



# Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture

## Supporting producers to increase productivity, strengthen markets, and improve climate resilience.

Under the three-year, \$80-million pilot program, the Alliance and its partners will help producers in Arkansas, Minnesota, North Dakota and Virginia prove the value of paying farmers and ranchers \$100 per acre or animal unit for stewardship practices that deliver public value through carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas reduction, improved soil health, water quality, water conservation, and other environmental services.

Producers can sign up a maximum of two FSA farm numbers with a maximum of 160 ac or animal units per farm number, for a combined total of 320 ac or animal units. Minimum 3 ac or 10 animal units

The local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's) in eligible counties are working one on one with producers to plan, apply, enroll, implement, and report. The SWCD's will be your local connection for information and program participation. SWCD contact information is provided in this guide.

### Land Eligibility:

- Eligible with FSA (producers without FSA records can apply for the program without FSA records but must work with your local FSA office to obtain immediately after applying for the Alliance program)
- Located in one of the eligible counties

### Producer Eligibility:

- Eligible with FSA (producers without FSA records can apply for the program without FSA records but must work with your local FSA office to obtain immediately after applying for the Alliance program)
- Own or operate land in one of the eligible counties

## Eligibility

### Eligible Counties:

- East Otter Tail
- Fillmore
- Kandiyohi
- Redwood
- Renville
- Houston (Root River)
- Stevens
- Wadena

### Eligible Practices:

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Cover Crop
- Nutrient Management
- Pasture and Hay Planting
- Prescribed Grazing
- No-Till/Strip Till
- Reduced Till
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Silvopasture
- Tree and Shrub Planting

## How Does this Program Work?

The Alliance to Advance Climate Smart program provides a \$100 per acre or animal unit to producers. If you choose one or five practices, the payment remains the \$100 per acre or animal unit. Practice specific eligibility is provided in this guide. Contracts are for 1 year in duration.

Payments are provided utilizing a loadable debit card. **Please do not throw away your card or the activation instructions that come with it.** If you are selected for enrollment, you will receive your debit card after signing the producer agreement. You will receive 50% of your practice payment once you activate your debit card. You will receive the second payment of 25% after implementing the practice, and the remaining 25% after reporting is completed.

The Producer Guide includes information about the program as well as the steps to complete if your application is selected to enroll in the program.

Producers interesting in implementing the eligible practices within the eligible counties will contact your local SWCD office. Working with the local SWCD office will provide you with eligibility review, application and enrollment assistance, practice planning, and reporting. Producers are able to apply on their own, but it is important for successful practice planning and support to work with your local SWCD office.

Producers complete the application online at the [Alliance website](#) and can be completed independently or with the assistance of your local SWCD. You will need to know what practice you would like to sign up for, how many acres or animal units, on what ground (farm, tract, and field numbers), and enter the information in the application portal. An Application Checklist is available online for information needed and the application process. If you don't currently have FSA records, work with your local FSA office right away to obtain records to enter in the application portal. Please provide the following to the SWCD office as soon as possible when/after you apply:

- FSA maps on applicable land
- Producer Farm Data Report
- FSA Subsidiary Print

You may also complete a [data consent form](#) allowing the local district to obtain your FSA records for the eligibility review.

After the application period closes, the applications will be reviewed for eligibility and ranked. You will be notified if your application was chosen or not for funding this round.

If your application was chosen for enrollment, you will work with your local SWCD office to complete enrollment and to upload required documentation.

You will then receive a notice to review and sign the Producer Agreement. When finalized, you will receive your debit card and will receive your first payment of 50% after card activation.

# Program Steps

The [Alliance Minnesota](#) page includes the Application Checklist, Producer Guide, and other useful information.

## 1. Application

Complete your application online in the producer dashboard independently or with the assistance of your local SWCD office. This is a great opportunity to discuss your objectives and plans with a local conservation planner to successfully develop your conservation plan, required documents, and process. Provide the local district your FSA maps on applicable land, Producer Farm Data Report, and your FSA Subsidiary Print.

