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Agricultural producers and landowners can sign up soon for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a cornerstone conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris Administration effort to address climate change and achieve other natural resource benefits. The General CRP signup will run from Jan. 31 to March 11, and the Grassland CRP signup will run from April 4 to May 13.

Producers and landowners enrolled 4.6 million acres into CRP signups in 2021, including 2.5 million acres in the largest Grassland CRP signup in history. There are currently 22.1 million acres enrolled, and FSA is aiming to reach the 25.5-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2022.

**CRP Signups**

General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland.

Meanwhile, Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

Alongside these programs, producers and landowners can enroll acres in Continuous CRP under the ongoing sign up, which includes projects available through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

**Climate Benefits**

Last year, FSA enacted a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP General and Continuous signups, to better target CRP on addressing climate change. This incentive aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CRP’s climate-smart practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA invested $10 million last year in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil...
carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

More Information on CRP

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to apply for the program -- for General CRP before the **March 11 deadline**, and for Grassland CRP before the **May 13 deadline**. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Additionally, fact sheets and other resources are available at fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

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**USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records**

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;
- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

Farmers.gov now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

**Managing USDA Business Online**

Using farmers.gov, producers, entities and those acting on their behalf can also:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices, plans and contracts.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View farm loan and interest information (producers only).

Future plans include adding the ability to import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture planting boundaries.
To access your information, you’ll will need a USDA eAuth account to login to farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit farmers.gov and sign into the site’s authenticated portal via the Sign In/Sign Up link at the top right of the website. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

In addition to the self-service features available by logging into farmers.gov, the website also has ample information on USDA programs, including pandemic assistance, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance. Recently, USDA updated the navigation and organization of the site as well as added some new webpages, including “Get Involved,” “Common Forms,” and “Translations.” Learn more about these changes.

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**USDA Offers Expanded Conservation Program Opportunities to Support Climate Smart Agriculture in 2022**

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing several new and expanded opportunities for climate smart agriculture in 2022. Updates include nationwide availability of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentive Contracts option, a new and streamlined EQIP Cover Crop Initiative, and added flexibilities for producers to easily re-enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). These improvements to NRCS’ working lands conservation programs, combined with continued program opportunities in all states, are part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s broader effort to support climate-smart agriculture.

**New Partnership Announced**

NRCS is announcing a new partnership with Farmers For Soil Health, an initiative of the United Soybean Board, National Corn Growers Association and National Pork Board. Farmers For Soil Health works to advance use of soil health practices – especially cover crops – on corn and soybean farms. The initiative has a goal of doubling the number of corn and soybean acres using cover crops to 30 million acres by 2030. Other partners include the National Association of Conservation Districts, Soil Health Institute, and The Sustainability Consortium.

**EQIP Cover Crop Initiative**

To complement the new partnership, NRCS is investing $38 million through the new targeted Cover Crop Initiative in 11 states to help agricultural producers mitigate climate change through the widespread adoption of cover crops. States include Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and South Dakota. States were selected for this initial pilot based on their demonstrated demand for additional support for the cover crop practice.

Sign-up dates will be determined at the state-level, and applications will be selected for funding by Feb. 11, 2022. The initiative is aimed at improving soil health through a targeted, rapid, and streamlined application and contract approval process. NRCS will continue to build on this framework and streamlined application process to support farmers and ranchers across the country.

Cover crops offer agricultural producers a natural and inexpensive climate solution through their ability to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide into soils. Cover crops can provide an accelerated, positive impact on natural resource concerns. In fiscal 2021, NRCS provided technical and financial assistance to help producers plant 2.3 million acres of cover crops through EQIP.

**EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts**

Conservation Incentive Contracts address priority resource concerns, including sequestering carbon and improving soil health in high-priority areas. Through these contracts, NRCS works with producers to strengthen the quality and condition of natural resources on their operations using management practices, such as irrigation water management, drainage water management, feed management and residue and tillage...
management that target resource concerns, including degraded soil and water quality, available water and soil erosion.

Conservation Incentive Contracts offer producers annual incentive payments to implement management practices as well as conservation evaluation and monitoring activities to help manage, maintain and improve priority natural resource concerns within state high-priority areas and build on existing conservation efforts. Download our “Conservation Incentive Contracts” fact sheet for a list of practices.

CSP Re-Enrollment Option

NRCS updated CSP to allow an agricultural producer to immediately re-enroll in the program following an unfunded application to renew an existing contract. Previously, if a CSP participant did not re-enroll the year their contract expired, they were ineligible for the program for two years.

This ineligibility was imposed on CSP participants even if their failure to sign a renewal contract was due to the unavailability of funds, which is beyond their control. USDA is now waiving this two-year ineligibility restriction for all CSP applications.

This year, producers renewed 2,600 CSP contracts covering 3.4 million acres. Applicants with unfunded fiscal 2022 CSP renewals will receive letters this month, notifying them they are automatically eligible to apply for future CSP funding opportunities, rather than needing to wait two years to reapply.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs – including EQIP and CSP – year-round, however you should apply by state-specific, signup dates to be considered for each year’s funding. To apply, you should contact your closest USDA service center.

Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early

The Farm Loan team is already working on operating loans for spring 2022 and asks potential borrowers to submit their requests early so they can be timely processed. The farm loan team can help determine which loan programs are best for applicants.

FSA offers a wide range of low-interest loans that can meet the financial needs of any farm operation for just about any purpose. The traditional farm operating and farm ownership loans can help large and small farm operations take advantage of early purchasing discounts for spring inputs as well expenses throughout the year.

Microloans are a simplified loan program that will provide up to $50,000 for both Farm Ownership and Operating Microloans to eligible applicants. These loans, targeted for smaller and non-traditional operations, can be used for operating expenses, starting a new operation, purchasing equipment, and other needs associated with a farming operation. Loans to beginning farmers and members of underserved groups are a priority.

Other types of loans available include:

Marketing Assistance Loans allow producers to use eligible commodities as loan collateral and obtain a 9-month loan while the crop is in storage. These loans provide cash flow to the producer and allow them to market the crop when prices may be more advantageous.

Farm Storage Facility Loans can be used to build permanent structures used to store eligible commodities, for storage and handling trucks, or portable or permanent handling equipment. A variety of structures are eligible under this loan, including bunker silos, grain bins, hay storage structures, and refrigerated structures for vegetables and fruit. A producer may borrow up to $500,000 per loan.