# On-Farm Energy Assessment Opportunities Offered Through the Natural Resources Conservation Service

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When you think of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) do you think of energy efficiency opportunities? In my experience, for a lot of producers across Indiana this topic isn’t at the top of their mind of when they come to the NRCS for financial and technical assistance.

Energy demands on a farming operation have always been a concern with producers and NRCS has multiple ways it can help. From the electricity it takes to run the motors and pumps, to the fuel needed to run tractors and heat the farmstead, energy plays a vital part in all operations. Reducing these energy demands is essential in today’s economic climate. NRCS offers opportunities to help producers not only conserve energy, but reduce their overall energy demands through assistance in identifying energy efficient component upgrades.

The first step in reducing energy demands on a farming operation is to identity the problems and opportunities. NRCS has a suite of energy conservation tools available to producers identify ways to reduce energy. These tools can be found at <https://energytools.sc.egov.usda.gov/>. They have been developed for all the major energy needs of farming enterprises.

The animal housing energy tool helps identify energy savings associated with lighting, ventilation and heating/cooling activities. The irrigation energy tool helps identify energy savings associated with pumping water. The nitrogen/tillage energy tool helps to identify energy savings associated with nitrogen use and tillage systems. Additional tools address issues related to livestock, grain drying, greenhouses, maple syrup production and more.

The energy conservation tools do a great job of giving producers a general idea of the areas of energy use to investigate. To take it a step further, an on-farm energy audit is a more detailed look at the current energy demands. Audits assist in prioritizing recommended energy efficient improvements along with identifying management changes to help conserve energy.

Eligible producers can apply for financial assistance from NRCS through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program’s National On-Farm Energy Initiative to help offset the cost of completing an on-farm energy audit. It is the responsibility of the producer to then hire an energy consultant to develop an energy audit, also known at NRCS as the Agricultural Energy Assessment Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity (CEMA228).

The CEMA228 will meet the “Type 2 Audit” criteria established in the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers S612 Performing On-farm Energy Audits standard. An on-site visit will be conducted by the consultant to inventory, evaluate and obtain information about the agricultural operation’s current energy management goals and objectives. An energy audit report will be developed outlining the current equipment and energy use along with the recommended energy improvement measures and component upgrades.

Financial assistance for an on-farm energy audit may also be available through your local energy cooperative or Rural Electric Membership Corporation (REMC). For example, Southeastern Indiana REMC and Hoosier Energy were recently awarded a USDA – Rural Development grant to offer energy audits to farms and rural businesses. Contact your local energy provider to see what opportunities they may offer.

For more information related to the available on-farm energy opportunities, contact your local NRCS Service Center office. To find your local service center, visit Farmers.gov/service-locator.