



## **Conservation Reserve Program Sign-up 26 May 5 - June 13, 2003**

### **Overview**

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them safeguard environmentally sensitive land. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

FSA administers CRP, while other USDA agencies and partners provide technical support. More detailed information on CRP is available in the FSA fact sheet "Conservation Reserve Program."

### **CRP Sign-up 26**

FSA will hold CRP sign-up from May 5 to June 13, 2003. This is the first general CRP sign-up since enactment of the 2002 Farm Bill on May 13, 2002. The last general sign-up was conducted in early 2000.

CRP sign-up 26 is the first general sign-up to benefit from new personal computer-based common computing environment (CCE) technology. Through CCE, FSA local offices can, for the first time, enroll producers and calculate

eligible acres and rental rates in an automated environment.

### **Submitting CRP Offers**

CRP participants with contracts expiring on September 30, 2003, or September 30, 2004, may submit offers during CRP sign-up 26.

To submit CRP offers, producers must visit their local FSA offices. FSA will accept offers only during the sign-up period (May 5 to June 13, 2003). To find your local FSA office, visit FSA's Web site at: [http://oip.usda.gov/scripts/ndisapi.dll/oip\\_agency/index?state=us&agency=fsa](http://oip.usda.gov/scripts/ndisapi.dll/oip_agency/index?state=us&agency=fsa)

NOTE: CRP sign-up 26 does not apply to participation in CRP continuous sign-up, in which land devoted to certain conservation practices may be enrolled at any time. Further information on CRP continuous sign-up is available in the FSA fact sheet "Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Sign-up."

### **Eligible Producers**

To be eligible for CRP enrollment, a producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the CRP sign-up period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner's death;

- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right or redemption in accordance with state law; or
- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

### **Eligible Land**

To be eligible for placement in CRP, land must be either:

- Cropland (including field margins) that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of the previous 6 crop years from 1996 to 2001, and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or
- Certain marginal pastureland that is enrolled in the Water Bank Program.

### **Additional Cropland Requirements**

In addition to the eligible land requirements, cropland must meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a weighted average erosion index of 8 or higher;
- Be expiring CRP acreage; or
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

## **Fact Sheet**

### *Conservation Reserve Program Sign-up 26*

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#### **CRP Payments**

FSA provides CRP sign-up 26 participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentive payments, and cost-share assistance:

##### ■ **Rental Payments**

In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides rental payments to participants. FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent or cash-rent equivalent. The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or offer a lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

##### ■ **Maintenance Incentive Payments**

CRP annual rental payments may include an additional amount up to \$5 per acre per year as an incentive to perform certain maintenance obligations.

##### ■ **Cost-share Assistance**

FSA provides cost-share assistance to participants who establish approved cover on eligible cropland. The cost-share assistance can be an amount not more than 50 percent of the participants' costs in establishing approved practices.

#### **Ranking CRP Offers**

Offers for CRP sign-up 26 will be ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). 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. Decisions on the EBI cutoff will be made after the sign-up ends. Those who have met previous sign-up EBI thresholds are not guaranteed a contract under this sign-up. Producers can consult with local USDA experts on steps producers can take to maximize EBI points and increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

Producers can avoid the highly competitive EBI process under the general sign-up by enrolling the most environmentally desirable land under CRP's continuous sign-up program. Under the continuous sign-up, relatively small amounts of land serving much larger areas, such as filter strips, riparian buffers and grass waterways, can be enrolled at any time.

More information on EBI for CRP sign-up 26 is available in the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program Sign-up 26, Environmental Benefits Index."

#### **For More Information**

For more information on CRP, contact your local FSA office or visit FSA's Web site at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp.htm>

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