



### Conservation Reserve Program

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#### OVERVIEW

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

In its 30th year, CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 and was reauthorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill). The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The program is implemented by FSA on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation.

#### BENEFITS

CRP protects tens of millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds and streams. The vegetative covers also make CRP a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

Since it was established on Dec. 23, 1985, CRP has:

- Prevented more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks;
- Reduced nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95 and 85 percent respectively;

- Sequestered an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases, equal to taking 9 million cars off the road.

Since 1996, CRP has created nearly 2.7 million acres of restored wetlands.

As of 2015, CRP is protecting more than 170,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, enough to go around the world 7 times.

#### ADMINISTRATION

FSA administers CRP while technical support functions are provided by:

- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA);
- State forestry agencies;
- Local soil and water conservation districts and;
- Other non-federal providers of technical assistance.

#### GENERAL ENROLLMENT AUTHORITY

Under general enrollment authority, producers can offer land for CRP general enrollment only during announced enrollment periods. There is a general enrollment period scheduled to begin Dec. 1, 2015, through Feb. 26, 2016.

#### CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT AUTHORITY

Under CRP continuous enrollment authority, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices may be enrolled in CRP at any time. Certain eligibility requirements still apply, but offers are not subject to competitive bidding. Further information on CRP continuous enrollments is available in the FSA fact sheet "**Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Enrollments.**"

**GRASSLANDS ENROLLMENTS**

CRP Grasslands helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. Further information on CRP Grassland enrollments is available in the FSA fact sheet “**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP – Grasslands)**.”

For information on enrolling land in CRP contact a local FSA office. To find a local office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

**RANKING LAND OFFERS DURING GENERAL ENROLLMENT PERIODS**

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking. FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acres;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching;
- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion and;
- Cost.

**ELIGIBLE PRODUCERS**

A producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the CRP general enrollment period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner’s death;

- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with state law or;
- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

**ELIGIBLE LAND**

Land must be cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity for four of six crop years from 2008 to 2013, and that is physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. Land also must meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a weighted average erosion index of eight or higher;
- Be enrolled in a CRP contract that expires Sept. 30 or;
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

**PAYMENTS**

FSA provides CRP participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentive payments and cost-share assistance:

- **Rental Payments**  
In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides annual rental payments to participants. FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dry-land cash rent using data provided by the National Agricultural Statistics Service or cash-rent equivalent as guidelines. The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or offer a lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

- **Cost-Share Assistance**

FSA provides cost-share assistance to participants who establish approved cover on eligible cropland. The cost-share assistance can be an amount not more than 50 percent of the participants' costs in establishing approved practices.

**OTHER INCENTIVES**

FSA may offer additional financial incentives of up to 20 percent of the annual payment for certain continuous enrollment practices.

**MORE INFORMATION**

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions may apply. For details, contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn more about FSA conservation programs, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation).

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