

# Special CRP Issue

## General CRP Sign-up

May 20—June 14th

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Whether you have CRP acres which are expiring in September or cropland which includes environmentally sensitive lands, the opportunity to sign-up for a new CRP contract is here. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is conducting a four-week Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general signup that began May 20th and will end on June 14th.

CRP has a 27-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States. The CRP has created millions of acres of upland and wetland habitat for quail, pheasants, ducks, deer, turkeys and a wide array of nongame wildlife by offering payments to farmers for taking highly erodible farmland out of production.

Currently, about 27 million acres are enrolled in CRP across the country; and contracts on an estimated 3.3 million acres, including 184,000 acres in Missouri, will expire on September 30, 2013.

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). USDA's Farm Service Agency (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 acreage;
- 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

Over the past 27 years, farmers, ranchers, conservationists, hunters, fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts have made CRP the largest and one of the most important in USDA's conservation portfolio. CRP continues to make major contributions to national efforts to clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, and prevent soil erosion by protecting the most sensitive areas including those prone to flash flooding and runoff. At the same time, CRP has helped increase populations of pheasants, quail, ducks, and rare species, like the sage grouse, the lesser prairie chicken, and others. Highlights of CRP include:

- CRP has restored more than two million acres of wetlands and two million acres of riparian buffers;
- Each year, CRP keeps more than 600 million pounds of nitrogen and more than 100 million pounds of phosphorous from flowing into our nation's streams, rivers, and lakes.
- CRP provides \$1.8 billion annually to landowners—dollars that make their way into local economies, supporting small businesses and creating jobs; and
- CRP is the largest private lands carbon sequestration program in the country. By placing vulnerable cropland into conservation, CRP sequesters carbon in plants and soil, and reduces both fuel and fertilizer usage. In 2012, CRP resulted in carbon sequestration equal to taking almost 9 million cars off the road.

The information in this newsletter may give you some ideas on how to apply CRP on your farm to increase profits, filter runoff into streams, restore wildlife habitat or protect the most erodible portions of your farm.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, visit a local FSA service center or [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

# WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR EXPIRING CRP ACRES?

CRP signup is upon us and it's decision time! With current grain prices, many of you may be contemplating whether or not to re-enroll your CRP acres. The following options are presented below to help you make an educated decision on the future of your CRP.



## Option One: Re-enroll

Consider re-enrolling your CRP contract. Don't worry if your current CRP soil rental rate payment is too low. There's a good chance the rental rate has improved since the last time you signed the CRP contract. Over the last five years FSA has adjusted CRP soil rental rates. Check with your local USDA Service Center to see what the new soil rental rates are. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Consider converting your CRP field to a wildlife-friendly mix. Back in the 1990's, most warm-season CRP fields were planted to a mix of "giant" native grasses and a pinch of wildflowers. Back then, we thought more was better; so

many grass seeding rates were around 8 to 12 pounds per acre. We've learned a lot over the last 10 to 15 years about establishing native grasses! Research has shown we can have good habitat and reduce soil erosion with much lower seeding rates (around 3 to 5 pounds of grass along with 3 pounds of native wildflowers per acre). Better seeding mixes are good for the land-owner and good for wildlife.

Instead of re-enrolling the current grass cover – whether it is warm-season or cool-season, consider replanting the field to a quail-friendly mix of little bluestem, wildflowers and legumes. Old CRP fields will need 2 to 3 herbicide applications to effectively remove the existing cover. Don't skimp on herbicide either. You'll pay for it in the long run with re-invading fescue or brome. During the current CRP sign up consult with your local wildlife biologist or Private Land Conservationist for recommended seeding mixes and conversion techniques. Converting to a quail-friendly mix is also likely to improve your overall CRP score.

