



United States Department of Agriculture

Conservation Planning with the NRCS

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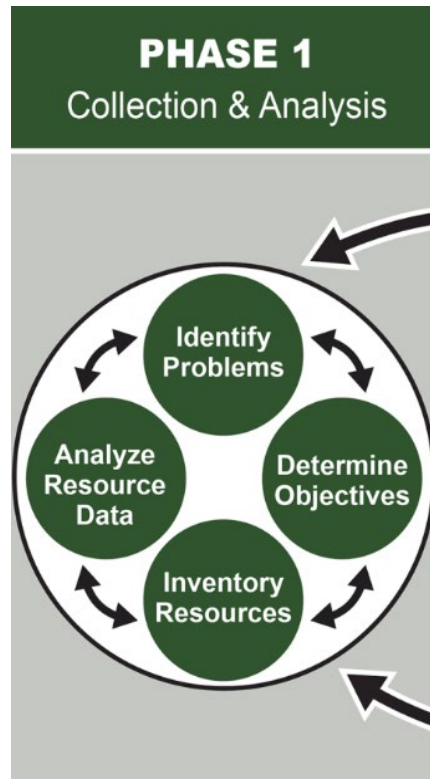
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Background

- **Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was formed from the aftermath of the dustbowl.**
- **Our Motto: "Helping People Help the Land."**
- **Our Mission: Deliver conservation solutions so that agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.**
- **Our Vision: A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.**



NRCS Conservation Planning



1. Identify Problems and Opportunities
2. Determine Objectives
3. Inventory Resources
4. Analyze Resource Data

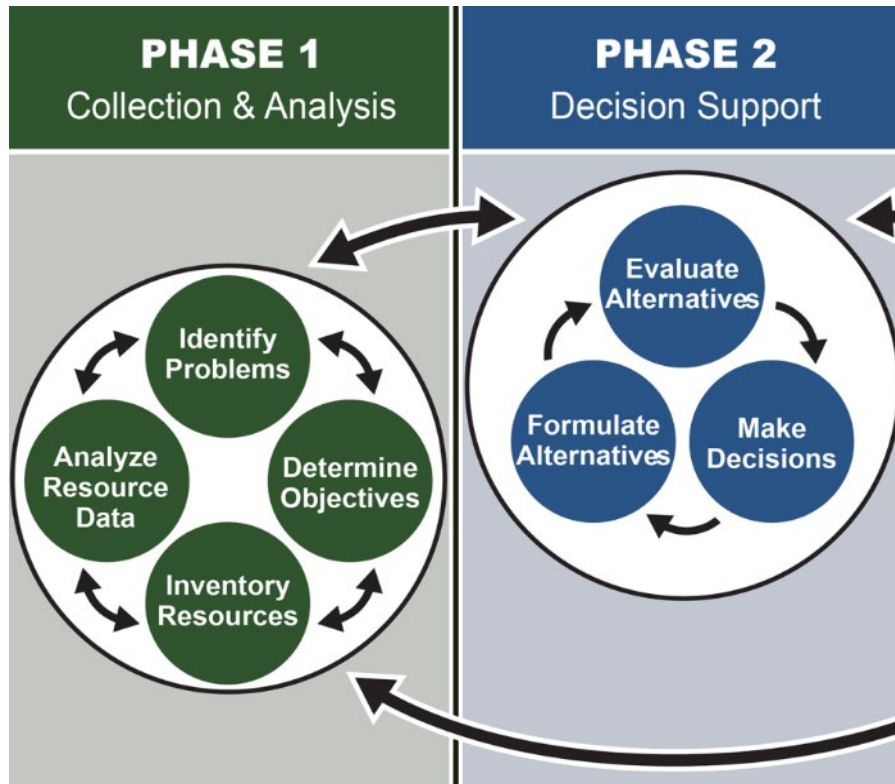


Typical timeline – Phase 1

- **Contact NRCS**
 - Identify objectives, existing conditions, and resource concerns with field staff.
- **Site visit**
 - Address concerns as discussed and additional concerns seen in the field.
 - **Resource Management System**
 - Identifying and evaluating all resource concerns present on site.
 - May pull in other specialties if needed:
 - Engineering, biology/wildlife, forestry, soils, agronomy, etc.



