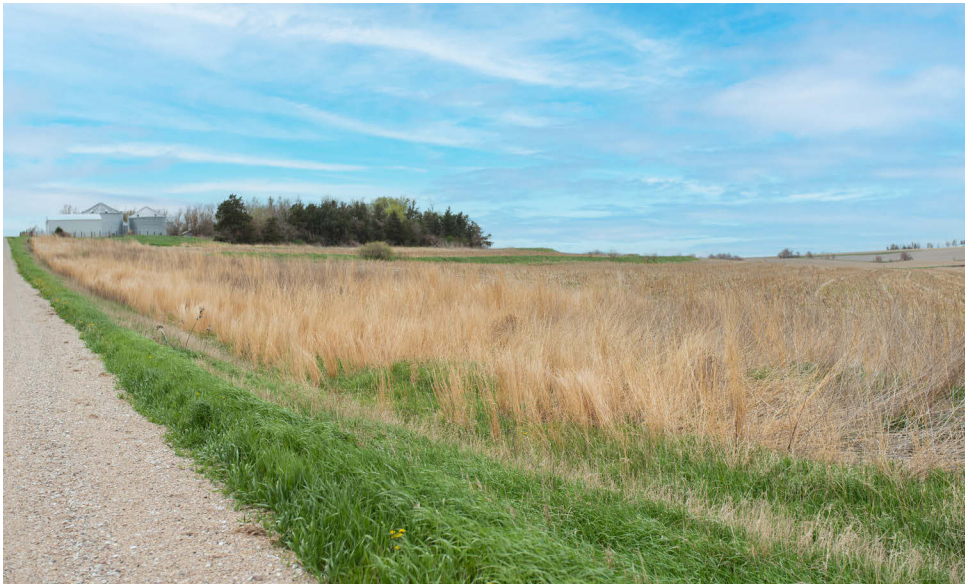
Conservation Stewardship Program Practices for Cropland



If you are implementing conservation practices on your operation and want to do more, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) can help you achieve your goals.

The program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), provides financial and technical assistance for producers to take their existing conservation efforts to the next level over the course of five years. This voluntary program allows producers to select practices based on the unique needs of an operation—no two contracts look the same.

This booklet contains a portion of the CSP practices and their benefits available to crop farmers in Nebraska. For a full list of CSP practices, visit your local USDA Service Center.

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Access control

By creating barriers such as fences, gates, or signs, this practice controls the access of animals, people, vehicles, and equipment to protect natural resources in a given area.

Reduce disturbances of soil and vegetation, reduce soil compaction, improve water use, protect native habitat

Conservation cover

Conservation cover is the establishment of perennial vegetation to create permanent cover that cannot be used for forage.

Reduce erosion, improve water quality, improve soil health, improve wildlife habitat

Conservation crop rotation

This practice includes alternating high and low residue-producing crops, such as corn and soybeans, from year to year or introducing forage, such as alfalfa, into crop rotations.

Reduce erosion, improve soil health, increase soil organic matter, improve water quality, reduce plant pest pressure, increase forage, improve wildlife habitat

Controlled traffic farming

Controlled traffic farming confines heavy, high-load farm equipment to specific lanes or patterns in a field to reduce soil compaction and its effects on yields.

Improve soil health, improve nutrient use, improve soil water availability

Watch videos about these practices at farmers.gov/conservation/conservation-at-work

Cover crop

Through this practice, grasses, legumes, or other approved plant species are planted to maintain a living root in agricultural soils that would otherwise remain fallow.

Reduce erosion, improve soil health, increase soil organic matter, improve water quality, suppress weed pressure, break pest cycles, improve soil water availability, increase pollinator habitat

Cereal rye is a popular cover crop for many producers implementing a corn and soybean crop rotation. Already doing this? Consider a multi-species cover crop for even greater soil health benefits or incorporate plants with fibrous and deep-rooted systems to break up soil compaction.

