



February 2011

On Line Only

Jefferson/Clark FSA
Service Center
210 S 5th W
Rigby ID 83442

Phone: (208) 745-6664
FAX: (208) 745-0522

Hours:
Monday – Friday
8:00 am - 4:30 pm

County Committee:
Lee Burtenshaw
George Ellsworth
Robert McCulloch
Kevin Small
Andy Wagoner

Advisor:
Susan Stewart

Staff:
Lisa Eaton, PT
Joy Lopez, PT
Elaine Roker, PT

CED:
Ben Evans

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New CRP General Sign-up

New sign-ups for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will begin on March 14, 2011, and continue through April 15, 2011. During the signup period, producers may offer eligible land for CRP's competitive general signup.

There are many types of CRP practices. Some include efforts to improve the level of water in the Snake River Aquifer and increased coverage for the Columbian Sharp Tailed Grouse. Producers will need to determine if they have land eligible, figure out the best practice for the land and make certain they have all the proper elements so they can obtain a high EBI ranking.

Land currently not enrolled in CRP may be offered in this signup provided all eligibility requirements are met. Additionally, current CRP participants with contracts expiring this fall may make new contract offers. Contracts awarded under this signup become effective Oct. 1, 2011.

To help ensure that interested farmers and ranchers are aware of the signup period, USDA has signed partnership agreements with several conservation and wildlife organizations that will all play an active role in USDA's 2011 CRP outreach efforts. Among others, Idaho FSA collaborates with NRCS and the Idaho Fish and Game Dept. and Pheasants Forever.

As administrator of the Conservation Reserve Program, FSA will evaluate and rank eligible CRP offers using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) that assists in calculating the environmental benefits to be gained from the contract. The EBI consists of five environmental factors (wildlife, water, soil, air and enduring benefits). Cost factors are also entered into the equation.

CRP Expiring?

Idaho has over 117,000 acres of CRP expiring in 2011. You may be wondering how you as a landowner can maintain the conservation benefits that CRP is providing, while at the same time providing income generation to your agricultural operation. CRP can be an important "working lands" tool for Idaho landowners, by providing an annual rental payment while addressing important resource needs by planting perennial vegetation.

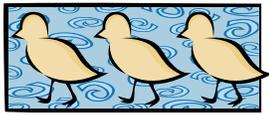
The first and easiest option is to try to reenroll the land in the next general CRP sign-up. As you know with CRP, the higher the landowner's Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) the more likely the offer is to be accepted. The easiest way to increase your EBI score is to improve your grass/forb planting to a more wildlife friendly mix or maybe install pollinator habitat.

A second option, if you have land in the eastern and southern part of the state is to see if you qualify for Idaho's State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE). This program is a practice within CRP that is targeted at lands within Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse range. SAFE is nearly the same as CRP in providing an annual rental payment, while having the landowner improve their parcel to provide important habitat for sharp-tailed grouse. SAFE is a continuous sign-up so there is no need to wait for the announcement of a general sign-up.

A third option is to convert your CRP into a grass-based agricultural operation. This means instead of breaking up that important sod and putting the land back into row crop production, you keep it in grass and instead turn to haying or grazing for income.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has several programs that are designed to assist a landowner in making this transition; the most notable is the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Your best bet is making an appointment with a NRCS representative to discuss options for technical and financial assistance in installing fencing, watering facilities, and improving range seeding as well as assistance in designing a prescribed grazing system on your property.

These options will help a landowner to both retain the resource benefits provided by the original enrollment in CRP as well as reward them for this benefit with a continued revenue stream. Interested landowners should contact their local USDA Service Center for more information.



CRP & Nesting Season

By John O'Neill, Idaho Fish and Game

Although winter continues to drag on here in eastern Idaho, spring is approaching. Gusting winds and February thaws quickly remind us that spring and summer will soon be upon us. Therefore, it is important to remind producers as they begin to make plans for the 2011 growing season to *Tread Lightly* and in many cases *Don't Tread At All*.

Spring announces not only the commencement of the busy season for producers, but it also is the onset of the nesting season for resident ground nesting bird, i.e., pheasants, gray partridge, mallards, and migrating songbirds, i.e., grasshopper sparrow, vesper sparrow, that call Idaho home for at least portion of their life cycle.

The *Farm Bill* and many of its programs were developed to enhance agricultural productivity and natural resource conservation on private land. Through these programs we have been very successful at improving overall agricultural practices, reducing soil and wind erosion, and improving water quality. We have also been successful providing safe and secure nesting habitat for many of our grassland birds. Therefore, it is important to remember that many Farm Bill programs, particularly the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), have motorized access restrictions on these enrolled lands. In many cases, these restrictions are not only limited to the primary nesting season but are in place to protect the conservation cover for duration of the contract.

During the primary nesting season, these motorized access restrictions were developed to help reduce

disturbance and nest lost for all bird species as well as improve brood survival. On many of the current CRP contracts, the primary nesting season is defined as 1 April to 1 August; however, some existing contracts may be from 1 April to 1 July.

