

Incentives and Support Programs to Promote Adoption of SPM in California

Purpose

Successfully transitioning to sustainable pest management (SPM) can require time, economic investments, and complex technical knowledge. Various federal and state programs, nonprofit organizations, and other resources exist to help California growers, land managers, and pest management practitioners make this transition.

This document provides a simple overview of that landscape, organized to help practitioners identify programs worth exploring further. It covers direct financial incentives, grants that fund on-farm demonstrations and research, tax credits, organizations that provide loans and application assistance, and additional training and educational resources. Programs differ in eligibility, application requirements, funding methods, and availability. This document is intended to help you find up to date information about these opportunities and support the transition to SPM.

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Direct-to-grower incentives programs

Federal programs

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [Environmental Quality Incentive Program \(EQIP\)](#)

- NRCS's flagship financial and technical assistance program for producers
- Reimbursement-based program; growers generally receive compensation when practices are completed and verified
- Program funds more than 200 practices including those related to IPM, soil health, irrigation, groundwater conservation, air quality, run-off, wildlife habitat, pollinator habitat, and more
- Eligible IPM activities include development of site-specific IPM plans (with land-grant university or other science-based standards), pest monitoring systems, risk assessments, habitat for beneficial insects, and environmental and pesticide resistance mitigations

USDA NRCS [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#)

- Annual payment program that rewards producers for maintaining and improving conservation practices – unlike EQIP, CSP recognizes existing practices and incentivizes further improvement
- Relevant enhancements include ecologically based pest management, cover crops, pollinator habitat, and reduced pesticide risk in surface and groundwater

USDA NRCS [Regenerative Pilot Program](#)

- New, outcomes-based program funded through EQIP and CSP
- Whole-farm holistic conservation planning, including pest management, is centerpiece of the program
- Bundled practices are integrated into a single application

State programs

CDFA [Healthy Soils Program \(HSP\)](#)

- Reimbursement-based program that supports implementation of practices that improve soil health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, many of which also support resilient agroecosystems and beneficial insects
- Eligible practices include cover crops, compost, hedgerow planting, mulching and reduced tillage

- Recently transitioned to a block grant model; CDFA awards intermediary organizations, who then solicit projects from individual producers

CDFA [Organic Transition Pilot Program](#)

- Supports farmers and ranchers preparing land for organic certification
- Structured as a block grant to eligible organizations, which then provide direct financial assistance and support to farmers and ranchers
- Provides technical assistance, application support, business planning, and language access services. Grower costs may be reimbursed or supported through advances depending on the awardee structure

CDFA [Pollinator Habitat Program](#)

- Provides financial assistance for development of pollinator habitat with floral resources and host plants
- Funds are available to eligible groups/organizations to collaborate with farmers/ranchers. Payments are reimbursed based upon successful completion (verification) of each project
- Hedgerow planting, cover crop, riparian herbaceous cover, conservation cover, critical area planting, tree/shrub establishment, and windbreak placement are all considered as acceptable practices

Nonprofit programs

Project Apis m. [Seeds for Bees](#)

- Provides free or low-cost cover crop seed mixtures to CA commercial orchard growers and commercial beekeepers
- Supports SPM through enhancing food resources and habitats for beneficial insects while also promoting healthy soils
- First year farmers/beekeepers can receive up to \$2,500 in seed mixes; applicants must plant at least six acres of cover crops in California

Zero Foodprint [Compost Connector](#)

- Rebate program for California growers that purchase compost from pre-approved composting facilities
- Promotes soil health and carbon sequestration through the distribution of compost to farms/ranches

Grant programs

Note: Growers may not be eligible to directly apply for all grant programs, but they may benefit by partnering with universities, local cooperative extension agents, nonprofits, or other eligible entities.

Federal programs

USDA NRCS [Conservation Innovation Grants \(CIG\)](#)

- Competitive grants within EQIP program that fund development and testing of innovative conservation approaches, typically through university, nonprofit, and grower partnerships
- Supports on-farm trials and pilot studies to implement and evaluate conservation practices
- Previous grants have funded biocontrol, landscape-level pest monitoring, and decision-support tools
- Growers do not play a role in the application process but are brought in later to host field trials

USDA [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\) Grants](#), Western Region

- Competitive grants supporting sustainable agriculture projects that incorporate both research and outreach
- Farmer/Rancher grants allow growers and technical advisors to apply directly to fund on-farm trials
- Past projects have evaluated a wide range of non-chemical or lower-risk pest and weed management practices and tools, including natural enemy release, organic pesticides, and cultural practices

State programs

CDFA [Biologically Integrated Farming Systems \(BIFS\) Grant Program](#)