## 2. Enrollment

Receive notification of your application being selected for enrollment or not selected. If your application is not selected, you may apply again in future sign up periods. If your application is selected for enrollment you will provide additional documentation and sign the producer agreement. Documentation needed: W9, Subsidiary Print, and CPA-52 if applicable. Once the enrollment is completed, the debit card will be issued, once activated, you will receive your first payment of 50% of your contract.

## 3. Practice Installation

Complete the planning on the practice worksheet of the practice you've enrolled and provide to your local district office. Working with your local SWCD office will help to assist in the practice planning and provide information and support for successful planning and implementation. The FSA map shapefile data will also be required on cropland practices. Once completed and uploaded, the second payment of 25% will be issued. The practice doesn't have to be implemented at this point but the planning on the practice worksheet needs to be completed and payment can be issued 6 months after signing the producer agreement.

## 4. Final Submission

Implement and self-certify the practice. You will self-certify the practice by documenting on your practice worksheet how the practice was implemented (practice worksheets vary on details to document in this step) and signing agreeing that the practice was implemented according to the information in the practice worksheet. Provide the completed practice worksheet to your district office. Please retain your implementation documents for at least 12 months after implementing the project. 10% of practices will be spot checked by the local SWCD office. Complete the COMET-Planner and submit to the producer dashboard (complete COMET-Farm if you elected this option). Once those documents are verified and uploaded, you will receive the last payment of 25%.

## What are Underserved Producers within the Alliance Program?

Producers who qualify as a Historically Underserved Farmer or Rancher will receive an additional \$25 equity payment for \$125 per acre or animal unit. The application allows producers to select one or more groups that best describes them. A producer may only qualify for (1) equity payment; if more than one underserved group applies to the producer, Virginia Tech will determine the producer's enrollment group based on the final applicant pool to meet the obligations of the research agenda and program outcomes. For farmers that do not qualify as a Historically Underserved Farmer or Rancher but operate less than five acres, an additional \$500 payment will be awarded to help install the climate-smart practice. Operations with fewer than five acres and operated by an underserved producer will receive a minimum total payment of \$625.

### **UNDERSERVED PRODUCER GROUPS**

**SMALL OPERATIONS** - An operation with gross cash farm income under \$250,000

**BEGINNING OPERATIONS** - An individual who has not operated a farm, ranch, for more than 10 consecutive years. To qualify, an individual must provide substantial day-to-day labor and management of the operation, consistent with the practices in the county or State where the operation is located. A legal entity or joint operation can be considered a Beginning Farmer and Rancher (BFR) if all members individually qualify.

**100% WOMEN-OWNED OPERATIONS** - Operations whose principal operator—the individual most responsible for the day-to-day decisions of the farm (or ranch)—is a woman.

**VETERAN OPERATIONS** - An individual who has served in the armed forces, including a reserve component; was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable; and qualifies as Beginning; or first obtained veteran status during the last 10 years.

**LIMITED RESOURCE OPERATIONS** - An individual who has direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years, and: has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four in each of the previous 2 years; or has a total household income less than 50 percent of the county median household income in each of the previous 2 years. A legal entity or joint operation can be considered Limited Resource if all members individually qualify. To determine if you qualify as Limited Resource Producer, USDA provides an online self-determination tool: <https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/DeterminationTool.aspx?fyYear=2024>. NOTE: If you qualify as a Limited Resource Producer, you may be eligible for an upfront payment for the year you are enrolled. This will be determined by Virginia Tech and outlined in the Producer Agreement.

**SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED** - Members of a group who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of that group without regard to their individual qualities. A legal entity or legal operation can be considered Socially Disadvantaged if at least 50% ownership in the business is held by Socially Disadvantaged individuals. Includes the following groups:

American Indian or Alaska Native - Asian - Black or African American  
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander - Hispanic

## What Reporting is Included in this Program?

The Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture is supported by USDA's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, and led by the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. As part of this pilot, research faculty from Virginia Tech will collect self-reported data from participating farms and ranches to determine the greenhouse gas benefit of climate-smart agriculture.

All enrolled participants will self-report and self-verify the installed practice and commodity using COMET-Planner or Field to Market's FieldPrint Platform.