In general, the primary nesting season dates are applicable for the duration of the contract; however, producers are allowed motorized access to the lands during the *establishment* of a new seeding (generally the first 3-years of a new seeding) to control and reduce competition from noxious weeds and undesirable plant through the use of mowing and spot spraying. During the remaining portion of the contract, these dates are expected to be observed. On occasion, the FSA County Committee may allow motorized access on these contracted lands during the primary nesting season for special circumstances, i.e. spot treatment of weed infestations. This practice must be requested in writing and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

This time period is stressful for most birds due to the high energy demands associated with nesting, brood-rearing and feather development; therefore, haying, mowing and general human disturbance should be restricted during 1 April to 1 August. Additionally, delay all haying and mowing activities for as long as possible to allow nesting birds ample time to hatch their clutches, install flushing bars on equipment to reduce nesting hen mortality, reduce your speed while harvesting or mowing to allow more time for wildlife to escape, and mow or hay from the center of the field toward the outer edge to allow hens with broods to escape toward the edge of the field. Haying or mowing from field perimeter in a circle toward the center tends to push broods "inward" where they are often killed by the swather or mower. So, give our birds a fighting chance and *Tread Lightly* when you are on CRP.

For additional information regarding access control, and haying and mowing on CRP please contact your Local Farm Service Center.

DCP and ACRE Signup Advance Payments

Enrollment for the 2011 Direct and Counter-cyclical Program (DCP) and also the 2011 ACRE Program has begun and will continue through **June 1, 2011**.

Advance payments of 22% on the 2011 DCP program are available. The remaining 78% of your DCP payment will be issued after October 1, 2011. ACRE is a revenue based payment alternative to the price-based counter-cyclical (CC) payments.

SURE – 2009 and Later

The Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE) provides benefits for farm revenue losses due to natural disasters. **SURE sign up for crop year 2009 losses runs from Jan. 10 to July 29, 2011. Deadlines for 2010 and 2011 crop years will be announced later.**

To be eligible for SURE payments, a producer is required to obtain crop insurance on all crops in all counties or, if crop insurance is not available, to participate in the Non-Insured Assistance Program (NAP) except for grazed acreage. This requirement does not apply for crops that are not of economic significance or where the administrative fee for the NAP coverage exceeds 10% of the value of the crop coverage.

Eligible farmers and ranchers who meet the definition of Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, or Beginning Farmer or Rancher are exempt from the risk management purchase requirement.

The following conditions are required to trigger SURE payments: 1) At least one crop of economic significance must suffer a 10% production loss due to an eligible disaster condition. 2) A crop of economic significance is a crop that has contributed or would have contributed at least 5% or more of the total expected revenue from all crops on the farm. 3) Producers in counties declared disaster counties by the Secretary of Agriculture, or in contiguous counties, or those who show proof of an individual loss of at least 50% are eligible to receive SURE payments for crop production or crop quality losses. Losses are measured with consideration to the whole-farm revenue, which includes crop insurance indemnities and commodity program payments, so that producers are not paid more than once for the same loss.

Note: Due to the need to wait for end of year market price data to make final SURE calculations, SURE assistance payments lag the crop year's end by one full year.

Check-off Referendum Scheduled

USDA is conducting a referendum on the Sorghum Check-off Program Feb. 1-28, 2011, at local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices. Ballots may be obtained in person, by mail or facsimile at county FSA offices, or via the Internet at www.ams.usda.gov/sorghumpage.

Any eligible person engaged in the production of/or importation of sorghum from July 1, 2008, to December 31, 2010, is eligible to participate. Individuals are required to provide documentation such as a sales receipt or remittance form that shows they engaged in the production of/or importation of sorghum.

Sorghum Check off is a national, coordinated, self-help marketing program designed to strengthen the position of sorghum in the market place, maintain and expand existing domestic and foreign markets and uses for sorghum, and develop new markets and uses.

BCAP – Two Phases

There are two categories of assistance in the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP). The first category provides financial assistance to producers or entities that deliver eligible biomass material to approved biomass conversion facilities (BCF) for use as heat, power, bio-based products or bio-fuels. Initial assistance will be for the collection, harvest, storage and transportation (CHST) costs associated with the delivery of eligible materials.

Producers who harvest, transport and store these materials can apply for FSA matching payments under the CHST. An application must be submitted before the eligible material is sold and delivered to a BCF. After the product is delivered, a producer must provide FSA with documentation of product quantity, quality and payment rate. County offices will validate payment requests with information in the county office.

In the second category of BCAP, incentives are provided to producers who enter into contracts with the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to produce eligible biomass crops on contract acres within BCAP project areas. For this phase, Project Area Proposals are required and must be submitted to FSA for approval. For more information, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/bcap.

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2011 Dates to Remember!

Ongoing	: Continuous CRP signup
February 21st	: Office Closed for Presidents' Day
March 14th	: CRP Sign-up Begins
March 31st	: Final date to request loan/LDP on 2010 crop barley, wheat, canola, honey, oats, rapeseed, flaxseed, and sesame seed
April 15th	: Final date to apply for CRP General Sign-up
May 30th	: Office Closed for Memorial Day
May 30th	: Final date to request loan/LDP on 2010 crop corn, dry peas, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, safflower seed, small chickpeas, soybeans, sunflower seed
June 1st	: Deadline to sign into DCP/ACRE
June 30th	: Crop Reporting deadline
June 30th	: Deadline to provide production evidence for producers' with NAP Insurance
July 4th	: Office Closed for the Independence Day
July 15th	: Deadline to provide production evidence for producers enrolled in the ACRE Program
July 29th	: Deadline to apply for the SURE Program for 2009 crop year losses
August 1st	: Deadline to Request Recons for farms enrolled in DCP/ACRE

February 2011 Interest Rates

2.250%	Farm Operating – direct
4.750%	Farm Ownership – Direct and Conservation Loans
1.500%	Farm Ownership – Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher
3.750%	Emergency
1.250%	Commodity Loans
2.750%	FSFL (Farm Storage Facility Loans) with 7-year loan terms
3.375%	FSFL with 10-year loan terms
3.625%	FSFL with 12-year loan terms