



NEWS

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Michigan
Agriculture
Environmental
Assurance
Program

New FSA loan now available

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has introduced a new loan program to help farmers and rural landowners protect and conserve natural resources on their land. Low-interest loans are now available to qualified borrowers through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Loan program.

"This is a great opportunity for producers and landowners who want to implement conservation practices but have been unable to due to a lack of resources," said Christine White, state executive director for FSA in Michigan. "This is a chance to put those conservation measures into practice."

Local FSA offices can provide conservation loans up to \$300,000 and can guarantee loans from private lenders for up to \$1,119,000.

FSA conservation loans can only be used for conservation practices approved by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The loans can be used by participants in USDA conservation financial assistance programs to pay the upfront costs for installing conservation practices or for costs not covered by financial assistance programs.

FSA conservation loans can be used in coordination with NRCS conservation financial assistance. NRCS financial assistance programs can help producers pay for implementing new conservation practices, typically by providing 75 percent of the estimated cost of implementing a new conservation activity.

While NRCS financial assistance can pay most of the cost for implementing a new conservation measure, the participant must implement the practice before receiving payment from NRCS. Implementing a conservation practice can cost hundreds to thou-



Conservation loans from the USDA Farm Service Agency can be used to implement conservation practices like these windbreaks.

sands of dollars. An FSA loan can help cover these costs until the producer is reimbursed by NRCS.

"This program will benefit producers who want to participate in NRCS financial assistance programs but have difficulty affording the upfront costs," said Garry Lee, NRCS state conservationist for Michigan.

If a producer or landowner is counting on NRCS financial assistance to repay a conservation loan, they should enter into a conservation program contract before obtaining the loan, said Lee. NRCS does not provide financial assistance unless the participant has entered into a contract prior to implementing a new conservation practice.

NRCS conservation practices are designed to protect and conserve soil, water, air and wildlife resources. These proven and established conservation practices can benefit any type of agricultural operation, including row crops, confined livestock or grazing operations, specialty crops, organic production and private non-industrial forest operations. Some NRCS conservation practices include animal waste storage facilities, tree and native grass plantings, agrichemical handling facilities, seasonal high tunnels and livestock watering facilities.

Conservation loan applicants must have a completed conservation plan that includes the conservation practices the producer is borrowing funds to implement. FSA conservation loans must be fully secured, and the applicant must demonstrate the ability to repay the loan. Terms of the loan will be based on the life of the security offered for the loan but will not exceed 20 years.

For more information about FSA Conservation Loans, contact your local USDA Service Center.

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MAEAP verification a sweet match for beekeepers

BY AMY CWALINA, MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

David Anthony and Leo Stevens share two key passions: bees and safeguarding the environment. Accordingly, both have pursued—and now attained—verification in the MAEAP Farmstead System, and now are reaping the benefits, including increased sales and public notice.

By assisting farmers to stay current with environmental regulations and processes, MAEAP can help bridge the gap between producers and consumers.

“The program makes people aware of what you need to do to be environmentally sound,” explains Stevens, owner of S&L Honey Farm.

“And the sign makes people ask questions,” adds Anthony.



Genesee Conservation District board members Brad Hill, Janice Stiles, MAEAP verifier Joe Kelpinski, Tom Wert, Michigan Water Stewardship Technician for Shiawassee and Genesee counties, with David Anthony of Anthony Bee Farm and Leo Stevens of S&L Honey Farm.

“It’s good advertising and encourages people to buy local honey, produced on an environmentally assured farm.”

Even if a farm is already doing everything necessary to meet MAEAP’s requirements, becoming verified allows the Michigan Department of Agriculture to confirm environmental management and practices including record keeping.

“MAEAP markets itself,” Anthony said. “People come here just because we are MAEAP verified.”

Becoming verified is good for the environment and good for the farmer.

“There have been no negatives—only a positive impact on my business,” Anthony said.

“Everyone should get verified,” added Stevens.



Doing it Right in Riga

The Denecker Farm in Riga, near Blissfield in Lenawee County, recently earned verification in the MAEAP Cropping System. Caring about the land has long been a priority of both father and son (that’s Maury pictured on the left and George on the right.) According to Maury, MAEAP verification was fairly simple and didn’t take too much time. They didn’t have to change what they were doing—just document the conservation practices that were already in place on their farm.

MAEAP Sign Administration

MAEAP extends sincere appreciation to the Grand Traverse Conservation District for the vital role they have played in making the familiar MAEAP farm signs available to verified operations for the past four years.

Special recognition goes to Dan Busby, Michigan Water Stewardship Program technician; Lou Coulter, executive director; and Kath Zatorski, administrative assistant; for all of their help in distributing signs to verified farms across the state.

A thank you also goes to the Shiawassee Conservation District for volunteering to oversee sign administration in the future.

All of Michigan’s Conservation Districts have shown great dedication to and support for MAEAP over the years. This program was built on partnerships and continues to thrive on the collaboration of organizations and farms across the state. The support of MAEAP is much appreciated and will help to further the program’s growth.

ACE 2011 offers production tips, profit info for all growers

Agriculture's Conference on the Environment (ACE) is expected to be a magnet for hundreds of farmers seeking to improve their farming operations while protecting the environment. ACE 2011 kicks off at 9 a.m. Jan. 27 at the Lansing Center and will focus

on key topics important to Michigan's farmers.