The Carbon Management Evaluation Tool (COMET) is a measurement tool designed to provide the estimated greenhouse gas impacts of conservation practices, without extensive on-site sampling. The Fieldprint® Platform is an assessment framework that measures the environmental impacts of commodity crop production. Alliance will utilize FieldPrint rather than COMET for rice conservation practices. Enrolled producers will be required to submit their COMET-Planner or FieldPrint data to the Alliance through the Producer Dashboard.

Producers are able to volunteer and Virginia Tech will select up to 10% of applicants to participate in COMET-Farm. Producers who choose to report through COMET-Farm will be compensated an additional \$1,000 per year for the estimated 35 hours to collect and input historical farm data.

- Producer will "opt in" if they wish to be considered to use COMET-Farm during the application. They will be notified when an enrollment decision is issued if they will participate in COMET-Farm and receive the additional \$1,000 payment at the conclusion of their producer agreement.
- Producers who participate in COMET-Farm are still required to submit COMET-Planner data.
- The Alliance Technical Specialist will be available to assist producers in completing COMET-Farm.

All enrolled producers will participate in additional data collection related to greenhouse gas benefits and complete surveys led by Virginia Tech faculty.

Producers will work with the local SWCD office to develop the applicable practice worksheet to plan the conservation practice. Producers will also self-certify practice implementation and will be completed by completing the applicable practice worksheet and uploading to the portal. 10% of practice implementation will be spot checked.

## Practice Specific Eligibility

Practices eligible for enrollment in the Alliance pilot must 1) result in GHG mitigation and 2) require producers to carry out activities (i.e. incur costs) for practice establishment or enhancement during the period of enrollment in the Alliance pilot.

The following applies to only the acres/AUs to be enrolled in the Alliance pilot. Simultaneous enrollment of the same practice on the same acres is not allowed for any USDA Conservation Program, another USDA Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities grant partner, or a state cost-share program.

**Conservation Crop Rotation (328)** has a practice lifespan of one year according to NRCS. The practice requires a minimum of two different crops to be grown in rotation which will typically span more than one year. Also, there are standard crop rotations, for example corn and soybeans, that are widely adopted, and it is not the purpose of the pilot to incentivize standard crop rotations. To meet the previously stated intent, producers are eligible to enroll this practice in the Alliance pilot, for new implementation or enhancement of the existing crop rotation through the addition of a different conservation crop with planting of the selected crop during the Alliance contract year.

**Residue and Tillage Management, No Till/Strip Till (329)** has a practice lifespan of one year according to NRCS. For producers who have already adopted no-till and want to enroll in the Alliance pilot, we require adding a practice or signing up for a different practice, such as 340 or 590 to accrue additional GHG benefits.

**Cover Crop (340)** has a practice life of one year according to NRCS. Because 340 must be renewed annually, it is eligible for enrollment in the Alliance pilot regardless of previous adoption.

**Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345)** has a practice lifespan of one year according to NRCS. For producers who have already adopted reduced-till and want to enroll in the Alliance pilot, we require adding a practice or signing up for a different practice, such as 340 or 590 to accrue additional GHG benefits.

**Silvopasture (381)** has a practice lifespan of 15 years, according to NRCS. Therefore, enrollment is only possible for year one of this practice.

## Practice Specific Eligibility Continued

**Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)** has a practice lifespan of 5 years, according to NRCS. Therefore, enrollment is only possible for year one of this practice.

**Riparian Forest Buffer (391)** has a practice lifespan of 15 years, according to NRCS. Therefore, enrollment is only possible for year one of this practice.

**Nutrient Management (590)** has a practice lifespan of one year according to NRCS. Because 590 must be renewed annually, it is eligible for enrollment in the Alliance pilot regardless of previous adoption. Requirements for enrolling 590 in the Alliance pilot are outlined on the following pages.

**Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)** has a practice lifespan of 15 years, according to NRCS. Therefore, enrollment is only possible for year one of this practice.

**Pasture and Hay Planting (512)** has a practice lifespan of 5 years, according to NRCS. Therefore, enrollment is only possible for year one of this practice. One exception to this is adding another species in a logical planting sequence (e.g. warm season grass in the spring and planting legumes in the fall) or enhancing an established pasture through adding new species for diversity.

