

INTRODUCTION

This publication provides detailed county-based data for the Conservation Reserve Program's (CRP) signup 18. As background, a map describes the location of 29.8 million acres that was enrolled in CRP in October 1998. Subsequent maps describe the location of the acreage offered for signup 18 and its environmental score before cost is considered.

Next, another map provides the location of signup 18's acceptable acreage and the final map identifies the location of acreage in CRP as of October 1999. These maps are followed by exhaustive State-by-State financial, programmatic, and environmental characteristics. Then, much of the same information is provided on a county basis.

The CRP is the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) largest conservation and environmental program and is authorized by Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. The purpose of the CRP is to cost-effectively assist farm owners and operators in conserving and improving soil, water, air, and wildlife resources by converting highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive land to a long-term resource-conserving cover.

CRP participants enroll contracts for periods from 10 to 15 years in exchange for market-based annual rental payments and cost-share and technical assistance for installing approved conservation practices.

The USDA uses a combination of locally- and Nationally-based data validations to ensure the greatest level of data accuracy and consistency. Extensive analysis of the environmental benefits and the rental costs are conducted using the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). An EBI has been used to prioritize and rank CRP offers since the tenth signup in 1991.

When an offer is made, USDA employees collect environmental and other data. Each offer is assigned a point score in consultation with the person making the offer based on the relative environmental benefits of that offer. After the end of the signup period, offers are ranked in comparison to all other offers nationally and selections are made from that ranking.

Signup 18 was conducted during a 7-week period from October 26, 1998, through December 11, 1998.