NRCS Conservation Planning



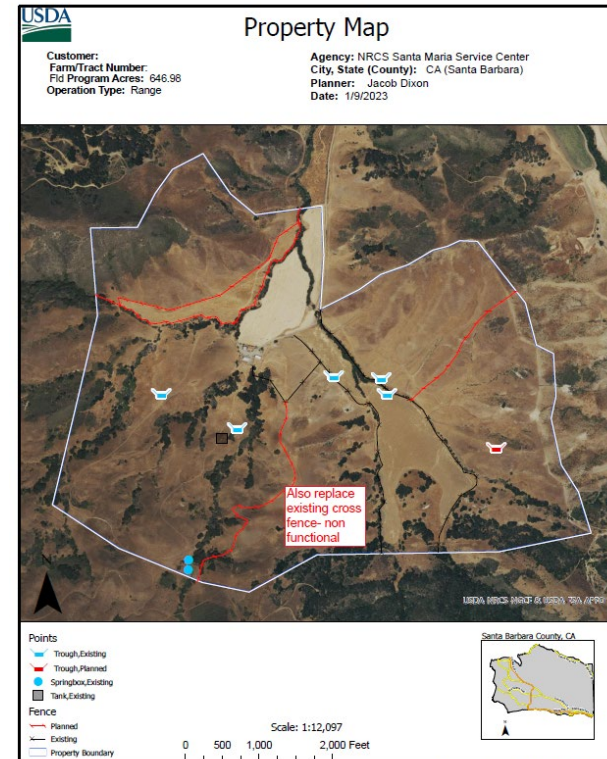
- 5. Formulate Alternatives
- 6. Evaluate Alternatives
- 7. Make Decisions



