



Audubon Arkansas's Native Agriculture to InVigorate Ecosystems (NATIVE) Project.

Fact Sheet

Project Goals

- Help farmers establish 2-9 acre plots of locally sourced native warm season grasses and pollinator-friendly forbs grown in monoculture plots for the production and sale of seeds needed for wildlife conservation.
- Assist producers with a farm conservation plan if needed, and increasing participation in USDA Farm Bill programs.

Project Area

- Grand Prairie Region: Arkansas, Jefferson, Lonoke, Prairie, and White Counties.
- Ozark Prairie Region: Benton, Boone, and Washington Counties.
- River Valley Prairie Region: Franklin and Johnson Counties.
- Blackland Prairie Region: Clark, Hempstead, Howard, and Miller Counties.

Benefits of Native Plants

- Cash-crop – Diversify income with a crop that is in high demand by conservation groups working to restore Arkansas's prairies and preserve our natural heritage.
- Perennial – Plant once then reap seeds year-after-year, as early as two years after sowing.
- Economical – Hardy once established, requiring less labor, equipment-use, water, and soil amendments than traditional annual row-crops.
- Environmentally sustainable – able to withstand drought and other severe weather events made worse by climate change.
- On-farm Conservation – Hold the soil, filter and slow water, provide wildlife habitat (deer, rabbits, quail, songbirds, bees, Monarchs), and sequester carbon. Production plots double as buffers and filter strips for traditional row-crops.

Producers Receive

- One-on-one consultations and prescriptions for native plant establishment.
- Technical assistance for plot preparation.
- Soil testing to track organic material in soil.
- \$350 per acre to offset initial input costs.
- Starter grass seeds and forb plugs.
- Plastic mulch and drip irrigation for forb plots, including installation.

- Plug planting using specialized equipment.
- Technical assistance for plot maintenance, including weed management.
- Technical assistance with harvesting, plus specialized equipment where applicable and available.
- Access to national markets, plus seed cleaning, testing, and long-term storage services provided by Audubon's partner Roundstone Native Seed, LLC, in Kentucky.

Producers Contribute

- Plot preparation, such as herbiciding and disking.
- Continued plot maintenance, such as mowing between rows and burning/haying dead vegetation after seed harvest.
- Seed crop harvesting and storage until seeds can be shipped to Roundstone.
- Track per-acre expenses for both traditional and native row-crops to help us compare input costs.
- Input on your farm conservation plan and working with NRCS to install practices as determined by your plan.
- Farm access to Audubon and project partners for monitoring.

Producer Qualifications

To participate in Audubon's NATIVE Project, the acreage enrolled must be **EQIP eligible**. In addition, **you must be EQIP eligible AND be at least one** of these types of producers: Socially Disadvantaged; Beginning; Limited Resource; or Veteran Farmer or Rancher.

Definitions:

- A. EQIP eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands.
- B. EQIP eligible applicants must:
- Be an agricultural producer (person, legal entity, or joint operation who has an interest in the agricultural operation, or who is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management).
 - Control or own eligible land.
 - Comply with adjusted gross income (AGI) for less than \$900,000.
 - Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements.
 - Develop an NRCS EQIP plan of operations that addresses at least one natural resource concern.
- C. Beginning Farmer or Rancher:
- A person or entity who has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of an entity.

- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

D. Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher

- A group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group, without regard to their individual qualities. These groups consist of the following: American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics.

E. Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher

- A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$173,900 (for FY2017) in each of the previous two years.
AND
- A person with a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.

F. Veteran Farmer or Rancher

- A person who served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.
AND
- Meets the definition of a Beginning farmer or rancher: a) not have operated a farm or ranch; or b) not have operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 consecutive years.

This material is based upon work supported by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Office of Advocacy and Outreach, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award numbers 69-3A75-17-22 and 59-2501-16-025, respectively. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

