

Sustainability

Conserving Land for Future Generations



Because American farmers are dependent upon the integrity of their soil and other natural resources for their livelihoods, they work to protect and improve the land. As a result, significant benefits to society have been achieved and improvements in efficiencies will continue to lessen the environmental impacts of food production.

Through the use of farm bill conservation programs, farmers are making important environmental gains, including reduced soil erosion, improved water quality and increased wildlife habitat. To continue this trend greater emphasis must be placed on working lands conservation programs.

- The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program provides the technical capability, including direct conservation planning, design and implementation assistance, to help people plan and apply conservation on the land. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), through the CTA program, addresses natural resource conservation issues at the local level that are of state and national concern.
- Key to working lands, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) assists landowners who face natural resource challenges on their land. EQIP is the principal source of cost sharing assistance for agricultural producers who wish to implement air, soil and water conservation practices. Corn growers utilize EQIP to ensure animal waste is managed responsibly through the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans.
- The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that promotes the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life. CSP supports ongoing stewardship of private agriculture lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources.

Additionally, corn farmers are involved in numerous state, local and national programs that idle environmentally sensitive land from crop production and encourage other on-farm conservation measures.

- The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is America's largest voluntary, private-lands conservation program. The NRCS reports that 36.7 million acres—an amount of acreage equivalent to half of 2006's harvested corn acres—are currently enrolled in the CRP. It protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams.

During its 20-year history, has restored 2 million acres of wetlands, 2 million acres of buffers and effectively reduces soil erosion across the United States by 454 million tons each year. Acreage enrolled in the CRP is planted to resource-conserving vegetative covers, making the program a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

- The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is an offshoot of CRP and addresses high-priority conservation issues of local and national significance, such as impacts to water supplies, loss of critical habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species, soil erosion, and reduced habitat for

fish populations such as salmon. CREP supports increased conservation practices, such as filter strips and forested buffers, to help protect streams, lakes and rivers from sedimentation and agricultural runoff. CREP also helps landowners develop and restore wetlands through the planting of appropriate groundcover.

- Also through CRP, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) aims to restore farmable wetlands and associated buffers by improving the land's hydrology and vegetation. Restoring wetlands reduces downstream flood damage, improves surface and groundwater quality, and recharges groundwater supplies. Wetlands provide vital habitat for migratory birds and many wildlife species, including threatened and endangered species, and provide recreational opportunities such as bird watching and hunting.

The greatest majority of agricultural land is a part of family farms that date back sometimes more than two centuries. As a result, farmers are continually seeking methods to maintain the integrity of the land for generations to come.

Acting Locally to Preserve and Maintain Area Waters

In Missouri, government, citizen and private industry groups came together in the late 1990s to form a partnership to improve area waters. Working together the Missouri Corn Growers Association, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and Syngenta created a local partnership to engage, educate and persuade neighbors to implement strategies that will maintain and restore the waters in their area. The group launched the Watershed Research, Assessment and Stewardship Project (WRASP) to provide farmers with options based on sound, scientific data that would improve water quality while increasing profitability. In 1997, WRASP began providing government agencies with input from the regulated community. The project concluded in 2005.

Encouraged by the positive feedback to WRASP, the Missouri Corn Growers Association formed the Environmental Resources Coalition, a not-for-profit organization, in 2001. ERC is committed to managing, improving and enhancing land and water resources through the use of sound science and effective public outreach. Key to the success of ERC is the understanding that one size does not fit all in addressing water quality issues. This unique approach to environmental stewardship has been applauded by the bipartisan Missouri House Interim Committee on Water Quality. It also received the Governor's Environmental Excellence Award. In August 2005, the WRASP project was singled out for recognition by the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation.

Other ERC projects include:

- **THE SOUTHWEST MISSOURI WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT** to identify and address major water quality issues in the southwestern region of the state.
- **THE ECOLOGICAL AND WATER RESOURCES ASSESSMENT PROJECT** to deliver a science-based and balanced view to regulators and the public to help them develop reasonable policies concerning water protection activities.
- **THE STEWARDSHIP IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT** for fair implementation of many of those policies and practices.

Key Points:

- Through the use of farm bill conservation programs, farmers are making important environmental gains, including reduced soil erosion, improved water quality and increased wildlife habitat.
- Programs are available to assist farmers and landowners with conservation practices. They include: the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Conservation Security Program (CSP).
- Corn farmers are involved in state, local and national programs that idle environmentally sensitive land from crop production and encourage other on-farm conservation measures. These include: the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP).