

On Farms and Ranches, Every Day is Earth Day

At USDA, we celebrate Earth Day 2019 by offering big thank-you's to farmers and ranchers here in Kansas for all they do. Every day we see their efforts to conserve natural resources while producing food, fiber and fuel for people in their communities and around the world. They are doing what needs to be done to make sure we all enjoy the benefits of clean and plentiful water and healthy soils, ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

This year's Earth Day theme, "[Protect Our Species](#)," highlights the responsibility we share in supporting wildlife. Two-thirds of the land in the continental United States is privately owned, and the decisions that farmers and ranchers make for their land can impact wildlife.

Working lands are what Kansas is made of. These lands work to support healthy families by providing abundant food, healthy soils, clean water and abundant wildlife. Kansas farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are keenly aware of the value of crop production, prairie ecosystems, and forests and have made great strides to protect their natural resource in harmony with day-to-day operations. Earth Day provides an opportunity to recognize the conservationists we have in our backyards, our neighborhoods, and up and down our beautiful landscape.

We at USDA believe people and wildlife can thrive together. USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service assist agricultural producers with adopting conservation practices that benefit not only farms, ranches and forest lands but wildlife species. In Kansas as well as across the nation, producers and landowners have played and continue to play important roles in helping wildlife species flourish, rebound or recover.

Kansas landowners have been instrumental in preserving the largest remaining population of [Lesser Prairie Chicken](#) within their original five state native range of the species. Through Farm Service Agency, Kansas landowners enrolled over 1.1 million acres of native grass cover into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the heart of the Lesser Prairie Chicken native range, thus helping to remove the species from the endangered listing. Native covers under the CRP program offers Lesser Prairie Chicken ideal habitat for brood and nesting habitat especially when located adjacent to native rangeland and cropland.

NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program through a Regional Conservation Partnership Program with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provides a great opportunity for ranchers and farmers to develop and improve working lands for Monarch butterflies. Monarch butterfly migration is under way and the first monarch was spotted in Kansas on April 7, according to [Journey North](#). If you see a monarch now and its color seems a little pale or faded, there is a good chance it has flown in from Mexico. Monarch butterflies are a species with a declining population that need milkweeds to lay their eggs and wildflowers to feed on their nectar. Kansas rangelands,

roadsides, and odd areas are typical places to find milkweeds. To learn more about managing your land for monarchs or pollinators, contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.

USDA offers a wide array of [Farm Bill programs](#) to help Kansas producers make wildlife-friendly improvements to croplands, grazing lands and working forests, as well as benefit agricultural operations. Programs include the Conservation Reserve Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. USDA also offers free conservation advice as well and financial assistance to help implement conservation practices.

If you farm or ranch, we encourage you to reach out to your local FSA and NRCS representatives at your nearest [USDA service center](#) to see if there is a program right for your operation. If you're not a farmer or rancher, on this Earth Day please thank one for the work he or she does to put food on our tables and to conserve our natural resources and support our nation's wildlife.