

**Conservation Reserve Program****Overview**

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them safeguard environmentally sensitive land. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorized CRP. The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The program is implemented by FSA on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation.

Benefits

CRP protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the Nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams. Acreage enrolled in the CRP is planted to resource-conserving vegetative covers, making the program a major

contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

CRP Administration

FSA administers CRP, while technical support functions are provided by:

- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service;
- State forestry agencies;
- Local soil and water conservation districts; and
- Other non-Federal providers of technical assistance.

CRP General Sign-up

Producers can offer land for CRP general sign-up enrollment only during designated sign-up periods. For information on upcoming sign-ups, contact your local FSA office. To find your local office, visit FSA's Web site at: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=us&agency=fsa>

CRP Continuous Sign-up

Environmentally desirable land devoted to certain conservation practices may be enrolled at any time under CRP continuous sign-up. Certain eligibility requirements still apply, but offers are not subject

to competitive bidding. Further information on CRP continuous sign-up is available in the FSA fact sheet "Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Sign-up."

Eligible Producers

To be eligible for CRP enrollment, a producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the CRP sign-up period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner's death;
- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with state law; or
- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

Eligible Land

To be eligible for placement in CRP, land must be either:

- Cropland (including field margins) that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of the previous 6 crop years from 1996 to 2001, and which is physically and legally capable of being

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planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or

- Certain marginal pastureland that is enrolled in the Water Bank Program or suitable for use as a riparian buffer or for similar water quality purposes.

Additional Cropland Requirements

In addition to the eligible land requirements, cropland must meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a weighted average erosion index of 8 or higher;
- Be expiring CRP acreage; or
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

CRP Payments

FSA provides CRP participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentive payments, and cost-share assistance:

- Rental Payments

In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides annual rental payments to participants. FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent or cash-rent equivalent. The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or offer a lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

- Maintenance Incentive Payments
CRP annual rental payments may include an additional amount up to \$5 per acre per year as an incentive to perform certain maintenance obligations.

- Cost-share Assistance

FSA provides cost-share assistance to participants who establish approved cover on eligible cropland. The cost-share assistance can be an amount not more than 50 percent of the participants' costs in establishing approved practices.

- Other Incentives

FSA may offer additional financial incentives of up to 20 percent of the annual payment for certain continuous sign-up practices.

Ranking CRP Offers

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking. FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff, and leaching;

- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and
- Cost.

For More Information

For more information on CRP, contact your local FSA office or visit FSA's Web site.

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