Consider converting 10% of your existing CRP into pollinator habitat blocks. Pollinators like honeybees and native insects are experiencing significant population declines due to loss of habitat, loss of floral diversity, invasive plants, disease and parasites. Both honey bees and native bees are important to agriculture:

- The value of honeybee pollination to U. S. agriculture is estimated at \$18.9 billion per year.
- 75% of the flowering plants in the world rely on pollinators for reproduction.
- 35% of the crop production in the world is dependent upon pollinators.

Pollinator plots are great for butterflies, bees, and numerous wildlife species. Establish these plots in block or long narrow bands adjacent to shrubby cover. These plots will provide outstanding deer browse, plus great bugging areas for grassland birds throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Providing pollinator habitat will also improve your overall CRP score.

**IT NOW COSTS LESS TO PLANT  
WILDLIFE FRIENDLY WARM-  
SEASON GRASS CRP PRACTICES!**

**FSA no longer requires fertilizer to  
be included on warm-season grass  
plantings**

## **Option Two: Farm the Best and Buffer the Rest**

Landowners converting their expiring CRP fields into soybean and corn fields or pasture should consider leaving field borders along the field edges and wide buffers next to streams and ponds. Landowners can enroll these sensitive areas into popular continuous CRP practices such as CP21 Filter Strip, CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer, CP33 Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds, and CP38 State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE). Landowners will still receive an annual soil rental payment and incentives for enrolling the margins of their fields into the Continuous CRP. In some cases the payment is higher because of sign up incentives. If necessary, they can even receive up to 90% cost share for establishing the proper vegetation.

Maintaining buffers around the edges of crop fields, not only provides great habitat for quail and other grassland birds, but also takes marginally productive ground out of production. With high input costs and low yields it makes sense to keep field edges and buffers in CRP. In 2008, when price of corn was just over \$4, the University of Missouri Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute found that corn prices need to be over \$6 for ten years in order to out-perform profit gains from CP33. Since that study, CRP rental rates have been raised several times and many cropfield inputs have increased. Remember to Farm the Best, Buffer the Rest!



## **Option Three: Production with Wildlife in Mind**



Some expired CRP fields may remain in grass for hay or pasture. Landowners can still take advantage of Continuous CRP practices if they plan on haying or grazing the field; however livestock will need to be excluded from the CRP buffer.

If you plan to return your CRP field to corn or beans, consider only farming the ridge-tops or flattest portions of the field. Keep the steeper slopes in CRP. These steep slopes were put in CRP for a reason and breaking them out of CRP may cause erosion problems. Plus, a mix of CRP and row-crop equals outstanding habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

### **Increased Sign-up Incentive Payments (SIPs)**

Last Spring USDA announced the opportunity for producers to enroll 1 million acres of land in new Continuous CRP Initiatives to preserve grasslands, wetlands, and wildlife. These continuous practices will include annual rental payments, cost share for establishment and management, and possible signup incentives.

\*Increase in Sign-up Incentive Payments (SIPs) to \$150/acre for some practices

\*Additional SAFE (State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement) acres to focus on creating bobwhite quail and prairie chicken habitat.

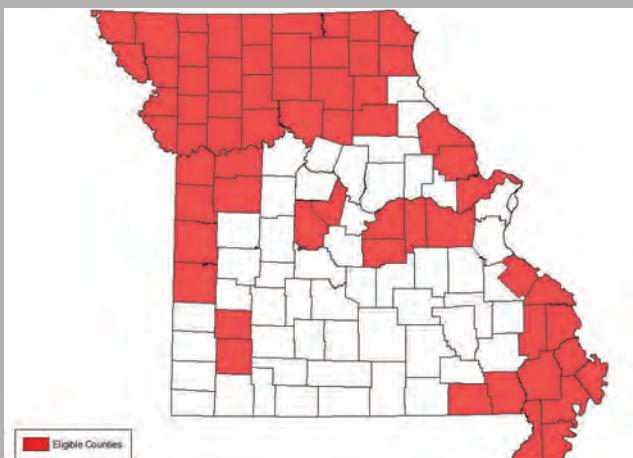
\*Additional CP33 (Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds) acres – Plant unproductive cropland edges into wildlife-friendly grasses and wildflowers.

## MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION OFFERS FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR NEW AND EXISTING CRP LANDS

In the past two years alone, Missouri has lost over 200,000 acres of CRP to contract expirations and land use conversions. An additional 184,000 acres are scheduled to expire this year. In response to the continued loss of CRP acres and the important wildlife habitat it provides in Missouri, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is offering financial incentives for enrolling new Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) acres and to assist existing CRP contract holders with implementing Mid-Contract Management activities in 62 counties across Missouri.

MDC will provide an additional \$100 - \$150 per acre incentive to enroll new CP33 – Habitat Buffers for Up-land Birds, CP38 – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), CP42 – Pollinator Habitat, or CP23 – Wetland Restoration acres. The incentive for CP23 acres is only eligible in Lincoln, Pike, and St. Charles counties. The MDC incentive is in **addition to** the \$100 - \$150 per acre Sign-up Incentive Payments already provided by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for new enrollments. All CRP eligibility rules, such as the requirement for offered acres to have been cropped four out of 6 years during 2002 –2007, must be met in order to qualify for the MDC CRP Incentive. Re-enrollments from a different general or continuous CRP practice into a CP33, CP38, CP42, or CP23 practice will be eligible to receive the MDC incentive payment, but not the FSA Sign-up Incentive payment.

MDC will also provide an additional \$18 - \$60 per acre for enhancing Mid-Contract Management activities such as prescribed burning, disking, herbicide application and legume or native forb interseeding on existing cool-season grass and warm-season grass CRP acres. This MDC incentive will be in addition to the cost-share assistance provided by FSA for completion of required Mid-Contract Management activities. MDC incentives ranging from \$100 - \$200 are also available for installation or enhancement of shrubby cover within or adjacent to CRP land.



The MDC CRP Incentive is available in the following counties: Adair, Andrew, Atchison, Bates, Bollinger, Buchanan, Butler, Caldwell, Cape Girardeau, Cass, Carroll, Chariton, Clark, Clay, Clinton, Dade, Daviess, DeKalb, Dunklin, Franklin, Gasconade, Gentry, Grundy, Harrison, Holt, Knox, Jackson, Johnson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Lewis, Lincoln, Linn, Livingston, Macon, Maries, Mercer, Mississippi, Monroe, Moniteau, Morgan, New Madrid, Osage, Nodaway, Pemiscot, Perry, Pike, Platte, Putnam, Randolph, Ray, Ripley, St. Charles, St. Genevieve, Schuyler, Scotland, Scott, Shelby, Stoddard, Sullivan, Vernon, Warren, and Worth.

Contact your local MDC Private Land Conservationist or your Soil and Water Conservation District County Clerk to enroll in the MDC CRP Incentive program. MDC staff can help farmers and other eligible landowners determine program eligibility, options, and seeding mixes to help sustain healthy forests, fish and wildlife. Visit [www.mdc.mo.gov](http://www.mdc.mo.gov) to find your local MDC Private Land Conservationists under "Who's My Local Contact."

# Pollinator Habitat

Pollinators like honeybees and native insects are experiencing significant population declines due to loss of habitat, loss of floral diversity, invasive plants, disease and parasites. Both honey bees and native bees are important to agriculture:

- The value of honeybee pollination to U. S. agriculture is estimated at \$18.9 billion per year
- 75% of the flowering plants in the world rely on pollinators for reproduction
- 35% of the crop production in the world is dependent upon pollinators

Establishing pollinator habitat to attract honeybees and native insects is now an option in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Consider planting 10% of your CRP acres into pollinator habitat blocks. Pollinator habitat is great for butterflies, bees, and numerous wildlife species. Establish these plots in long linear strips throughout your CRP. These plots will provide great bugging areas for grassland birds throughout the spring, summer, and fall.



