

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FARMLAND RESTORATION PROGRAM (FLRP)

Governor Malloy and the State Bond Commission have allocated \$5 million of Bond funds to the Department of Agriculture's new Farmland Restoration Program under Public Act 11-1. The main objective of this voluntary program is to increase the State's resource base for food and fiber production agriculture focusing primarily on prime and important farmland soils, in accordance with a Farmland Restoration Program Plan (FLRP Plan).

Farmers will submit applications to the Department of Agriculture (DoAg). The DoAg will receive, evaluate and notify applicants of application status, either acceptance or rejection.

If an application is accepted by the DoAg, the applicant will be asked to contact either the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for assistance preparing a Conservation Plan, or the North Central Conservation District (NCCD) to request assistance preparing a FLRP Plan.

A Conservation Plan or FLRP Plan is required for participation. (Note: A Conservation Plan needs to be prepared by the USDA- NRCS and must include a determination of highly erodible land and wetlands within the restoration area.) A Commissioner approved application and plan are required prior to funding approval. Once a project is approved for funding, a letter stating such will be provided the applicant from the Commissioner. The following FLRP scenarios may apply:

Scenario 1: If the applicant has an existing signed NRCS conservation plan, any plans/contracts (EQIP, WHIP, AMA, CSP, GRP, FRPP, CTA, WRP) associated with the restoration area must be submitted with the application. Restoration treatment activities and approved conservation practices associated with NRCS farm bill approved plans will likely be funded under the Connecticut DoAg FLRP.

Scenario 2: If the applicant does not have a NRCS conservation plan identifying restoration lands and conservation practices, but wishes to participate with NRCS to complete one, indicate this in the application. The application will be reviewed and evaluated. If the application is accepted, the applicant will be notified and asked to contact NRCS to prepare a conservation plan including a plan for the farmland restoration area.

Scenario 3: If the applicant does not have a NRCS conservation plan, and does not wish to participate with NRCS at this time, the application will be reviewed and evaluated. If the application is accepted, the applicant will be notified and asked to contact the NCCD to request preparation of a conservation / farmland restoration plan for the conservation practices on the farmland restoration project area. **Please note:** If the applicant wishes to participate in future USDA (NRCS, Farm Services Agency, Rural Development, Risk Management Agency) programs, they must remain in compliance with the Highly Erodible Land and Wetland provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act.

Under any scenario, the applications will be reviewed and the applicant notified of acceptance or rejection. Grants will be awarded based on evaluation and criteria recognizing the amount of cropland restored, with priority given to food producing agriculture.

Priority of applications to the program will be as follows:

1. Human food production agriculture will be considered the highest priority, including fruit production.
2. Livestock, livestock feed and livestock support production will be considered second.
3. Other agricultural uses may be considered based on land use, food production and acreage to be restored.

Types of restoration activities funded by the Farmland Restoration Program:

- Reclamation of grown over pastures, meadows and cropland including the removal of invasive plants and hedge row management;
- Clearing and removal of trees, stumps, stones and brush to create or restore agricultural use;
- Installation of fencing to keep livestock in reclaimed pasture areas and/or out of riparian areas;
- Installation of wildlife management fencing to protect crop fields on FLRP area(s);
- Restoration of water runoff and drainage of crop fields to improve cropland areas and restore water runoff patterns and water conservation;
- Renovation of farm ponds including farm pond management/irrigation and irrigation wells incidental to the restored areas;
- Replanting of vegetation on erosion prone land & along stream banks related to agricultural lands;
- Restoration of shellfish beds or aquaculture ponds;
- Enhancement of farm roads which service restoration areas.

THE PROGRAM ASSISTS FARMERS ACROSS THE STATE BY:

- Developing farm conservation and resource management plans intended to restore farmlands;
- Reestablishing use of the state's prime and important agricultural lands;
- Providing an opportunity to enhance use of agricultural lands that are currently underutilized;
- Helping farmers afford the cost of qualified plans and restoration activities by paying up to 50% of the cost, or \$20,000, whichever is less;
- On State or municipal owned farmland, under long term agricultural leases of 5 years or more, the total state share may be up to 90% of the restoration costs on such lands up to \$20,000.
- Providing opportunity to enhance farm businesses through increased production;
- Renovating farm ponds and removing invasive plants such as autumn olive & multi-flora rose;
- Enhancing manageability and connectivity of farm units;
- Assisting in clearing, stumping, and removing stones from agricultural lands.
- Restoration practices approved for payment are based on an approved conservation/farmland restoration plan.

HOW THE FARMLAND RESTORATION PROGRAM WORKS:

1. A farmer may apply to the program voluntarily, by completing the FLRP application.
2. Applicant should review program 'Checklist for application to FLRP' to assure application is complete and in order for consideration.
3. Applicant with an existing NRCS conservation plan which addresses the farmland restoration should include a copy of approved plan/contract with the application.
4. The application will also include site map, soils map (available from the USDA Web Soil Survey or another source which disseminates the official USDA soils information) and photos of the area to be restored, conservation/restoration practices, and price estimates of the work to be conducted.
5. Submitted FLRP Application is evaluated according to program criteria. If the application meets acceptable criteria, the Commissioner may accept and approve the application.
6. Upon application approval, a letter will be sent from the Commissioner to the applicant notifying them of application approval. Applicant will then be asked to contact NRCS or the NCCD to prepare a conservation plan which will include a plan for the farmland restoration project.
7. All conservation plans must address the farmland restoration plan area. These plans and the specific conservation / restoration practices and activities are then approved by the Commissioner and FLRP funding can be requested. Once the project funding is approved, an approval letter will be sent to the applicant.
8. All federal, state and local permits and any fees are the responsibility of the applicant.
9. The project work may then be initiated and completed.
10. Upon completion, all required documentation including a detailed performance log, project payment receipts, and a completion affidavit (see 'Checklist for disbursement of FLRP funds) must be submitted. A site inspection verifying the project has been completed in accordance with the plan, a FLRP payment request can be processed.
11. There is no advancement of funds under this grant program. Payment check can only be requested and processed for disbursement once project certified as complete with all required documentation.