



Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

OVERVIEW

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop 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. The vegetative covers also make CRP a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

ADMINISTRATION

FSA administers CRP while technical support functions are provided by:

- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA);
- State forestry agencies;
- Local soil and water conservation districts;
- Other non-federal providers of technical assistance.

CONTINUOUS SIGN-UP

Under CRP continuous sign-up authority, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices may be enrolled in CRP at any time. 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."

GENERAL SIGN-UP

Under general sign-up authority, producers can offer land for CRP general sign-up enrollment only during announced sign-up periods. However, there will not be a general sign-up in 2014. For information on upcoming sign-ups, contact a local FSA office. To find a local office, visit the FSA website.

RANKING LAND OFFERS DURING GENERAL SIGN-UP

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.

ELIGIBLE PRODUCERS

A producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to submitting the offer, 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

Land must be cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity for four of the previous six crop years from 2008 to 2013, and that is physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. Land also must meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a weighted average erosion index of eight or higher;
- Be enrolled in a CRP contract that expires Sept. 30 or;
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

PAYMENTS

FSA provides CRP continuous sign-up participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentives 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 dry-land cash rent using data provided by the National Agricultural Statistics Service or cash-rent equivalent as guidelines. 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.

- **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.

MORE INFORMATION

To find more information about FSA programs, contact your local FSA office or USDA Service Center, or visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov.

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