Early successional habitat development and management

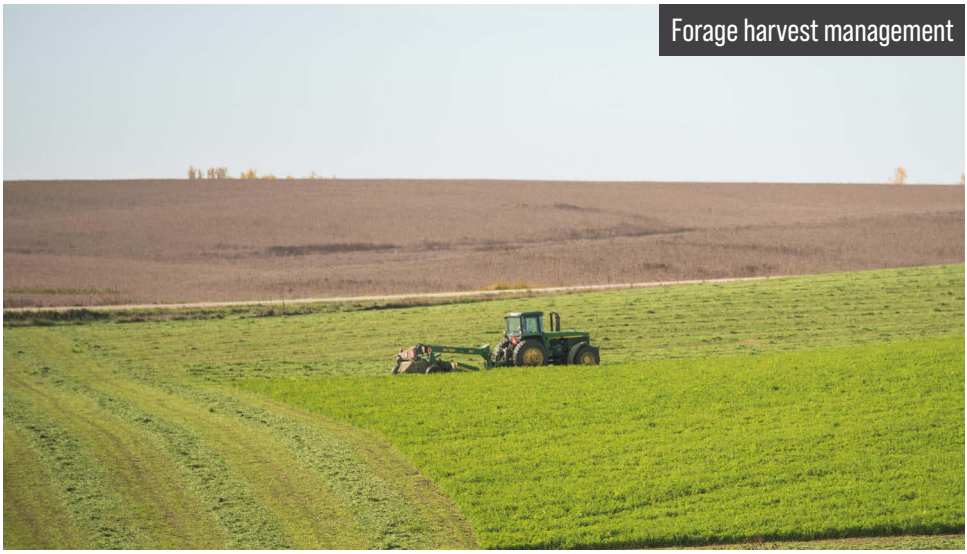
Through this practice, vegetated areas are disturbed by mechanical, chemical, or biological means to encourage the regrowth of plants that benefit desired wildlife species.

Reduce erosion, improve water quality, improve wildlife habitat, improve forage, reduce wildfire hazard

Energy efficient agricultural operation

Following an assessment, this practice helps producers increase their energy efficiency by replacing or retrofitting equipment, systems, and nonresidential structures on their operations.

Reduce energy use



Field border

Commonly implemented on converted cropland, field borders are strips of permanent vegetation on the sides of fields and consist of both herbaceous and woody plants, such as grasses, legumes, and shrubs.

Reduce erosion, protect soil quality, protect water quality, aid in pest management, improve wildlife habitat

Filter strip

Filter strips are established by planting dense vegetation on the edge of fields, often next to environmentally sensitive areas such as creeks and streams, to keep sediment, organic matter, and other contaminants out of runoff and wastewater.

Reduce harmful runoff, improve field access, increase forage, improve wildlife habitat

Fishpond management

Through this practice, ponds, lakes, and reservoirs are managed to enhance habitat and increase desirable fish populations by removing overpopulated or unwanted species.

Increase fish production, improve water quality, increase beneficial aquatic habitat

Forage harvest management

Forage harvest management requires the mechanical harvest of forage for animal feed at a time that accounts for both drought and wet conditions.

Reduce erosion, increase vegetative cover, increase soil biomass, improve water use, improve wildlife habitat, improve feed and forage

Many producers in Nebraska rely on adequate hay stores to feed cattle during the winter months. In addition to preserving the quality of hay, forage management has a significant impact on local wildlife and can be adjusted to benefit desired species.

Fuel break

By clearing vegetation, debris, and litter on a strip or block of land, fuel breaks reduce the risk of wildfire by creating an area where a fire will run out of fuel and stop progressing.

Reduce wildfire risk to land and structures

Grassed waterway

Through the use of vegetation, grassed waterways capture runoff and sediment in high-flow areas and are typically large enough for farm equipment to pass through without causing damage.

Reduce erosion, prevent gully formation, improve field access, improve water quality

Over time, run-off and soil erosion can create deep ditches through otherwise productive fields. Establishing a grassed waterway eliminates this threat and contributes to the ease of field access.

Irrigation water management

This practice requires producers to carefully consider and control the volume, frequency, and application rate of irrigation water on agricultural lands.

Improve water use and efficiency, reduce erosion, protect water quality, improve plant health, reduce energy use

Nutrient management

Through the careful timing, rate, and placement of commercial fertilizers, animal manures, or other materials, this practice reduces the environmental impact of soil amendments by increasing the efficiency of nutrient uptake and decreasing nutrient loss.

Reduce harmful runoff, improve plant health, reduce emissions

Find your local USDA Service Center at nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center

Pasture and hay planting

Through this practice, producers plant new perennial plant species for pasture and hay production.

Reduce erosion, improve livestock health, increase forage, improve water quality, improve soil health

Pest management conservation system

This practice combines natural resource conservation with integrated pest management, which monitors, prevents, and controls pests—including plants, insects, and pathogens—in the most economical and least hazardous way possible.

Reduce pest pressure, reduce harmful runoff, reduce injury to beneficial organisms

Residue and tillage management, no till

No-till requires farmers to maintain plant residue on cropland year round by tilling only a narrow strip for seed-to-soil contact during planting and leaving the rest of the field undisturbed.

Reduce erosion, reduce emissions, improve soil health, increase soil organic matter, reduce energy use, improve wildlife habitat

Nutrient management is one of the most popular practices for crop producers in Nebraska and can use the technological capabilities of precision agriculture to ensure the right source, rate, time, and place of plant nutrient and soil amendment application.

