023. Eligible entities should apply through the Colchester State Office through julia.grey@usda.gov.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Easements Sign-up**- NRCS is accepting applications from both eligible entities and eligible landowners for RCPP conservation easements focused on protecting and enhancing water quality. Applications should be submitted by January 13, 2023, to the Colchester State Office through julia.grey@usda.gov
- **RCPP Land Management Sign-up:** NRCS and Vermont DEC have announced a January 13, 2023, sign-up deadline for RCPP Land Management and Rental contracts to address water quality resource concerns. This RCPP project [offers unique flexibilities](#) for producers beyond that of EQIP and CSP. During 2023, this project will focus heavily on support for grazing and pasture-type applications. Producers can reach out to their local service center which can be located on the new [NRCS website](#) .



Now in its eleventh year, the **National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)** is a partnership among NRCS, state water quality agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address impaired water bodies through voluntary conservation. NRCS provides targeted funding for financial and technical assistance in small watersheds most in need and where farmers can use conservation practices to make a difference. The NWQI targeted watersheds (including Source Water Protections Projects) in Vermont are: East Creek, Hungerford, Rock River, Bean Brook, East/West Branch Passumpsic River, Black Creek, Browns River, Calendar Brook, Castbane Brook-Connecticut River, East Putney Brook-Connecticut River, Great-Brook Connecticut River, Hardwick Lake Dam-Lamoille River, Headwater Little Otter Creek, Jail Branch, New Haven River, Sacketts Brook, Sodom Pond Brook Winooski River, South Stream-Wolloomsac River, Vernon Dam-Connecticut River, and Whetsone Brook.

Events and Meetings



- Upcoming State Technical Advisory Committee Meetings: To learn about upcoming State Technical Advisory Committee meeting dates as well as to view older meeting minutes, visit the [State Technical Committee webpage](#). The next meeting is set for January 18, 2023. The agenda and information on how to RSVP will be found on the [events page](#) of the NRCS website.

USDA Releases Nationwide Farmer, Rancher and Forest Manager Prospective Customer Survey

You can now take a nationwide survey to help the USDA improve and increase access to its programs and services for America's farmers, ranchers, and forest managers. The survey includes new and existing customers. USDA encourages all agricultural producers to take the survey, especially those who have not worked with USDA previously. The survey gathers feedback on programs and services available through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA).



The survey is available online at farmers.gov/survey, and you should complete it by March 31, 2023. Stakeholder organizations are also encouraged to share the survey link through their networks. The survey is available in 14 different languages including Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hmong, Korean, Navajo, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Urdu and Vietnamese.

In addition to the online survey, the FPAC Business Center, which is administering the survey, will also mail 11,000 printed surveys to various local state stakeholder organizations and farmers markets.



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