Resources and Programs for Producers

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Who is NRCS?

- Formerly known as SCS
  - *Established in the Dust Bowl to help farmers and ranchers conserve soil*
  - *Expanded its mission in mid-90s*
    - Work with nonfederal landowners on a voluntary basis
    - Funded and administered under the Farm Bill
Conservation Assistance

- Agency’s goal: assist agricultural producers address resource concerns
  - Conserving soil, water, air, plants, animals
- Technical assistance upon request
  - Information, coordination
- Program assistance to help producers implement conservation practices
  - Often helps with production!
Cooperators and Partners

- **Cooperators**
  - Agricultural operators
  - Subsistence users
  - Forest producers
  - Native entities
  - Individual landowners

- **Partners**
  - Local/state/tribal governments
  - Nonprofit organizations
  - Other resource agencies
  - Economic development councils
Services and Programs

- Soil Survey
- Snow Survey
- Technical Assistance
- Financial programs
Program Funding

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - Most commonly used in AK. Set payment rates for implementing conservation practices.

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
  - New as of 2014. “Grant” type program for collaborative conservation projects.

- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
Typical Practices in Southeast AK

- **Small-scale agriculture assistance**
  - High tunnels and “companion practices” such as nutrient, pest, irrigation water management; cover cropping; crop rotation; microirrigation systems, etc.

- **Forestry**
  - Forest thinning, slash treatment, pruning
Remember! Agency’s mission is to assist agricultural producers address resource concerns.

High tunnels were authorized for EQIP funding because:
- Protect water quality by reducing pesticide/nutrient runoff
- Reduce soil erosion
- Increase watering efficiency

Associated practices such as nutrient/pest/irrigation management are encouraged
EQIP - High Tunnels et al.

- EQIP funding based on set rates
  - Does not necessarily cover the entire cost — but sometimes it does!
  - Reimbursable—payment is made after the practice is in place and has been certified by NRCS
  - Considered a taxable benefit
  - Both the applicant and the land must be eligible for EQIP
EQIP Eligibility

- **Applicant**
  - *May be an individual, partnership, or corporation*
    - Units of government and political subdivisions thereof (including school districts) are not eligible
  - *Must qualify as an agricultural producer*
  - *Certify control of the land for the life of a contract*
    - Deed, lease, binding agreement
Qualifying for EQIP

- Land Qualifications
  - Currently cultivated
  - Meets wetland and highly erodible land requirements in accordance with the Food Security Act
  - May not already be enrolled in other USDA conservation programs
Application Steps

- Applications are accepted continuously
  - First “cutoff” date for 2016 funding is June 15, 2015
- Farm records must be established with FSA
  - HELC/wetland certification and AGI
- Develop conservation plan, document eligibility
- Applications ranked, then reviewed by State Office
- Contracts usually awarded ~March

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<th>June</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Develop plan; paperwork</td>
<td>Project in database</td>
<td>Contracts awarded</td>
<td>Construction, inspection, payment</td>
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NRCS in Southeast Alaska

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Juneau Field Office Projects

Legend
- Ag-EQIP
- Ag-Technical Assistance
- Experimental High Tunnel
- Fish Habitat Improvement
- Forestry
- Capacity Building
- Traditional foods

Project partners include private landowners, Alaska Native corporations, nonprofit organizations, Tribes and Tribal entities, State of Alaska Division of Forestry, Mental Health Trust, municipalities, USDA agencies.
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