Residue and tillage management, reduced till

Through reduced tillage, alternative tillage methods, such as vertical and strip-till, are implemented to reduce soil disturbance.

Reduce erosion, reduce emissions, improve soil health, reduce energy use, increase soil organic matter

Riparian forest buffer

Riparian forest buffers are established by planting trees and shrubs along waterways and water bodies to reduce the transport of contaminants, such as sediment and pesticides, into surface and groundwater.

Reduce erosion, increase plant diversity, improve water quality, improve wildlife habitat, increase soil biomass, lower water temperatures, improve water bank structure

Riparian herbaceous cover

To establish riparian herbaceous cover, water-tolerant grasses and other herbaceous plants are seeded along water bodies or other aquatic habitats, particularly areas that are prone to period flooding or lack native plant communities.

Improve wildlife habitat, improve water quality, stabilize streambanks and shorelines, increase soil biomass, reduce erosion, reduce harmful runoff

Shallow water development and management

This practice establishes habitat, typically through excavation or flooding, for fish and wildlife that depend on shallow water, such as shorebirds and waterfowl.

Improve wildlife habitat


Residue and tillage management

Stream crossing

This practice requires the construction of a bridge, culvert, or ford crossing over or through a stream to provide better access for people, livestock, equipment, and vehicles.

Reduce harmful runoff, reduce erosion, improve access, improve water quality

Stream habitat improvement and management

This practice encourages the inspection and repair of streambanks and streambeds to develop or improve habitat for desired wildlife.

Improve wildlife habitat, stabilize streambanks and beds, create healthy stream ecosystems

Streambank and shoreline protection

Once the instability of a shoreline is determined, structures and plant vegetation are used to improve stream stability and maintain water flow.

Stabilize streambanks and shorelines, reduce erosion, improve water capacity, improve wildlife habitat, improve aesthetics

Structures for wildlife

Through this practice, artificial wildlife structures, such as nesting boxes, are constructed and installed to provide habitat where natural structures are lacking.

Improve wildlife habitat

Already implementing these practices? Ask your NRCS field representative how to increase their impact with enhancements.

Many of these practices can be implemented simultaneously to increase the benefits.

Tree/shrub establishment

Tree/shrub establishment requires the planting of native trees and shrubs through seeding, direct planting, and natural regeneration based on location.

Improve plant health, increase plant diversity, improve water quality, improve native habitat, reduce erosion, improve wildlife habitat, provide shade and shelter for livestock

Upland wildlife habitat management

Upland wildlife habitat management is the establishment of vegetation or structures that provide food, shelter, and corridors to conserve wildlife species and ecosystems.

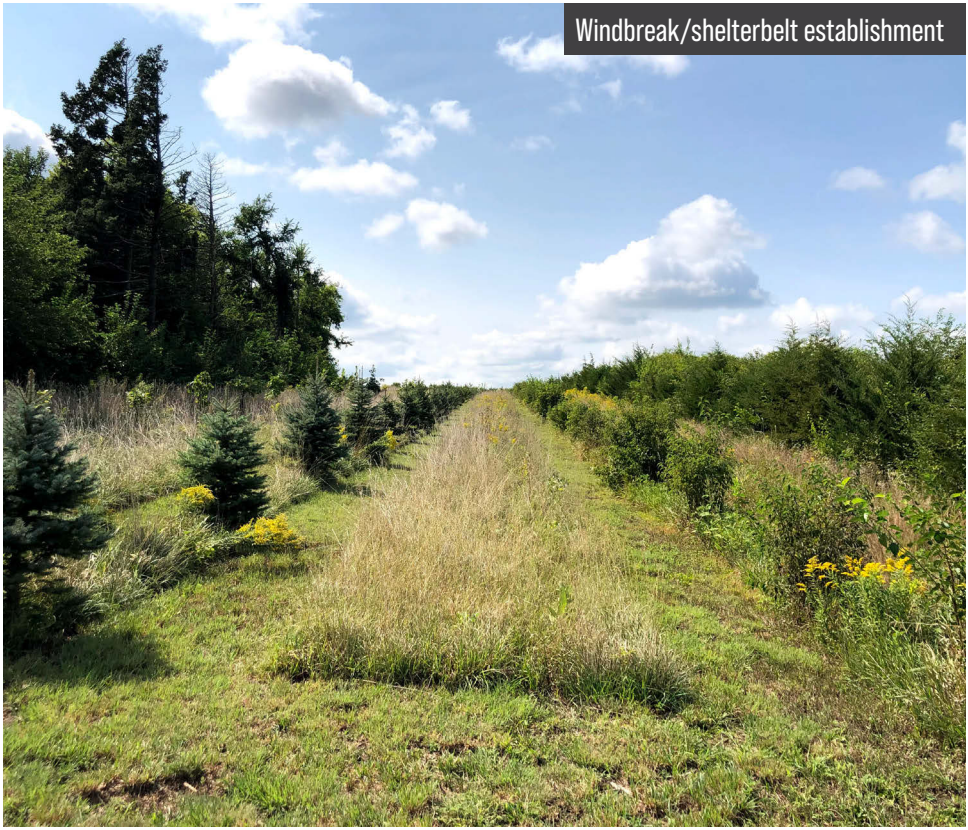
Improve wildlife habitat, increase select animal populations, increase value of landscape

The establishment and careful management of wildlife habitat has the potential to increase the population of popular upland wildlife, including pheasant and quail.

