

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Maryland

Overview

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state natural resources conservation program that addresses state and nationally significant agricultural related environmental concerns related to agriculture. Through CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contracts of 10 to 15 years. Participants remove cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers CRP and CREP on behalf of CCC.

The Maryland CREP is a partnership between USDA and the state of Maryland. The program seeks to enroll 100,000 acres of eligible cropland or marginal pastureland in 14 to 15 year contracts within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The project will establish or restore wetlands, riparian buffers, and highly erodible land within 1,000 feet of a stream by planting grasses, shrubs or trees. The CREP project area includes all of Maryland. The primary goals of the project are to improve water quality by filtering agricultural runoff and enhance wildlife habitat.

General Benefits

The Maryland CREP provides for the establishment of riparian buffers, grass plantings, forbs, shrubs and trees to improve and enhance water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed by reducing soil runoff,

increasing ground water absorption, and reducing stream sedimentation and nutrient loading from crop fields into Maryland's waterways. Additional benefits will accrue through habitat restoration for plant and animal species and wetland restoration.

Goals

Maryland CREP, taking into account previous enrollments, will seek to achieve the following objectives:

- Reduce nutrient pollution from agricultural lands by approximately 11.5 million pounds of nitrogen and 1.1 million pounds of phosphorus, on an annual basis.
- Reduce sediment loading into streams from agricultural lands of approximately 200,000 tons of sediment, on an annual basis.
- Increase the survivability, distribution and abundance of targeted fish, wildlife and plant species in the Chesapeake region. Emphasis for Rare and Declining Species Habitat enrollments will be given to high priority species listed under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, and state and federally-listed threatened or endangered species such as bald eagles, Delmarva fox squirrel, Eastern bog turtle, dwarf wedge mussel, glassy darter and harparella.

Land Eligibility Requirements

The following are some of the eligibility requirements producers and their land must meet in order to be enrolled in Maryland CREP.

- Land may be enrolled under the riparian buffer practices with a maximum average width of 100

feet and a minimum average width of 35 feet.

- Buffers along channelized intermittent streams and infield constructed drainage ditches will be eligible in grass filter strips only, and shall not exceed a maximum average width of 35 feet.

In addition, cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland along streams, watercourses and certain upland areas may also be eligible for enrollment.

Other requirements may apply. Interested producers should contact their local FSA service center for specific information regarding their eligibility for CREP.

Sign-up and Contract Duration

Sign-up will continue until enrollment goals are met and as long as there is statutory authority for such enrollments. Land enrolled in the program will remain under contract for a minimum of 14 years, but no more than 15 years, as specified in the contract.

Approved Conservation Practices

- CP1 (Introduced Grasses/Legumes) (cropland only)
- CP2 (Native Grasses/Legumes) (cropland only)
- CP3 (Tree Planting) (cropland only)
- CP3A (Hardwood Tree Planting) (cropland only)
- CP4D (Permanent Wildlife Habitat) (cropland only)
- CP9 (Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife) (cropland only)
- CP21 (Filter Strips) (cropland

- only)
- CP22 (Riparian Buffer) (Cropland and Marginal Pastureland)
- CP23 (Wetland Restoration) (cropland only)
- CP23A (Wetland Restoration, Non-floodplain) (cropland only)
- CP25 (Habitat for Declining Species) (cropland only)
- CP29 (Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer) (marginal pastureland only)
- CP30 (Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer) (marginal pastureland only)

USDA Payments

Maryland CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of USDA payments subject to contract terms and certain limitations:

- Annual Rental Payment: The maximum annual rental rate is based on posted CRP rental rates and is calculated as follows:
 1. For enrolled CREP acres, CCC will determine the base rental payment per acre using the weighted average soil rental rates for the three predominant soils, plus
 2. Eighty to 200 percent of the incentive payment, added to the base soil rental rate depending on the practice, plus
 3. A per-acre maintenance incentive payment as provided under normal CRP rules.
- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time incentive payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in practices CP9, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP29 and CP30. This payment is made after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time incentive payment equal to 40 percent of the eligible reimbursable cost for the establishment of practices CP9, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP29 and CP30.

- Cost-share assistance: 50 percent cost-share of reimbursable costs to install approved conservation practices.
- Cost-share assistance: Up to 50 percent for approved management activities according to normal CRP rules.

State of Maryland Payments

The state of Maryland will provide the following payments, subject to contract terms and certain limitations:

- A one-time State Incentive Program payment of \$100 per acre, for every acre enrolled, and for every acre re-enrolled.
- Pay thirty seven and a half percent of the installation cost of practices CP1, CP2, CP3, CP3A, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A and CP30.
- Pay all costs associated with the purchase of voluntary permanent easements.

Cost

The USDA share for Maryland CREP is estimated to be \$165 million for rental payments to be made over 15 years, and about \$33 million for cost-share payments during the same period, for a total of \$198 million. Maryland will spend an estimated \$1 million in cost-share payments in addition to other state direct and in-kind contributions of approximately \$89 million.

CRP Enrollment

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select for their land. Applicants may still enroll eligible land in the general CRP or continuous sign-up CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through general and/or continuous sign-up. For instance, CREP payments are at a higher effective rate.

Haying and Grazing

Haying and grazing are not permitted during the CRP contract period except for emergency or managed haying and grazing purposes, if authorized.

For More Information

For more information about FSA and its programs, visit a local FSA or USDA Service Center, or the FSA website at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp>.

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