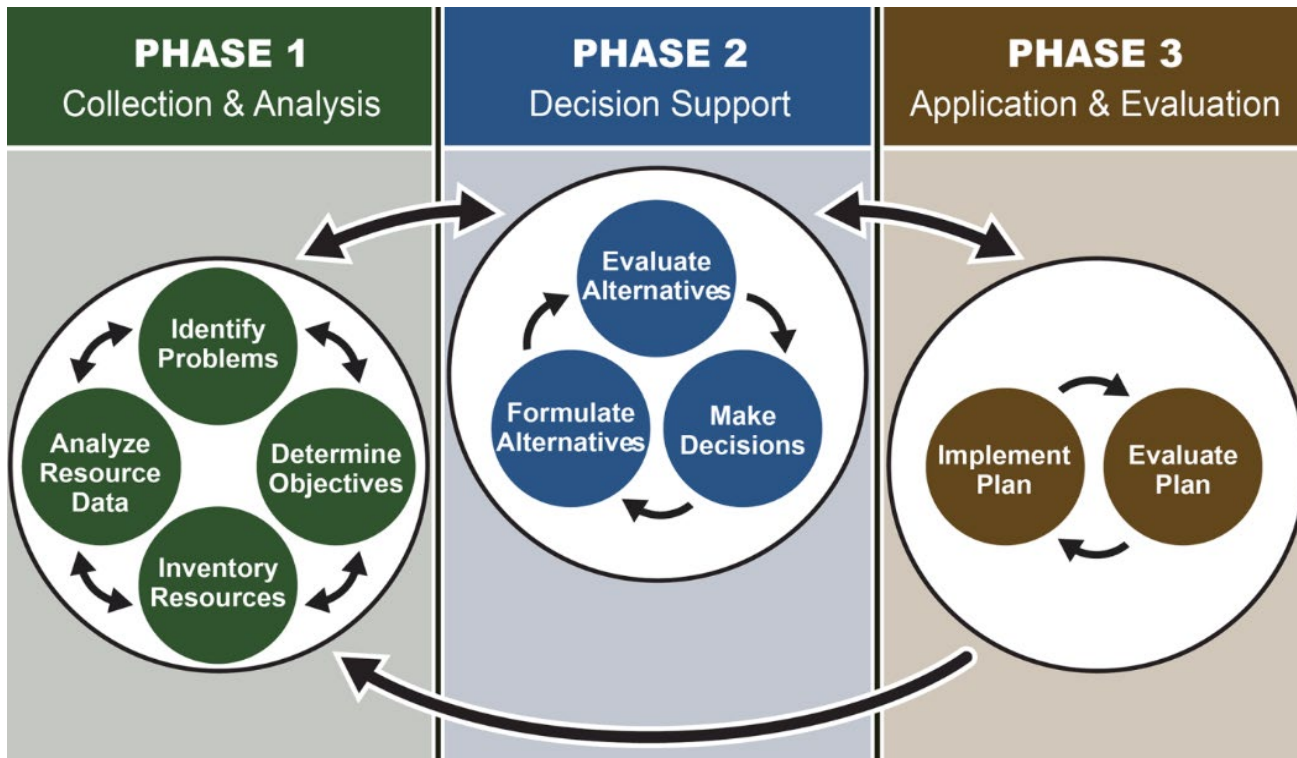
Typical timeline – Phase 2

- **Develop alternatives**
 - Meet core objectives and resource concerns
 - May pull in other specialties if needed:
 - Engineering, biology/wildlife, forestry, soils, agronomy, etc.

- **Present alternatives**
 - **Resource Management System**
 - Present alternatives that address all resource concerns, select options that are feasible
 - Evaluate alternatives in context of feasibility and/or effect on other resource concerns
 - NEPA/Cultural Resources
 - Permits
 - Deliver draft plan map, plant lists, engineering designs, estimated project cost, etc.



NRCS Conservation Planning



- 8. Implement Plan
- 9. Evaluate Plan



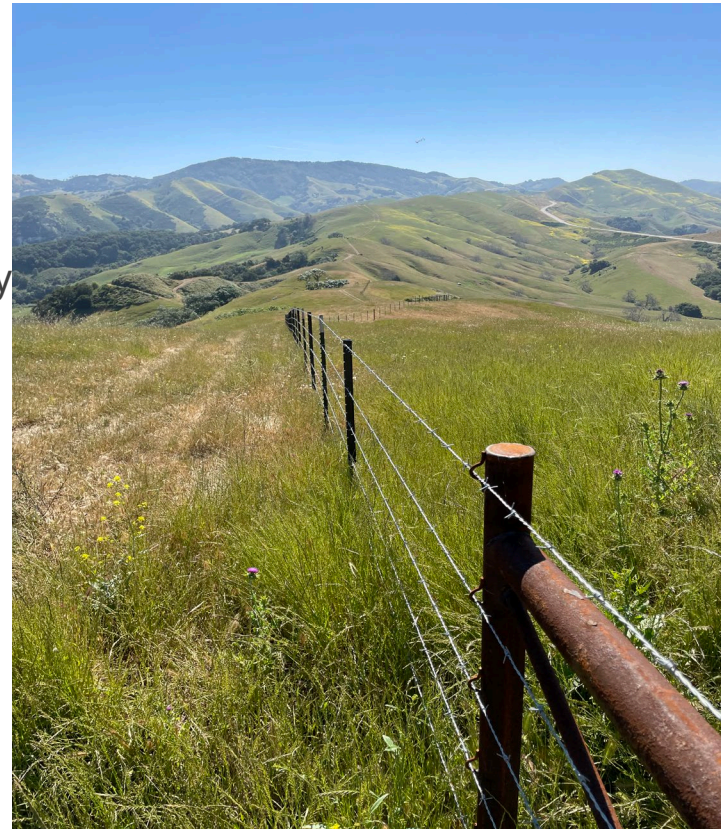
Typical timeline – Phase 3

- **Implement plan**

- NRCS provides completed designs and implementation requirements (i.e. practice specifications).
- Client is responsible for obtaining necessary permits, implementing planned practices.

