

Remarks

OF
SECRETARY DAN GLICKMAN
MEDIA AVAILABILITY ON 16TH SIGN-UP FOR CRP
USDA -- OCTOBER 14, 1997

Good morning. As you know, today is the first day of the 16th sign-up of the Conservation Reserve Program. We had some rough spots in the last sign-up. We've been smoothing them out ever since. Working closely with farmers, it is my hope that this will be 'sweet 16.'

Last year's Farm Bill came to us late, so our people really had to hit the ground running -- first with market transition payments, then the new CRP. Given the hand they were dealt, our folks at the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and all our partners did an outstanding job. But as soon as our people were done, they put their work under the microscope and asked: How can we do better?

We also heard that some farmers felt that they were not adequately informed of the importance of improving their cover crop to the success of their bid. We responded by spending the time between sign-ups 15 and 16 providing additional training to our NRCS and FSA folks, and holding town-hall meetings so farmers better understand how to put together the strongest bid possible -- and field staff are more capable of helping them -- along with the many commodity and conservation groups that are helping us get the word out.

In areas where rental rates are high, we also know that proportionately less acreage was selected in Sign-up 15, even though the environmental benefits of those bids were high. So, we improved the equity of the cost factor by giving bonus points to producers who bid below the maximum rental rates in their areas.

Now, we're open for business. I urge folks to come on in to their county office early. USDA field staff are ready to help farmers put together the strongest bid possible. As you know, this is a highly competitive process. Producers can strengthen their hand if they improve their crop cover, reduce their rental rate, and bid only their most sensitive land. If farmers come in early, we can work these things through together.

We had about 5 million contract acres expire last month. Another 4.8 million are set to expire next September. Farmers should start deciding now what they're going to do with that land. For folks who aren't going to re-bid their acreage, I encourage them to give serious thought to preserving their most significant conservation gains through our continuous sign-up.

This approach lets farmers crop most of their acres and get guaranteed enrollment for their buffer strips, grassed waterways, and other land with high-priority practices. Rangelands are equally welcome. We'll take these acres at any time, and we're willing to pay a little more for many of these practices.

Conservation buffers are agriculture's #1 tool for protecting America's streams and waterways. We should all do our part to keep them clean and reach the Administration's goal of 2 million miles of buffers by 2002.

The new CRP is a good deal all around. Taxpayers get the biggest bang for their environmental buck, farmers get real help in their conservation efforts, and the most productive acres are kept farming. In these ways, the new CRP -- our nation's largest conservation effort -- is agriculture's attempt to strike a sustainable balance between reaping America's abundance and respecting the needs of generations to come.

Thank you, and I'd be glad to take your questions.

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