

Recommended Actions to include Continuous Living Cover Farming Systems in the Environmental Quality Incentives and Conservation Stewardship Programs

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The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) are US Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs that improve water quality, soil health, and address many other agricultural resource concerns. Green Lands Blue Waters (GLBW) promotes five Continuous Living Cover (CLC) farming strategies: agroforestry, cover crops, perennial forage, perennial grains, and biomass in the Upper Midwest of the US. The goal of CLC farming is to keep live plant cover and roots in the ground on farmland all year long. Support for CLC farming is among the most efficient uses of NRCS funding. CLC farming can significantly improve conditions for resources of concern to NRCS, GLBW partners, farmers, and communities.

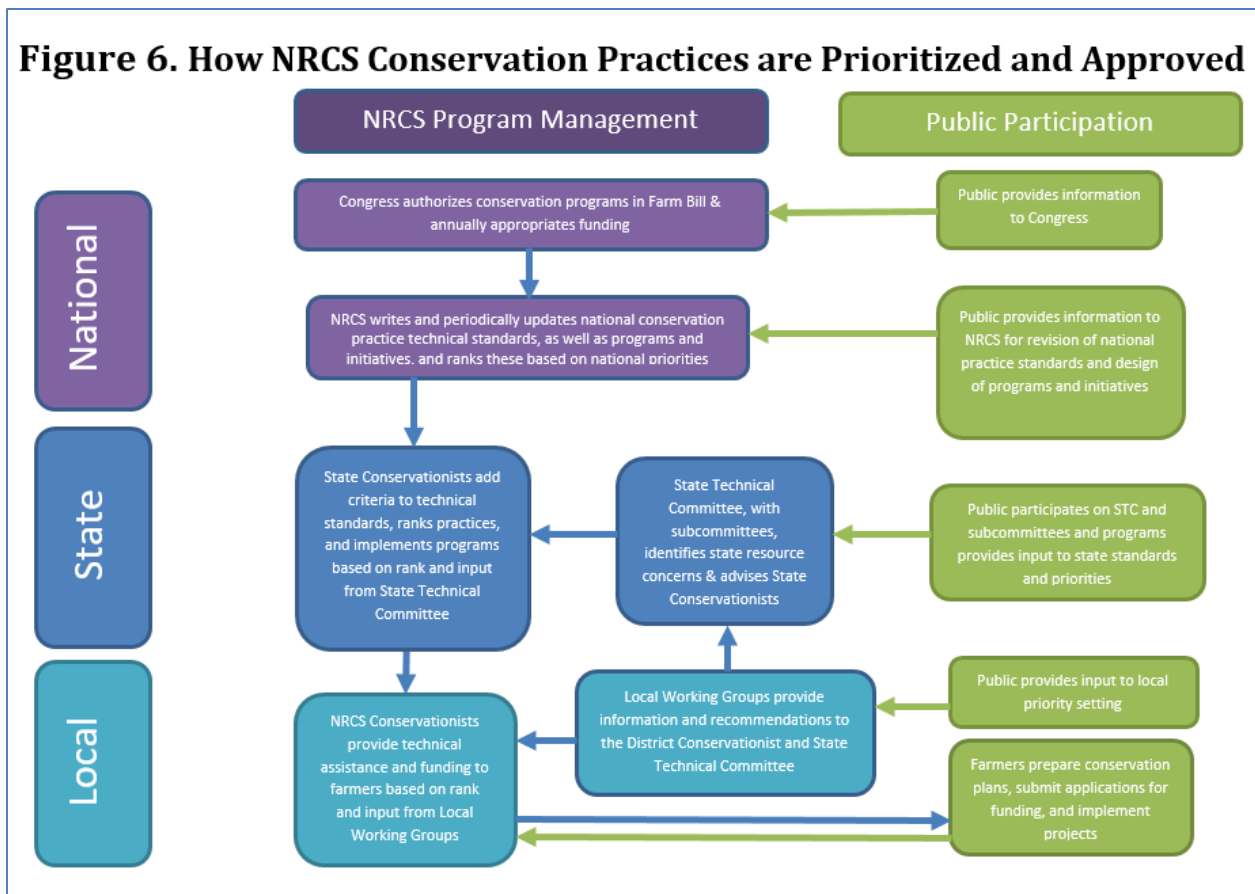
Opportunities - Green Lands Blue Waters has identified the following opportunities for GLBW and partners to optimize EQIP and CSP support for CLC farming systems.

- Expand ongoing and new research to document the environmental and economic benefits of CLC farming systems.
- Organize and provide scientific data that NRCS can use at the national and state levels to revise technical guides in ways that expand potential applications for CLC farming.
- Prepare case studies and publish analyses documenting the successes of NRCS conservation programs that use CLC farming in the Midwest. Make these available to NRCS, state agencies, and Congressional delegations from the region and work with members of the Farm Bill Conservation Coalition to more broadly share the information with USDA and Congress.
- Participate on State Technical Committees and Sub-Committees, and Local Working Groups to promote program descriptions, funding allocations, and ranking criteria that expand potential for contracts that implement CLC farming systems.
- Provide technical support to farmers for conservation planning, applying for NRCS contracts that implement CLC farming systems, and assistance with implementing those contracts.

Regional Coordination - Green Lands Blue Waters is planning to work with partners across the region to implement the opportunities listed above, to better understand and navigate NRCS practice prioritization and approval (see fig. 6) and to develop and implement a targeted regional strategy to increase funding for CLC practices through EQIP and CSP.

As an example, Alley Cropping (NRCS conservation practice #311) with rows planted to shrubs and trees that produce fruits and nuts and alleys planted to mixed herbaceous species that support pollinators could support pollinator habitat under the "Honey Bee Effort." However, in our region Alley Cropping is included on the state list only in Missouri and the Honey Bee Effort is available only in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Hence, one strategy for GLBW partners might include: 1) add Alley Cropping to the state lists of practices; 2) promote national and state-level revision of technical guides to ensure inclusion of CLC cropping systems; 3) add Honey Bee Effort to the state lists of EQIP programs; and 4) integrate Alley Cropping with CLC options in state ranking criteria.

Figure 6. How NRCS Conservation Practices are Prioritized and Approved



For more information, please see full GLBW report, *NRCS Opportunities for Increasing Continuous Living Cover Farming Systems* (in process)

Questions for Partners

- What are we missing? Do you see additional opportunities to optimize EQIP and CSP support for CLC farming systems?
- What work are you already doing in this arena?
- Would you be interested in partnering with Green Lands Blue Waters to implement these opportunities in your state?
- Would you be interested in partnering with Green Lands Blue Waters and others on a regional strategy to increase funding for CLC practices through EQIP AND CSP?

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