



### Conservation Reserve Program: Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) - Bioreactors and Saturated Buffers

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#### OVERVIEW

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program whereby the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”) to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

Under “continuous enrollment authority,” land may be enrolled in CRP at any time. Certain eligibility requirements still apply, but applicants are not subject to competitive bidding.

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorized CRP. The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers CRP.

#### IMPROVING WATER QUALITY

Since its creation in 1985, CRP has reduced nitrogen and phosphorous from fields that otherwise would enter lakes, streams and rivers by 95 and 85 percent.

USDA continues to improve water quality through its clean lakes, estuaries and rivers (CLEAR) effort to combat hypoxia in areas such as the Mississippi River and Great Lakes Basin.

Research shows that proper installation of a denitrifying bioreactor or a saturated buffer on farmland can significantly reduce nitrate runoff from fields, particularly on tiled fields adjacent to streams or waterbodies that can reduce nitrate concentration in subsurface drain discharge.

#### DENITRIFYING BIOREACTOR AND SATURATED BUFFER

A denitrifying bioreactor is a structure that uses a carbon source, such as wood chips, to reduce the concentration of nitrate nitrogen in subsurface agricultural drainage flow via enhanced denitrification.

A saturated buffer is a vegetated buffer (filter strip or riparian buffer) on which the water table is artificially raised by diverting much of the water from a subsurface drainage system along the buffer to reduce nitrate loading to surface water via enhanced denitrification.

#### ELIGIBILITY

Through CLEAR, FSA is targeting existing Filter Strip (CP21) and Riparian Buffer (CP22) practices that are already enrolled in CRP or are part of a new enrollment offer in areas with a need to reduce nitrate loading to surface water from subsurface drain outlets.

These CRP practices can be used at sites where there is a need to reduce nitrate nitrogen concentration in subsurface drainage flow. These practices do not apply to underground outlets from practices such as terraces, where the drainage source is primarily from surface inlets.

The CRP bioreactor and saturated buffer practices must be installed according to standards and specifications approved by the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS).

#### PAYMENTS AND OTHER ASSISTANCE

FSA will offer the following types of payments:

- Cost-share of up to 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable practice costs; and
- Practice incentives of up to 40 percent of the eligible establishment cost, not to exceed

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\$1,500 per bioreactor on existing CRP filter strips and riparian buffers.

- Practice incentives of up to 40 percent of the eligible establishment cost for newly enrolled bioreactors or saturated buffers on filter strips and riparian buffers.

NRCS or a Technical Service Provider (TSP) will provide technical assistance needed in the assessment of site suitability and conservation planning and design.

In addition, other groups partner with FSA and can provide assistance. These groups include state government, private conservation and environmental groups, and other conservation groups, including watershed organizations and local conservation districts.

### ENROLLING IN CRP

CRP participants who have enrolled eligible land in Filter Strip (CP21) and Riparian Buffer (CP22) practices or desire to offer new eligible land into CRP should contact their local FSA office to see if their acreage is suitable for installation of a denitrifying bioreactor or saturated buffer.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only; other eligibility requirements or restrictions may apply. To learn more about FSA CLEAR, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp) or contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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