**Prescribed Grazing (528)** has a practice lifespan of one year according to NRCS. Because forage availability and livestock class and numbers must be evaluated and adjusted annually and continually adapted throughout the year, it is eligible for enrollment in the Alliance pilot regardless of previous adoption.

**Feed Management (592)** has a practice lifespan of one year according to NRCS. Because 592 must be adjusted and renewed annually with respect to feed quality and the nutritional needs of the livestock, it is eligible for enrollment in the Alliance pilot regardless of previous adoption.

# Practice Specific Eligibility Continued

## Nutrient Management (590) Standard Practices to Cost-Share

Minimum requirements (we will not pay cost-share to implement and must be done):

- 1) Use of a current soil test as recommended by state Land Grant University (LGU) – for initial planning, not more than 2 years old.
- 2) Continual/current soil testing – at frequency prescribed by the LGU.
- 3) Maintain soil pH as required by state LGU.
- 4) If organics/manure/biosolids are used – they must be tested according to LGU guidance.
- 5) Utilize the local NRCS risk assessment tool.
- 6) Utilize the 4-Rs, the right source, right rate, right time, and right place.
- 7) For soil test analyses, use laboratories successfully meeting the requirements and performance standards of the North American Proficiency Testing Program under the Soil Science Society of America and NRCS or use an alternative NRCS- or State-approved certification program that considers laboratory performance and proficiency to assure accuracy of soil test results.

Practices to cost-share per acre. Only one of these practices required to receive payment.

- 1) Reduce the potential for volatilization by applying sources subject to volatilization during cooler, higher humidity conditions or by placement that minimizes vulnerability to volatilization.
  - a. Inorganic and organic sources containing urea and ammonium.
  - b. Subsurface application
  - c. Irrigate after application with at least 0.5-inches per acre in less than 2 days if weather conditions are hotter than 80°F for a high and humidity is greater than 70%.
- 2) Use application methods, timing, technologies, or strategies to reduce the risk of nutrient movement or loss, such as—
  - a. Soil and plant tissue testing for N rate applications:
    - i. Small grains: Split nitrogen applications (3 per crop) with N rates based on fall soil nitrate tests (FSNT), tiller counts [Zadok's growth stage (GS) 25] and tissue tests (GS30).
    - ii. Corn: Pre-sidedress nitrate test (PSNT) to reduce or justify N applications in conjunction with yield goals.
    - iii. Cotton, tomato, potato: Petiole nitrate testing to adjust last split of N applications for optimal N rate.
  - b. Banded applications
    - i. Subsurface (knifing-in) on second split application for crop.
    - ii. Streamer jets reduce N contact with residue on small grains and pastures.
  - c. Enhanced efficiency fertilizers
    - i. Slow or controlled release fertilizers to match crop uptake patterns.
    - ii. Urease inhibitors applied at rates per LGU guidelines for optimal active ingredient ratios.
  - d. Sensor based technologies.
    - i. Chlorophyll meters or real-time sensors to adjust N rates across the landscape.
    - ii. On-farm adaptive N management based on on-farm research.
    - iii. Using CC-NCALC to calculate cover crop contribution and reduce inorganic/organic fertilizer applications.
    - iv. GreenSeeker, Crop Circle, and other NDVI type sensors to variably apply N rates across the landscape.



## Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Contacts

**East Otter Tail** - Darren Newville darren.newville@eot.mnswcd.org (218) 346-9105

**Fillmore** - Riley Buley Riley.Buley@fillmoreswcd.org (507) 887-0240

**Kandiyohi** - Margaret Johnson margaret.johnson2@mn.nacdnet.net (320) 235-3540 ext.3

**Redwood** - Brian Pfarr brian.pfarr@mn.nacdnet.net (507) 637-2427 ext. 3

**Renville** - Holly Hatlewick hollyh@renvilleswcd.org (320) 523-1559

**Root River** - David Walter goosey10@hotmail.com (507) 724-5261 ext 3

**Stevens** - Matt Solemsaas matt.solemsaas@stevensswcd.org (320) 589-4886 ext. 4

**Wadena** - Darren Newville darren.newville@eot.mnswcd.org (218) 632-4201