- **Evaluate plan**

- **Resource Management System**
 - Revisit remaining resource concerns (RC)
 - Plan for future project to address remaining RC's
- Long term viability of conservation plan is dependent on continued operation, maintenance, and evaluation by producer.



Conservation Programs

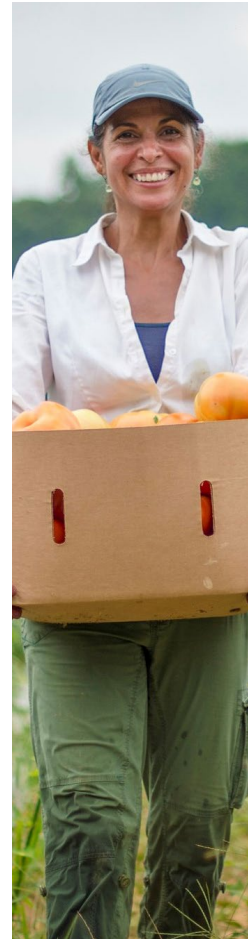


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Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- **NRCS' flagship program for helping producers apply conservation practices on their land**
- **Provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns**
- **Benefits include:**
 - Improving air, soil and water quality
 - Conserving water
 - Preventing soil erosion
 - Enhancing wildlife habitat
 - Mitigating impacts from climate change
- **NRCS accepts applications year-round. State specific ranking dates can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/staterankingdates**
- **In fiscal year 2021, NRCS invested \$1.26 billion to help producers implement conservation practices on 11.6 million acres**



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Conservation Stewardship Program

- **Nation's largest conservation program in terms of numbers of acres**
- **Helps producers take their conservation activities to the next level**
- **NRCS accepts applications year-round. State specific ranking dates can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/staterankingdates**
- **In fiscal year 2021, NRCS invested \$513.6 million to help producers implement conservation practices on 9.8 million acres**

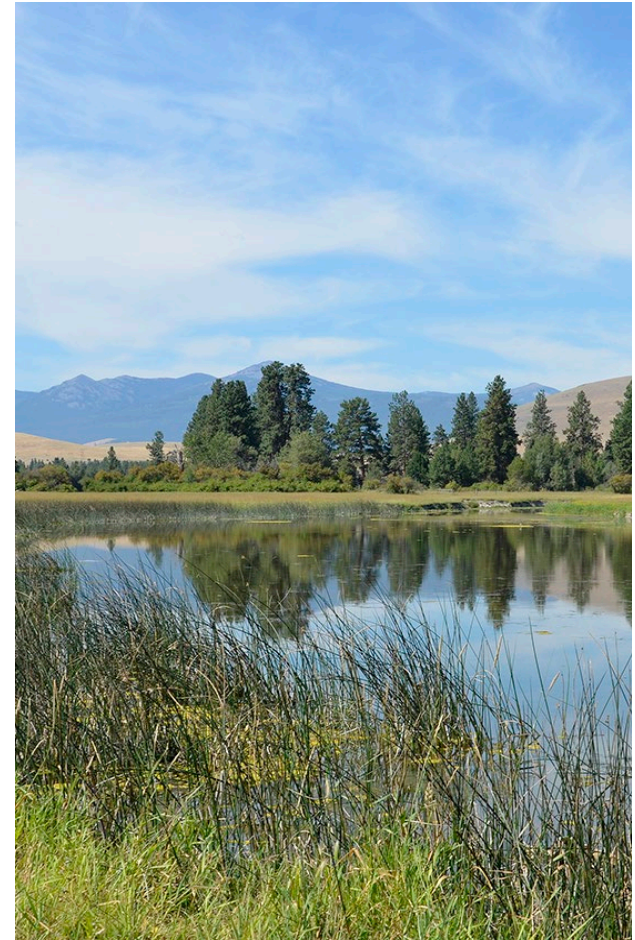


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Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- **Aids landowners and eligible entities with conserving, restoring and protecting wetlands, productive agricultural lands and grasslands**
- **Footprint of more than 5 million acres**
- **Two types:**
 - Wetland Reserve Easements
 - Agricultural Land Easements
- **NRCS accepts applications year-round. State specific ranking dates can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/staterankingdates**
- **In fiscal year 2021, NRCS invested \$230.5 million in 361 new easements, enrolling 197,734 acres**



