

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Ohio - Upper Big Walnut Creek

Overview

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the state of Ohio have launched a \$13.2 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to protect the Hoover Reservoir, the primary drinking water source for Columbus, Ohio's 575,000 residents.

CREP is a federal and state natural resource conservation program targeted to address significant agricultural related environmental problems. Through CREP, program participants receive financial incentives to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contracts of 14 to 15 years. Participants remove cropland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees, and other vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

Benefits

The Ohio Upper Big Walnut Creek (UBWC) CREP will help farmers improve the water quality of streams near the Hoover Reservoir by reducing field runoff of pollutants. Currently, much of the existing watershed has no vegetative buffers. Through CREP, Ohio farmers will be able to buffer approximately 450 miles of watercourses. This will help lower water temperatures, increase dissolved oxygen, and provide additional wildlife habitat.

Eligible Areas

Producers can offer eligible cropland and marginal pastureland that drain from the Upper Big Walnut Creek watershed into the Hoover Reservoir above the dam. This

includes Delaware, Franklin, Knox, Licking, and Morrow Counties. Contact your local USDA Service Center for specific information concerning your eligibility for CREP.

Goals

The goals of the Ohio UBWC CREP are to:

- Improve water quality for 575,000 Columbus residents by installing 3,500 acres of filter strips, riparian buffers, hardwood trees, wetlands, and wildlife habitat practices.
- Reduce by 30 percent sediment, nutrients, and agricultural chemical runoff in the Hoover Reservoir.
- Increase terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

Throughout the project, Ohio and the city of Columbus will conduct water quality monitoring to evaluate and record progress in achieving these goals.

Approved Conservation Practices

To better serve program goals, specific CRP conservation practices have been identified for inclusion in the program. The practices and associated acreage goals are:

- CP3A - Hardwood Tree Planting, 200 acres
- CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat, 100 acres
- CP21 - Grassed Filter Strips, 2,300 acres
- CP22 - Riparian Forest Buffers, 700 acres
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration, 200 acres

Signup and Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment will be on a continuous basis. Cropland must have been cropped 4 out of the past 6 years (2002-2007) and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees. In addition, producers must generally have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to enrollment. Persons who have an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

CREP Payments

Ohio UBWC CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment - A one-time payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in a riparian forest buffer or grass filter strip practice. This payment is made soon after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment - A one-time payment equal to about 40 percent of the eligible cost for establishing the riparian buffer or filter strip. This payment is in addition to up to 50 percent cost share assistance that USDA will provide for installing the selected practices.
- Annual Rental Payment for the Life of the Contract - An incentive of 200 percent of the calculated annual soil rental rate for installing riparian buffers, restoring wetlands, and

planting hardwood trees. An incentive of 175 percent of the calculated annual soil rental rate for installing grass filter strips and wildlife habitat is also available.

- Cost Share Assistance of up to 50 percent for the installation of the eligible conservation practices on land that is retired.

In addition, Ohio will offer the following incentive payments:

- A one-time incentive payment, through the local Soil and Water Conservation District and the city of Columbus, of \$60 per acre for land devoted to filter strips and wildlife habitat for practices that are enrolled at greater than an average of 66 feet in width.
- A one-time incentive payment, through the local Soil and Water Conservation District and the city of Columbus, of \$60 per acre for land devoted to wetland restoration and for riparian buffers and hardwood tree plantings that are enrolled at greater than an average of 66 feet in width.
- A direct payment, through the city of Columbus, to producers that sign up for a voluntary perpetual easement option. An appraisal process will determine easement payments and all costs associated with easement acquisition.
- A one-time incentive payment, through the Ohio Division of Wildlife, of up to \$40 per acre for installing and seeding 100 percent warm season grasses.
- A one-time incentive payment, through the Division of Wildlife and Ducks Unlimited, of up to \$500 for wetland restoration in exchange for a 20- or 30-year contract.

Program Cost

Based on the initial implementation of the Ohio UBWC CREP, which projects an enrollment of 3,500 acres, the expected combined financial federal and state obligation will be approximately \$13.2 million. Of that amount, \$8.4 million will come from USDA and \$4.8 million from the state and local sources.

This does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers. USDA's share of the total program costs is approximately 64 percent and Ohio's share is approximately 36 percent.

Enrollment in Other Programs

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll eligible land in the regular general CRP or continuous signup CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous signup. The CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are at a higher effective rate.

Haying and Grazing

Haying and grazing are not permitted during the CRP contract period unless USDA permits it for emergency purposes under normal CRP rules.

For More Information

Contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or Natural Resources Conservation Service office within your local USDA Service Center; your local Soil and Water Conservation District office; or the Ohio Department of Natural Resources/Division of Soil and Water Conservation, (614) 265-6610, (<http://www.dnr.state.oh.us>). Additional information is also available on FSA's web site: www.fsa.usda.gov

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all of part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Stop 9410, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll-free at (866) 632-9992 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (English Federal-relay) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.