Become inspired to further your progressive mindset and equip yourself with the tools necessary to secure a profit, ensure environmental stewardship

and manage today for tomorrow. Gain insight on current agriculture and environmental topics through educational sessions offered throughout the day focusing on these themes:

- **Building Consumer Trust** — Sessions include relating with the public to build consumer trust, managing milk house waste, stream sampling and managing farm odor footprint.
- **Developing Efficiencies to Increase Profitability** — Decrease your farm's energy use, and manage your carbon footprint. Gain insight into protecting the Great Lakes watershed and learn about utilizing precision agriculture, ecosystems services and green payments.
- **Legislative, Food Safety and Economic Impacts** — Hear the latest on legislative issues, an overview of economic trends influencing agriculture and learn about food safety issues important to farmers and the public.
- **Managing Inputs to Maximize Profit** — Learn the latest on soybean production, nitrogen fertilizers for corn and anhydrous ammonia storage. Hear MAEAP-verified farmers describe the importance of marketing your farm to your neighbors.
- **Reducing Farm Energy Costs to Increase Profitability** — Learn about USDA's Rural Energy for America program and what opportunities exist for improving energy efficiency on the farm, information will be available on efficient irrigation systems.

Keynote speaker Dr. Bill Beranek Jr., president of the Indiana Environmental Institute, Inc., will start the conference by sharing his expertise regarding what today's farmers need to know about their practices while being mindful of industry changes.

Charlie Arnot, CEO of the Center for Food Integrity, will close the conference with a message about how farmers can share their story and promote the strength of the agriculture industry.



ACE attendance counts as a MAEAP Phase 1 education meeting, provides three RUP credits for both private and commercial Core Pesticide Applicators, and offers CCA credits.

Registration sign-in, a continental breakfast and exhibitor review starts at 8:15 a.m., with the conference following from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Visit www.maeap.org/ace for more information or to register. Registration cost is \$50 (\$25 for students) by Jan. 17, \$75 after.

Sponsoring ACE 2011 are: GreenStone Farm Credit Services, Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Milk Producers Association, Michigan Pork Producers Association, Corn Marketing Program of Michigan and Michigan Corn Growers Association, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension/College of Agriculture and Natural Resources/AgBioResearch, Michigan Farm Radio Network, Dairy Farmers of America, Michigan Cattlemen's Association, Michigan Allied Poultry, MSU Institute of Water Research and Michigan Sugar Company.



Reid this

MAEAP-verified farmers Jim and Pam Reid were named the winners of Michigan Farm Bureau's 2010 Ecology Leadership Award. Located in St. Clair County, the Reid's farm consists of a 200-cow dairy and approximately 1,000 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat. The farm is verified in all three MAEAP systems—livestock, cropping and farmstead. The couple was awarded with a John Deere Gator at MFB's 2010 Annual Meeting in early December.

Deserving farmer earns ‘the’ sign

BY EMILY RIES, MICHIGAN FARM BUREAU

“I’ve been farming all my life,” says Frank Rochowiak, proud to have recently earned MAEAP Farmstead System verification. Rochowiak isn’t stopping there, however; in the new year, he plans to become verified in the Cropping System and add a Livestock System verification in 2012.

A Ford Motor Company retiree, Frank first began farming with his brother in Wayne County until the tide of suburban development forced a move into neighboring Washtenaw County, where he remains today, raising 120 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and hay. With the move, Rochowiak knew being proactive would be the key to developing an environmentally friendly farm plan—a plan that’s earned him the results he’s proud of today.

Rochowiak found the verification process relatively easy, cit-

ing the assistance of the Michigan Water Stewardship Program (MWSP). MWSP Technician Amy Gilhouse helped him complete the necessary paperwork and implement the necessary improvements to his operation.

One key improvement was a spill kit and emergency plan, including signs to alert visitors of necessary safety precautions, such as “no smoking” signs in each barn. A new chemical cabinet ensures safer storage and spill prevention, and emergency contact numbers are prominently posted in the event emergency services workers needed to reach the veterinarian, implement dealer or seed and chemical representative for information.

Recognizing the importance of showcasing his farm and demonstrating sound practices to rural and urban neighbors alike, Rochowiak is proud to spread the message that farmers care about the environment. As farmers across the state continue to pursue MAEAP verification, Rochowiak stands out as a stewardship leader who has achieved such

excellence even under the bright illumination of the most developed corner of the state.

“We have setbacks,” he says, “but I really love it and I wouldn’t ever give it up.”

**“IT’S AN HONOR TO
HAVE THAT SIGN —
A PRIVILEGE.”**

—Frank Rochowiak

Group gets grant to test manure storage

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) recently awarded a Conservation Innovation Grant through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to the Seepage Meter Coalition. A team of Michigan-based agricultural groups, the coalition will use the funding to improve and test a device that measures the performance of manure storage facility liners.

The seepage meter was developed by a University of Florida professor and manufactured and tested in Michigan as part of a Technology Transfer Grant from 2006-2009. As part of the original grant, additional components and testing procedures were identified to make the system more reliable.

The new grant will fund testing in controlled settings and on storage structures that were constructed to current standards, with the goal of improving the meter so it will be recognized by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) as an acceptable device for evaluating waste storage structure liners

within Michigan.

The current method for evaluating liners is visual inspection.

According to the coalition, the benefits of the device include:

- Providing an option to existing methods of sampling to test liner integrity.
- Cost efficiency; the seepage meter is cheaper and less disruptive from a structural and operations perspective.
- Accuracy; the meter measures the response of the entire system and protects the environment and natural resources at a higher level.

The Seepage Meter Coalition is currently made up of representatives from MDA, DNR, DEQ, Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan State University, NTH Consultants, Ltd., and USDA-NRCS.

The coalition is currently seeking support from interested producer and environmental groups. Please contact Latricia Giddens at 313-237-3923 for more information.

With support from:



Corn Marketing Program of Michigan



Total MAEAP Verifications: 860