



# United States Department of Agriculture

## Niobrara County Service Center

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**August 2010**

### **Conservation Reserve Program General Signup Announced**

CRP is the largest private-land voluntary conservation program that helps farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers use their environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolling in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers. In return, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants rental payments, cost-share and technical assistance and does so on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation.

**The 2010 signup will be held from August 2 through 27.**

#### **Eligibility:**

- Eligible acreage includes cropland that has been cropped or is considered to be cropped for four of the six years between 2002 – 2007. It is located within conservation priority areas, and it is land that has an average Erodibility Index (EI) of 8 or greater, which means it is highly erodible. Or, it is land that has been in CRP, but the contract is expiring.
- The 25 percent cropland limit continues to apply. Generally, this limit means that no more than 25 percent of a county's cropland may be enrolled in the CRP and the Wetlands Reserve Program. The 2008 Farm Bill added authority to exclude cropland enrolled under CRP's continuous signup or under CRP's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) provided the county government agrees.
- After signup ends on August 27, FSA will evaluate the offers. During September, FSA expects to notify producers about offers that are acceptable or rejected.

#### **Selection Criteria:**

- FSA will select the highest ranked offers that provide significant environmental benefits relative to cost by using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) based on six factors. All offers will be evaluated competitively. After the end of signup, offers will be ranked and an EBI cutoff score selected.
- The EBI factors are: (1) wildlife habitat cover benefits that encourage covers and habitats on contract acreage that will be most beneficial to wildlife; (2) water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching; (3) on-farm benefits of reduced erosion; (4) enduring benefits; (5) air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and (6) cost.
- There were a few changes to the EBI since the last general sign up in 2006. For the wildlife factor, the subfactor for wildlife enhancement was changed to add 20 points for establishing pollinator habitat. Offers that are less than ten acres and provide at least one acre of pollinator habitat, or offers that are ten acres or greater and provide at least ten percent of the acreage offered in pollinator habitat, will receive 20 points. Also, the cost factor was changed to remove points awarded if producers elected not to receive a cost share payment. The cost factor was further changed when land was offered for less than the maximum payable rate. Before, points were added based on the number of dollars offered below the maximum. However, this was changed so that offers that are less than the maximum payment rate will receive points based on the percentage offered below the maximum payment rate.

**Additional Pre-enrollment Program Background:**

- Producers should be aware of several ways that CRP may assist in creating new wildlife habitat and enhancing water, soil, and air quality through a number of varieties of grasses and/or forbs that can be established on the offered acreage to accomplish their conservation goals.
- Producers leasing the land they hope to enroll in CRP must provide a lease agreement for the full duration of the CRP contract at sign up, unless the landowner is party to the CRP agreement. In that case, both landowner and leaseholder must complete the enrollment.
- CRP participants may harvest this year's crops even when normal harvest occurs after the contract effective date of October 1, 2010. The first year's payment is not affected by the harvest date.
- Producers with acceptable offers may begin establishing the cover immediately. However, those who establish the cover before the CRP contract is approved do so at their own risk.
- Land that meets basic eligibility criteria may be offered during any CRP sign-up even if it was previously offered but not accepted.
- Approximately 31 million acres are currently enrolled in CRP. However, CRP contracts amounting to about 4.5 million acres expire September 30, 2010. The statutory maximum number of acres that can be enrolled in the program at any one time is 32 million acres.

**Transition Incentives Program**

The Transition Incentives Program (TIP) encourages retired or retiring owners or operators to transition their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. TIP sign-up opened May 17, 2010. If all program requirements are met, TIP provides annual rental payments to the retiring farmer for up to two additional years after the expiration of the CRP contract, provided the transition is not to a family member. For eligibility requirements producers should visit the FSA county office or [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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<b>Important Dates to Remember</b>	
August 27	CRP General Signup Period Ends
September 6	Labor Day Holiday Office Closed
Continues	Continuous CRP Signup

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