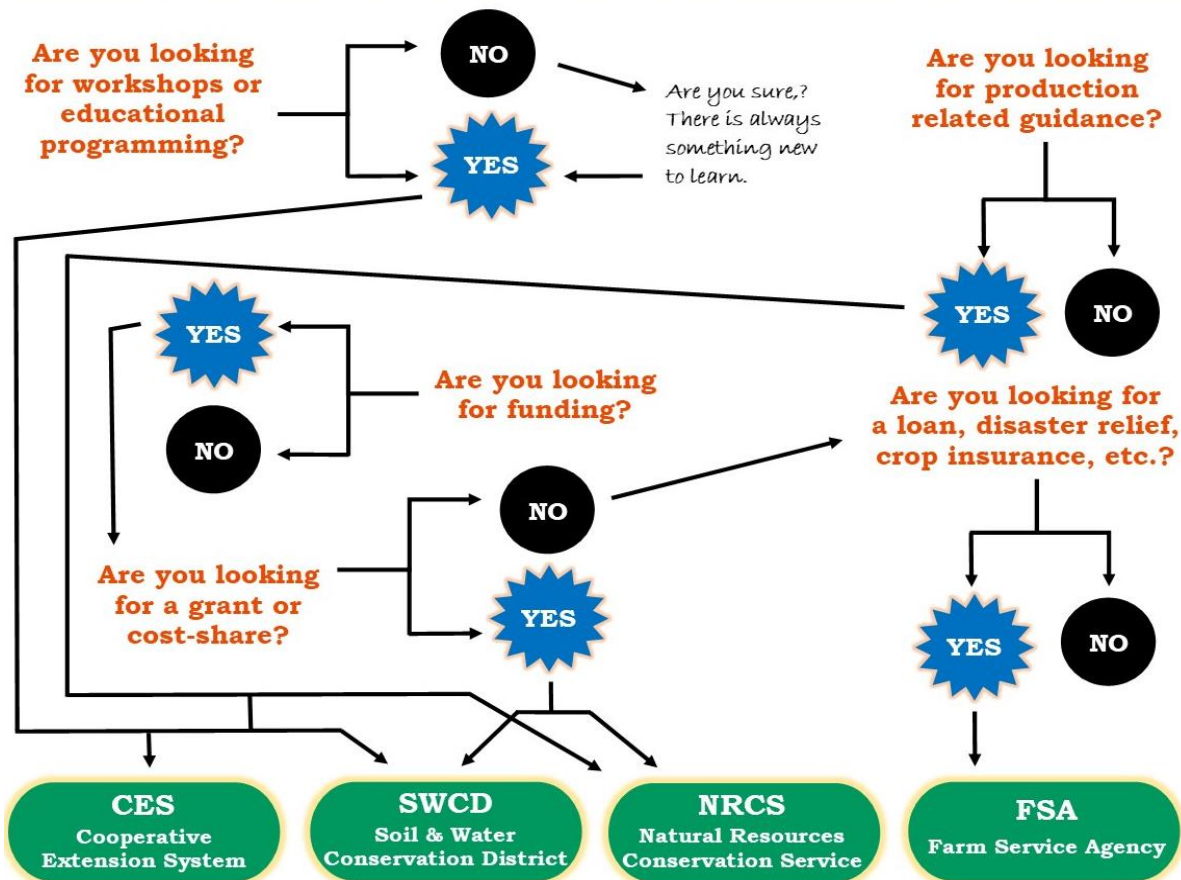


We know that navigating the federal farm programs and agencies can be confusing and overwhelming – an alphabet soup of acronyms! This guide seeks to clarify how four of the federal government’s main farming programs housed under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) can be of help to the average livestock farmer.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Cooperative Extension System (CES) are all federal programs that have state and local representation, to varying degrees. Each of these programs can help you on your farming journey but how they help can be different not only from state to state but also county to county within each state.



A Quick and Easy Guide to Choosing the Right Federal Farm Program For Your Needs



Picking the right program for your farm's needs.

Not sure where to start? Below you will find a brief explanation of what the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Cooperative Extension System (CES) can do for you. No matter where you live it is well worth the time to investigate your local program offices (often in the same building) to see what they have to offer.



Educational programming:

There is a lot of programming available through CES and SWCD, much of which is now online. If your state or local agency doesn't offer a wide selection, don't despair. Check out a neighboring state or county. Many programs are open to anyone regardless of location (e.g. [Cornell University](#) has a series of courses for small farms).

- [Cooperative Extension System](#) (CES)
- [Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) (SWCD)

On Farm Planning and Problem Solving:

From conservation planning, pasture or pond management to animal husbandry, you'll find someone with the necessary skills to help.

- [Cooperative Extension System](#) (CES)
- [Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) (SWCD)
- [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS)



What's the difference between NRCS and SWCD? *It's nuanced! NRCS administers the federal farm bill policies guiding resource conservation. Each state adopts the federal guidelines based on their district's needs then their SWCD sets priorities for their district. Both programs offer technical assistance and manage cost share programs that benefit resource conservation.*



Disaster Relief, Loans, Crop Insurance:

Have you been hit by a natural disaster (or pandemic)? Then FSA should be your first stop. FSA does more than administer relief funds, they offer loans, insurance and so much more. It is very useful to have an FSA number no matter your size as many federal relief programs designed for farmers require you to have one.

- [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA)

Grants and Cost Share Funds:

Grants and Cost Shares are available for a wide variety of projects from stream restorations to pond exclusions to high tunnels. Each district does things a little differently, but they all have federal funds to draw from, with many states and counties adding matching funds.

- [Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) (SWCD)
- [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS)
- ✓ Check out the [complete list of NRCS programs](#), including the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The Center for Rural Affairs has also produced several excellent [fact sheets](#) about implementing conservation practices.

