



Farm Bill Assistance Partnership sees increased demand for conservation in 2016

January 2017 Snapshots

Helping landowners understand and make the best choice of available options for establishing conservation practices and wildlife habitat on private land is the primary objective of Minnesota’s Farm Bill Assistance Partnership. Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) sponsored Farm Bill Assistance staff serve on the front lines of landowner outreach, knocking on doors, picking up the phone, and providing support and facilitation to get environmentally sensitive lands enrolled in conservation programs like the state’s Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program and the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

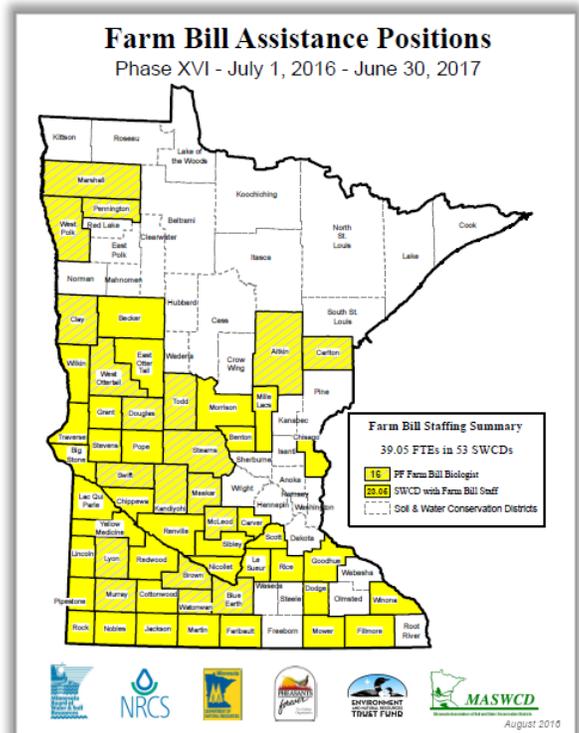
As Minnesota’s State Buffer Program rolls out and existing CRP contracts expire, the people in these positions have seen increased demand for their services. 2016 has seen a spike in interest in CRP buffers as landowners look for program assistance to meet the requirements of the new law. Requests for assistance with CRP buffer enrollment has more than doubled.

In Mower County, the Soil and Water Conservation District staff have been “swamped” by landowners looking to enroll sensitive lands in the program. Farm Bill staff have supported their federal partners by holding initial landowner meetings, deciding on boundaries, filling out documentation and writing plans for the land.

In Cottonwood County, the soil and water conservation district’s Farm Bill Assistant has completed 79 CRP plans in 2016, and provided GIS data and eligibility information to a number of landowners considering enrolling. Statewide, more than 14,000 acres have been enrolled through the end of September.

Meeker County Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist Josh Pommier reports that in the fall of 2016, a landowner who had heard about the program stopped by to get more information. After Pommier walked him through the program, implementation, payment rates, and the end result, the landowner reported it was “exactly what he’d been looking to do with his cropland.”

As the 2017 buffer law deadline approaches, the interest in CRP will likely increase. District staff are working closely with landowners to help them identify the program that will meet their needs best.



Cottonwood SWCD Farm Bill Assistant Becky Alexander. There are 48 Farm Bill Assistance positions located in 53 SWCDs around the state (not all are full time).