



Outreach That Works: the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership

June 2014 Snapshots



Blue Earth County Farm Bill Biologist Jeff Potts, right, meets with a landowner to discuss conservation practices.

When it comes to establishing conservation practices and wildlife habitat on private lands, Minnesota landowners have many choices. Helping landowners understand those options and make the best choice is the primary objective of the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership.

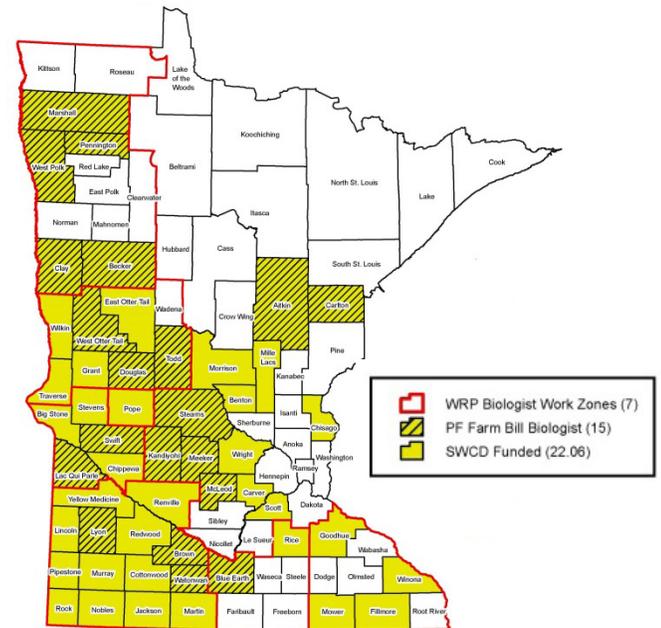
In an effort to provide unified direction in protecting and restoring Minnesota’s grasslands and wetlands, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Pheasants Forever, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have come together as a committee to provide support and guidance to the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership. This outreach effort connects

eligible landowners with the agency or program that best fits their operation. According to Jason Beckler, BWSR Farm Bill Assistance Coordinator, the Farm Bill Assistance positions were created because “we needed folks out there knocking on doors, picking up the phone, and actively engaging landowners to encourage them to enroll environmentally sensitive areas into conservation programs like the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).”

The Farm Bill Assistance program is outreach that works, and the numbers prove it. Since its inception in 2002, the program has enrolled over 500,000 acres into various state and federal conservation programs. 78% of all RIM dollars since 2012 have gone to counties with Farm Bill Assistance staff in place.

The program was awarded \$3 million from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for Fiscal Years 2014-2016. This funding has allowed the program to strengthen its work in private lands conservation by increasing outreach efforts. Ten new positions have been added to the program, bringing staff coverage to 50 counties. These Farm Bill

Below: Farm Bill Assistance positions statewide, in yellow. The positions currently cover 50 counties and are funded through BWSR, SWCDs and Pheasants Forever.



Assistance positions have shared funding: 90% through BWSR's LCCMR grant and the remaining 10% coming from a local Soil and Water Conservation District or other local nonprofit group.

The support provided by these Farm Bill Assistance positions does not go unnoticed by others. Minnesota DNR Area Wildlife Supervisor Cory Netland had this to say: "I firmly believe that an ambitious Farm Bill Technician equipped with well-funded programs (and a good payment structure) can do more for wildlife habitat and populations than I can in the short term, and if funding is available for perpetual easements, perhaps the long-term as well."

Boots on the ground matter. The outreach provided by these positions and the work they're doing to help private landowners successfully connect with government programs is helping make a difference in Minnesota's conservation work.