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Conservation Reserve Program

- **Key conservation program offered by FSA that provides yearly rental payments for farmers who maintain conservation for 10 to 15 years**
- **In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant cover species that will improve environmental health and quality**
- **Benefits of establishing cover:**
 - Help improve water quality
 - Prevent soil erosion
 - Create wildlife habitat
 - Mitigate impacts of climate change



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Conservation Innovation Grants

- **Competitive grant program that supports the development of new conservation tools, approaches, practices and technologies**
- **These innovations also help build resilience in producers' operations and improve their bottom lines**
- **All non-Federal entities and individuals are eligible to apply**
- **In fiscal year 2021, NRCS is investing up to \$25 million in CIG projects**



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Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- **Partner-driven approach to voluntary conservation that funds solutions to natural resources challenges**
- **Leverages \$1 for every \$1 invested by USDA**
- **Eligible entities include private industry, non-government organizations, Indian tribes, state and local governments, water districts and universities**
- **RCPP stats:**
 - \$330 million invested in 85 projects in fiscal year 2021
 - \$75 million to be invested in additional alternative funding arrangement projects in fiscal year 2021



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Conservation Practices



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Conservation Practices

- **Land and crop management choices that producers can implement to conserve natural resources**
- **About 170+ conservation practices available through NRCS programs**
- **Practices often work in systems**
 - For example, fencing is often used in concert with prescribed grazing
- **Each practice has a conservation practice standard, which details how producers should implement to maximize benefits**
 - These standards are available on the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide, available on nrcs.usda.gov



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Conservation Concerns Tool

- **Launched in November 2020 to help producers learn about conservation issues that might impact their agricultural operation**
- **Helps producers identify targeted solutions that best fit their business needs**
- **Provides a walkthrough of more than 40 conservation concerns related to soil, water, plants, animals, energy, and air**
- **Available at farmers.gov**



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Conservation at Work Video Series

- **90-second video series to hear directly from farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners about their conservation practices**
- **Available at farmers.gov**



Benefits of Voluntary Conservation on Agricultural Lands



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Soil Health

- **Healthy soil is the foundation of productive, sustainable agriculture**
- **Benefits of soil health management systems:**
 - Reduce erosion
 - Maximize water infiltration
 - Improve nutrient cycling
 - Save money on inputs
 - Improve resiliency
- **Principles to improve soil health:**
 - Minimize disturbance
 - Maximize soil cover
 - Maximize biodiversity
 - Maximize presence of living roots
- **Key practices include:**
 - No-till
 - Cover crops
 - Rotational grazing
 - Crop rotation

