



FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

May 2012

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program – Pennsylvania, Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have expanded their Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) partnership to improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The project, first announced in April 2000, with a 100,000 acre goal, was originally funded at \$210 million and included 20 counties in the lower Susquehanna and Potomac River basins. The project was expanded in 2003 to add another 100,000 acres and increase the project area to include 23 northern tier counties. A second expansion in 2012 added another 19,746 acres.

CREP is a federal-state natural resource conservation program targeted to address state and nationally significant agricultural-related environmental problems. Through CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from USDA to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for contracts of 10 to 15 years. Participants remove cropland or marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, legumes, forbs, shrubs, trees and wetland practices. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

Benefits

The Pennsylvania CREP will help farmers and other landowners improve the water quality of the upper and lower Susquehanna and lower Potomac River basins by reducing sediment, nutrients and animal waste loadings into the Chesapeake Bay. Through CREP, Pennsylvania

farmers will be able to join with other farmers and states in protecting the environmental resources of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This also will help lower water temperatures, increase dissolved oxygen and provide additional wildlife benefits and habitat.

Goals

The goals of the Pennsylvania CREP are to:

- Provide financial and technical assistance for Pennsylvania farmers and other landowners to voluntarily restore wetlands, riparian areas and grasslands by enrolling up to 219,746 acres of farmland in CREP;
- Reduce erosion in the Chesapeake Bay watershed by 17.9 million tons;
- Prevent 265,500 tons of sediment and 15,409 tons of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) from reaching the Chesapeake Bay;
- Restore and enhance riparian habitat corridors next to streams, estuaries, wetlands and other watercourses by enrolling up to 31,746 acres of buffers, grass filter strips and wetlands;
- Restore and enhance grassland habitats for declining grassland-dependent wildlife and improve water quality by enrolling up to 188,000 acres of highly erodible cropland in conservation cover plantings; and
- Improve water quality and restore damaged riparian areas of the Susquehanna and Potomac River watersheds to facilitate the health of fish, game and other wildlife populations.

Eligible Areas

The Chesapeake Bay CREP includes the following 43 counties:

Adams; Bedford; Berks; Blair; Bradford; Cambria; Cameron; Carbon; Centre; Chester; Clearfield; Clinton; Cumberland; Columbia; Dauphin; Elk; Franklin; Fulton; Huntingdon; Indiana; Jefferson; Juniata; Lackawanna; Lancaster; Lebanon; Luzerne; Lycoming; McKean; Mifflin; Montour; Northumberland; Perry; Potter; Schuylkill; Snyder; Sullivan; Somerset; Susquehanna; Tioga; Union; Wayne; Wyoming; York.

Interested farmers and other landowners should contact their county FSA office for specific information regarding their eligibility for CREP.

Conservation Practices

To better serve program goals, specific CRP conservation practices have been identified for inclusion in the program. The following conservation practices are offered in the Chesapeake Bay CREP:

- CP1, Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes;
- CP2, Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Non-easement;
- CP12, Wildlife Food Plot
- CP8A, Grass Waterways;
- CP9, Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife;
- CP15A, Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips), Non-easement;

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- CP21, Filter Strips;
- CP22, Riparian Buffer;
- CP23, Wetland Restoration;
- CP29, Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer;
- CP30, Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer and;
- CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds.

Sign-Up and Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment began on a continuous basis in 2003. Cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland also is eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as a needed buffer practice. Producers who have an existing CRP contract are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires. Producers with expiring CRP contracts are encouraged to apply for CREP in the last year of their current CRP contract.

Enrollment in CRP

Producers enrolled in the Pennsylvania CREP may also enroll in general and continuous sign-up CRP. CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land. CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous sign-up. The CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are at a higher effective rate.

CREP Payments

Pennsylvania CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time payment consistent with FSA Handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in a grass waterway, riparian buffer or filter strip practice. This payment is

made soon after the contract has been signed and approved.

- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time payment equal to about 40 percent of the eligible cost for certain practices consistent with FSA Handbook 2-CRP. This payment is in addition to up to 50 percent cost-share assistance that USDA will provide for installing eligible practices.

- Annual Rental Payment (includes an incentive) for the life of the contract:

1. For land enrolled as Highly Erodible Land (HEL) practices CP1, CP2, CP4D, and CP12 the incentive rate will be;

- 0.75 times the applicable base soil rental rate (SRR) for land with $8 < EI < 12$;
- 1.5 times the SRR for land with $12 < EI < 20$;
- 1.75 times the SRR for land with $20 < EI < 25$;
- 2.0 times the SRR for land with $25 < EI < 30$;
- 2.25 times the SRR for land with $30 < EI$.

2. For land enrolled as riparian protection and other special conservation practices CP8A, CP9, CP15A, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP29, CP30, and CP33, the incentive rate will be 1.5 times the applicable base soil rental rate.

3. These incentive payments will be considered to be, and treated as, a rental payment for payment limitation purposes.

- Cost-Share Assistance: up to 50 percent for the installation of the eligible conservation practices on enrolled land;
- Annual Maintenance Payment: in accordance with FSA Handbook 2-CRP procedure as applicable.

In addition, Pennsylvania will offer a variable state cost-share payment up to 50 percent for certain eligible practice costs.

How to Participate

Interested producers should contact their FSA office or their local Soil and Water Conservation District office. Additional information also is available on FSA's website at www.fsa.usda.gov.

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