

NEWS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of Communications News Room 460-A
Washington, DC 20250-1300
Internet: News@usda.gov Phone: 202-720-9035
World Wide Web Home Page: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Jim Petterson (202) 720-4623
jpetterson@usda.gov
Marlyn Aycock (202) 720-5237
maycock@usda.gov

USDA SETS NEXT CRP SIGN-UP FOR OCTOBER-NOVEMBER

WASHINGTON, September 4, 1997--Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman today announced that the next Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general sign-up will be held during a 5-week period from October 14 through November 14 in USDA Service Centers across the nation.

"This is an opportunity for landowners to participate in a cost-effective, voluntary program to improve their land, water and wildlife resources," Glickman said. "Many landowners have not participated in CRP in the past. Now they will have another chance to do so.

"Applicants should be aware that CRP is a highly competitive program and that the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) system was changed for this sign up to address concerns arising from the 15th sign up and to better protect the Nation's natural resource base," said Glickman. I encourage applicants to find out about the EBI well in advance of Nov. 14, and to consult with USDA experts locally on steps they can take to maximize EBI points. Landowners who do this have a higher likelihood that their acreage will be accepted."

The EBI's wildlife habitat factor is revised to recognize the benefits attributable to vegetative covers planted to address the habitat needs of specific wildlife species.

USDA also modified the EBI's air quality factor to reflect more accurately wind speed, moisture conditions, particle size, organic material, volcanic and organic soils. Other minor revisions also were made.

"We want to make sure every potential applicant has the information he or she needs to make an informed decision," Glickman said. "We will be holding public informational meetings and making other efforts to get the facts out to landowners in plenty of time before the sign-up begins.

"This also will be an opportunity for landowners whose contract offers were not accepted in Sign-up 15 last spring and those with contracts expiring this fall to make new contract offers.

USDA will continue to evaluate and rank all eligible CRP offers using an EBI based on the potential environmental benefits from enrolling the land in the CRP. "Decisions on the EBI cutoff will be made only after Sign-up 16 concludes," Glickman said. "And we may not use the same cutoff that we used in the 15th sign up. We decide the cutoff after analyzing the EBI of all the bids. Those who would have met previous EBI thresholds are not guaranteed a contract this time around."

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Approximately 27.8 million acres will be under CRP contracts on October 1, 1997. Just over 4.8 million acres are under contracts that expire next year on September 30. USDA is authorized to maintain enrollment of up to 36.4 million acres.

Except under special circumstances, CRP rental rates will be based on local land rental rates just as they were for the 15th sign up, which was held last March.

Landowners should contact their local Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service office for additional information.

The CRP is designed to improve the nation's natural resource base. Landowners enter into contracts with USDA to enroll erodible and other environmentally sensitive land in long-term contracts -- for 10 to 15 years. In exchange, landowners receive annual rental payments and a payment for up to 50 percent of the cost of establishing conservation practices.

The program protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, it also protects groundwater and helps improve lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams. Acreage enrolled in the CRP is planted to resource-conserving (vegetative) covers, which make the program the major contributor to increases in wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

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