- Funds on-farm demonstration projects of innovative, biologically integrated pest management programs that reduce chemical pesticide inputs
- Growers cannot apply directly but can partner with cooperative extension agents or nonprofits to develop a project
- Previous projects have provided financial and technical assistance to growers willing to implement BIFS practices and host a demonstration site

Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) [Sustainable Pest Management Grants](#)

- Competitive grant program supporting projects that advance SPM through IPM research, knowledge, outreach, tools, and implementation in agricultural, urban, and/or wildland settings
- Can fund projects that reduce impacts to public health or the environment from pesticide applications.
- Growers may apply as long as eligibility requirements are met; partnering with universities, nonprofits, or other relevant organizations is recommended

Loan access

Nonprofit programs

[California FarmLink](#)

- Nonprofit lender providing loans to small and mid-scale farmers with limited access to conventional financing
- Conservation bridge loan can be paired with reimbursement programs like EQIP and HSP
- Offers bilingual business education and technical assistance, helping growers navigate incentives program

Tax credits

Federal programs

Federal Research Credit

- Tax credit that may apply when growers, companies, or partner organizations conduct qualified research and development – not routine adoption of standard practices
- Could this support coordinated field trials, led by UCCE or other organizations, to systematically evaluate SPM programs or technologies? Relevant SPM examples include testing pest monitoring systems, biopesticides, application technologies, or other methods that involve technical uncertainty and systematic evaluation
- Consult with tax professionals about applicability

State programs

California Research Tax Credit

- California credit generally follows the federal research credit model, with California-specific rules and qualified in-state research requirements

- May apply to SPM-related research, tool development, or on-farm experimentation conducted in California
- Be sure to consult with tax professionals before attempting to claim this credit

Land conservation and easement tools

State programs

California Department of Conservation, Williamson Act Program

- Voluntary program administered by local governments designed to help farmers lower operating costs and preserve agricultural land
- Contract agreements restrict land use to agricultural production while providing landowners with reduced property tax assessments
- Contracts generally last 10 years, and heavy fees are assessed for early exit
- Indirectly supports SPM by preserving working lands and providing cost savings that can be used to invest in sustainability practices

Nonprofit programs

The Nature Conservancy Private Lands Conservation

- Conserves ecologically important working lands while supporting sustainable agriculture, biodiversity, climate resilience, and water resources
- Partners with landowners, communities, cooperatives, and businesses to form local conservation groups; uses land trusts, conservation easements, private reserves, and incentives
- Conservation easements are voluntary agreements to limit or prohibit certain uses or development in perpetuity
- SPM relevance through habitat protection, wildlife corridors, water quality protection, and approaches that support ecologist pest management

Risk management tools

- Question for committee: would it be useful or appropriate to include crop insurance programs in this document? If so, what opportunities exist for California growers?

Turf replacement programs

Many California cities and water districts offer rebates for replacing water-intensive turf grass with drought tolerant native landscaping. This is relevant to SPM because turf is a significant driver of pesticide use and runoff in urban areas. Replacing turf with diverse

native plantings can reduce reliance on herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides while supporting beneficial insects.

Rebate amounts and eligibility vary by region. Contact your local water agency or visit their website to find programs in your area.

Other resources

Webinars

USDA NRCS 595 – Pest Management Conservation Systems practice standards

- [Land Grant and Extension: Facilitating use of NRCS Conservation Programs to increase adoption of IPM](#)
- [How crop consultants can facilitate use of NRCS Conservation Programs to support grower use of IPM practices](#)
- [Increasing resource conservation through adoption of Integrated Pest Management 595 conservation practice systems](#)

Foundation for Food and Agriculture (FFAR)

- New Perspectives on Integrated Pest Management - <https://foundationfar.org/events/new-perspectives-on-integrated-pest-management/>
- Latest Advances & Challenges in Developing & Implementing IPM - <https://foundationfar.org/events/latest-advances-challenges-in-developing-implementing-ipm/>
- Can Ecosystem Service Benefits Be Assessed and Valued for IPM Practices? - <https://foundationfar.org/events/can-ecosystem-service-benefits-be-assessed-valuated-for-ipm-practices/>

Pest management technical assistance resources

- [California Certified Organic Farmers](#)
- [Community Alliance with Family Farmers \(CAFF\)](#)
- [IPM Institute of North America](#)
- [National Center for Appropriate Technology, Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas \(NCAT/ATTRA\)](#)
- [NRCS certified technical service providers](#)
- [Pollinator Partnership](#)

- [Resource Conservation Districts \(RCDs\)](#)
- [UC Cooperative Extension](#)
- [UC IPM](#)
- [UC Master Gardeners](#)
- [UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program \(SAREP\)](#)
- [Wild Farm Alliance](#)