

**Fact Sheet****Conservation Reserve Program  
15th Sign-Up Period  
March 3 - March 28, 1997**

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that offers annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term resource-conserving covers on eligible land. The Commodity Credit Corporation makes annual rental payments based on the agriculture rental value of the land and provides cost-share assistance in an amount equal to not more than 50 percent of the participant's costs in establishing approved practices. The durations of contracts are from 10 to 15 years.

**Eligibility**

To be eligible to be placed in CRP, land must be:

(1) Cropland that has been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 2 of the 5 most recent crop years (including field margins) which is also physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or

(2) Marginal pasture land that is either:

(a) Certain acreage enrolled or recently enrolled in the Water Bank Program; or

(b) Suitable for use as a riparian buffer to be planted to trees.

In addition to basic eligibility requirements, the cropland must also meet at least one of the following conditions. Land must:

(1) Have an Erosion Index (EI) of 8 or higher or be considered highly erodible land according to the conservation compliance provisions (Redefined fields must have an EI of 8 or higher);

(2) Be considered a cropped wetland;

(3) Be devoted to any number of highly beneficial environmental practices, such as filter strips, riparian buffers, grass waterways, shelter belts, wellhead protection areas, and other similar practices;

(4) Be subject to scour erosion;

(5) Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area; or,

(6) Be cropland associated with or surrounding non-cropped wetlands.

**Ranking Criteria**

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service collects data for each of the EBI factors based upon the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Bids are then ranked in comparison to all other bids offered and selections made from that ranking.

EBI factors are the following:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;

- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff, and leaching;

- On-farm benefits of reduced erosion;

- Likely long-term benefits beyond the contract period from certain practices such as tree plantings;

- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion;

- Benefits of enrollment in conservation priority areas where enrollment would contribute to the improvement of identified adverse water quality, wildlife habitat, or air quality; and

- Cost.

**Producer Eligibility Requirements**

An applicant must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the sign-up period *unless*:

- The new owner acquired the land as a result of death of the previous owner;

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- The only ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with State law;

or

- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to the Commodity Credit Corporation that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

### **When and Where**

The sign-up period begins Monday, March 3, 1997, and runs through Friday, March 28. Applications are accepted *only during that period*, at the local offices of the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). These are usually listed in local telephone books under "United States Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

**NOTE: The sign-up period does not apply to participation in certain high-priority environmental practices such as filter strips, riparian buffers, etc. (For more details, see FSA Farm Program Fact Sheet: Conservation Reserve Program - Continuous Sign-Up for High-Priority Conservation Practices.)**

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