

USDA Farm Service Agency  
Conservation Reserve Program  
**Questions and Answers on General CRP Sign-up**  
February 2020

**What is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)?**

CRP is a voluntary, land conservation program, and the goal of General CRP is to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. FSA contracts for land enrolled in General CRP for 10-15 years in length.

**What are the benefits of enrolling in CRP?**

A producer can enroll partial or entire fields/farms at a time.

There are three areas in which we see CRP as beneficial:

1. Money – steady income, less productive land becomes valuable.
2. Wildlife – improves habitats, attracts wildlife species, and increases pollinator habitat
3. Resources – Reduce soil erosion, increase soil health, and protects air and water quality

**What are the key things to be aware of for CRP general sign up?**

- General CRP is a competitive process.
- There's an annual sign-up with selected periods of time.
- There's an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) used for ranking the offers. ‘
- Only offers ranked high enough using EBI will be accepted for enrollment.

**What are the eligibility requirements specific to CRP general sign-up?**

Specific to general sign up, the land has to meet certain eligibility requirements. There are three ways that the land can become eligible.

The first is through the erodibility index (EI). So if the land has a weighted average erodibility index which we call an EI of eight or greater, it would be eligible. That's determined at the time that producer offers that land into CRP during the offer process at the county office.

The second way that the land can be eligible is, if it's expiring CRP. So if a producer is currently enrolled in a CRP contract that expires on September 30, 2020, it would be eligible for this general sign up that we have ongoing right now.

The third way is 3.

**What if a producer was enrolled in CRP, but their contract expired last year?**

For this year only for only, a one-time opportunity, contracts that expired in 2017, 2018, or 2019 that continued to be maintained like they were in CRP have this one-time opportunity to enroll in the general CRP sign-up that is currently going on.

So if their cover is still out there functioning, they did not have another opportunity in those years to enroll, so there wasn't a sign up that would have taken them in, or there wasn't an extension possibility, they might be eligible for this currently sign-up.

### **Reasons why a producer should make an appointment and begin talking about sign-up for general CRP:**

- There are some restrictions that might still apply for them. So they would definitely have to come into their local FSA office and look at what those restrictions might be.
- They would be able to find out their erodibility index, and if they're land is in a CPA area.
- There's additional requirements in addition to the land eligibility that they must meet, and to know what those specifically are, they need to work with their local county office.

### **In addition to land eligibility, what other requirements are there?**

In addition to one of those three basic land eligibility requirements, the land also has to have what we call a cropping history. So the land had to have been planted or considered planted, for example corn, soybeans, something like that. During four of the six crop years from 2012 through 2017, and the land also has to be physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner. For example, if a producer has corn that has been planted in four of those six years, they would meet the cropping history requirement. Also, if they were in CRP in any of those years, CRP is considered planted. So, it will help to meet that cropping history requirement as well.

### **What are some producer specific requirements (outside of the land eligibility)?**

A producer has to have either owned or operated the land for 12 months before the close of the signup period for general sign up. So they have to own it for 12 months before February 28, 2020. They also have other producer eligibility requirements such as payment limitation and adjusted gross income that the county office can go over the specific producer eligibility requirements that also are included for CRP.

### **What if the producer just acquired the land 8 months ago, but it was previously owned by a family member? Are there waivers for the 12-month requirement?**

There are some waiver opportunities for example, if you have a combination of owning and operating it for 12 months so you were the operator, you operated it for six months, and then the owner sold it to you and you've owned it for the last five. So, even though that's 11 months we can take that into consideration. So there are certain waivers that the state and county offices have the ability to do and also the national office.

### **What does the environmental benefits index (EBI) look like?**

EBI is complex and it's a ranking tool that's used to determine if the offers have an environmental benefit of a certain level or not. There are five factors that are environmental factors, and then a cost factor. The first three factors which are wildlife, water quality, and erosion, are all up to 100 points, because those are the primary purposes of CRP. And then there's a fourth factor which we call enduring benefits which has 50 points. There's also air quality benefit, which is 40. There's also the cost factor varies because it is a determination that's made by the Secretary after signup ends. And then, that is what the EBI cutoff score will be determined. After that, the cost factor is determined.

### **What are some factors that could help a producer in their EBI score?**

Okay, for the most part, EBI is driven by the location of the land and the soils. Most of the factors are driven by what that land has in the soil beneath it.

The things that they can do to affect the EBI are rental rate adjustment. For example, they can offer below with the maximum payment rate is up to 15% below, and get additional points for that. Another way that the producer can affect the score is by the cover type that they choose in the species mix. So for example tree practices are generally higher scoring in the EBI as well as things like rare and declining habitat. And the other ways that they can do it is by some enhancements that can be provided so wildlife food plots or pollinator habitat also provides additional points.

**How long would it take for a producer to sign-up for general CRP?**

It depends. For example, if you're a producer that's been in our office, is used to the FSA office, you've participated in CRP or other programs before, then you probably have your farm set up. Which means you also have a lot of your eligibility documents already in the county office. So, it would take you a little bit less time to sign up than someone who is brand new.

If you haven't been into an FSA office before, it will take time to get your documents and records in order. So it depends on where you are in the spectrum to determine how long it might take, and get your records correct in our system.

**How will producers know if their offer has been approved or rejected?**

After the EBI cut off score is determined, there will normally be a press release that will go out that says something along the lines of the EBI cut off score has been determined; and how many offers have been accepted.

There will also be a national CRP Notice to FSA staff announcing that producers that submitted an offer will receive a letter that tells them if they were accepted or rejected. Producers who submitted an offer will receive one of two letters. One will say you're accepted, and you need to let us know if you want to continue. Or the other letter they're receive will say you were rejected and why.