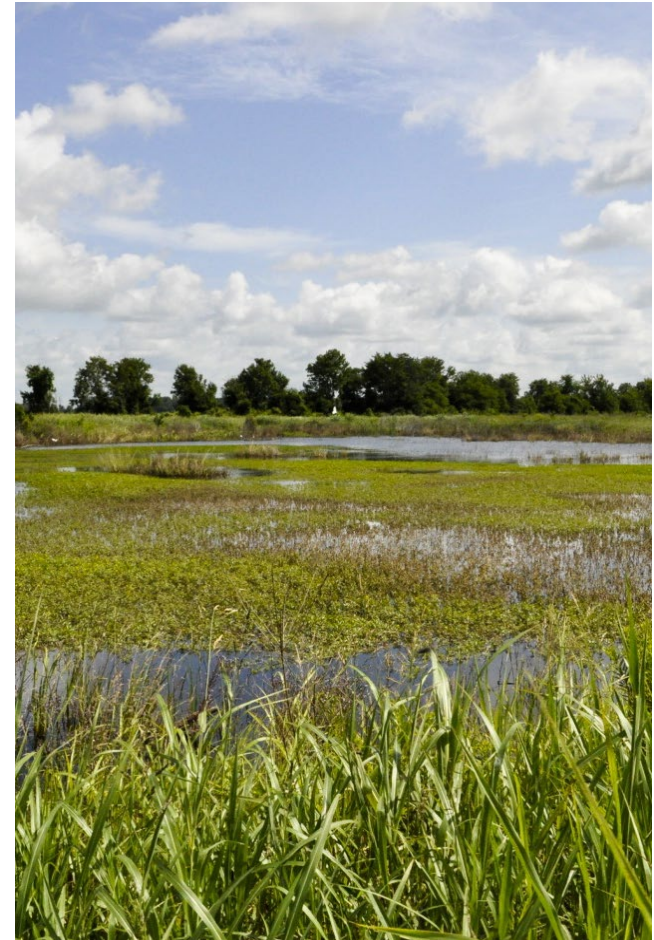


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Water Quality

- **All land is in a watershed, meaning what happens on the land impacts water quality**
- **USDA offers programs and practices that help farmers improve water quality while gaining efficiencies and reducing costs**
- **Practices focus on avoiding, trapping and controlling nutrients and sediment**
- **Managing water quality:**
 - Fight erosion
 - Enhance management
 - Improve filtration
 - Manage animal waste
- **Key practices include:**
 - Cover crops
 - Grassed waterway
 - No-till



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Water Quantity

- **Agriculture is one of the largest users of water**
- **Producers can manage excess water, conserve limited supplies of water, and build resilience to mitigate drought**
- **Managing water quantity:**
 - Control drainage
 - Improve irrigation infrastructure
 - Improve water supply
 - Improve moisture management
- **Key practices include:**
 - Irrigation water management
 - Pumping plant
 - Micro-irrigation



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Wildlife

- **America's privately-owned farms, ranches, and forests don't just provide us with food and fiber—they also support lots of wildlife**
- **USDA offers practices to help producers integrate wildlife friendly practices on croplands, rangelands, pastures and forests**
- **Key practices include:**
 - Brush management
 - Prescribed or rotational grazing
 - Forest stand improvement
 - Wetland restoration

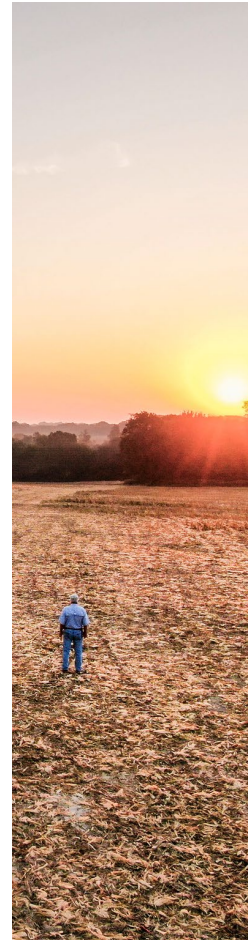


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Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry

- **Agricultural producers play a key role in mitigating climate change**
- **Benefits of climate-smart practices**
 - Conserve natural resources
 - Build healthier soils
 - Sequester carbon
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O)
- **Focus areas include:**
 - Soil health
 - Nitrogen stewardship
 - Livestock partnerships
 - Conservation of sensitive lands
 - Grazing and pasture lands
 - Private forest growth and retention



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Investing in Small and Urban Farms in California

In Fiscal Year 2023:

NRCS California invested \$46.5 million to farmers growing specialty crops

- \$9.4 million went to Beginning Farmers
- \$21.9 million went to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers
- \$875,000 went to Limited Resource Farmers



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National USDA Support for Urban Farmers

Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production

- Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production Grant
 - Investing \$5.2 million in grants recipients in FY24
 - Building on \$46.8 million invested in projects since 2020
- Compost and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreement
- People's Garden Initiative



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