## Ask FSA about practice CP42 - Pollinator Habitat!

- Increase your CRP score
- Improve wildlife habitat
- Benefit agriculture production



The planting will be a diverse mix of wildflowers that provide a nectar and pollen source throughout the growing season. In addition to benefiting pollinators, these mixtures will provide winter and nesting cover and food for a variety of grassland wildlife.

Contact your local Farm Service Agency to learn more about CP42 pollinator habitat and CRP.





Photo by Tom Schultz with the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management (NREM) at Iowa State University

# Buffers

The Conservation Reserve Program

## A BETTER WAY!

provides excellent financial incentives to install **CP-21** grass buffers on crop land, **CP-22** forested buffers on crop land and pasture, **CP-29** pasture wildlife buffers or **CP-30** pasture wetland buffers.

### Benefits:

- Filter sediment from surface runoff
- Filter excess nitrogen and phosphorus
- Stabilize stream banks and curb erosion
- Enhance aquatic and wildlife habitat

- FSA offers an annual rental payment plus an additional 20%.
- \$100/ac sign-up bonus.
- Up to 90% cost share.
- Cost share for fence and/or watering systems if the creek or pond is the watering source.

**Contact your local Farm Service Agency today!**



# It Pays to ESTABLISH QUAIL HABITAT!

## *Reap the rewards*

**Every year seed, fertilizer and herbicide costs go up. Are field edges paying you back?**

Probably not. The large ear of corn was collected from the side of a field with a native warm-season grass crop buffer. The smaller one came from a side next to a wooded fenceline. Yields on the buffered side were estimated at 168 bushels per acre; those on the nonbuffered side ran 45 bushels per acre.



Crops planted right next to the treeline are usually stunted.



CP33 pays farmers to let these strips grow into natural cover.

*CRP practice CP33 pays you to take marginal edges out of production.*

**That's good for quail and your bottom line.**

- CP33 provides cost-share money to establish native vegetation buffers.
- Compared to traditional field borders, CP33 can reduce corn borer infestation by 15 percent.
- Studies show CP33 can increase returns from \$30 to \$65 per buffer acre per year on most farms.



*For details, call your local Farm Service Agency office and ask about CP33.*



# Implement Mid-Contract Management Practices - Keep Your Conservation Reserve Program Acres Open and Wildlife Friendly!



**Use Mid-Contract management practices to maintain wildlife benefits through the life of your CRP contract.**

Mid-Contract Management Practices Include:

- Prescribed Burning
- Strip Disking
- Chemical Application
- Wildflower/Legume Interseeding in conjunction with a practice above



**It doesn't matter if your CRP grasses are brome, fescue, or a diverse native warm-season mix, when left unmanaged CRP fields become unsuitable for most wildlife species.**

**Periodically disturb your CRP acres:**

- Maintain your best habitat conditions by applying a prescribed burn.
- The best timing for burning native warm-season grasses or disk any grass cover is late summer/fall.
- The best timing for burning fescue and brome is late April.
- Combine practices for best results, such as burning then strip disking immediately after.



CRP field burned in September of the previous year - Note abundant wildflowers and reduced grass dominance.

**Contact your local Farm Service Agency to find out current cost-share rates and management practice timeframes.**



# Attention Farmers and Participants in CSP!



**Want to benefit wildlife and continue to make money on your farm?**

***Enroll today!***

**CP38 SAFE Delta Stewardship Program** pays to take or keep marginal acreage out of production.

***That's good for upland wildlife and your bottom line.***

- The Farm Service Agency (FSA) will offer participants an annual payment based on the soil rental rates for the county.
- Cost-share money is available to purchase and install components for the program.
- There is a one-time sign-up incentive payment of \$100 per acre.
- The Missouri Department of Conservation may offer an additional one-time incentive payment of \$150 per acre.
- For details on how to enroll, stop by your local FSA office today!



United States Department of Agriculture  
Farm Service Agency