Wetland wildlife habitat management

Through this practice, wetland habitat is established by managing water depths, addressing invasive plant species, and planting vegetation that provides food and shelter for targeted wildlife, such as migratory waterfowl and other waterbirds.

Improve wildlife habitat


Windbreak/shelterbelt establishment

Wildlife habitat planting

This practice includes the conversion of cropland, pasture, or poor-quality habitat into high-quality habitat for wildlife through the planting or seeding of desirable herbaceous plants and shrubs.

Improve wildlife habitat, increase pollinator habitat

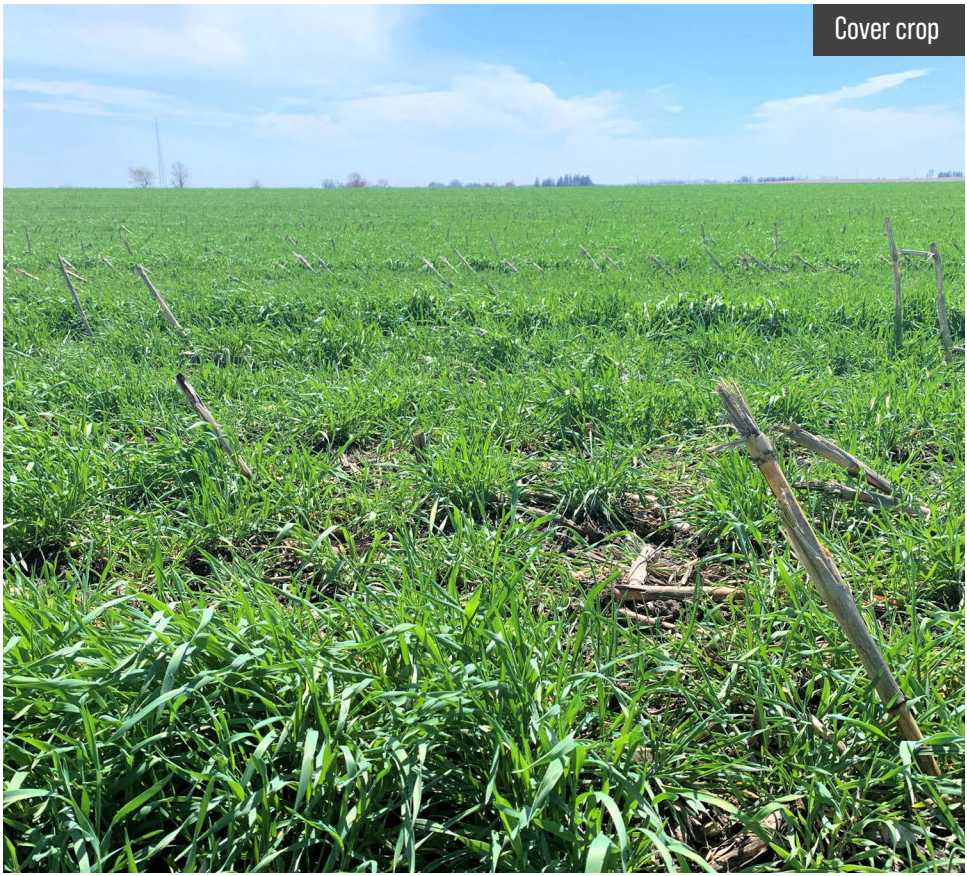
Adding nectar- and pollen-producing plants to field borders, buffer strips, windbreaks, and other areas is one way to support pollinators and add beauty to the landscape. Milkweed can also be incorporated to support monarch butterflies.

CSP practices are designed to benefit multiple aspects of your operation, including your bottom line.

Windbreak/shelterbelt establishment

Windbreaks or shelterbelts are established by planting a single row or multiple rows of trees and/or shrubs to protect a given area during weather events.

Reduce erosion, improve plant health, provide shelter, improve wildlife habitat



Want to connect with a producer implementing these practices?
Ask about our Conservation Mentorship Network.

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This material is based on work supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, General Mills, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture under agreement number 2004.23.077344.

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