



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

March 2006

**Farm Service Agency**

**Fact Sheet**

**Conservation Reserve Program  
General Sign-up 33**

**March 27 – April 14, 2006**

**Montana State  
Producer Handbook**



**Background**

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will hold a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general sign-up beginning March 27 and ending April 14, 2006.

CRP is a voluntary program that offers annual rental and incentive payments for certain activities, and cost-share assistance to establish approved cover on eligible cropland.

The program encourages farmers to plant long-term resource-conserving covers to improve soil, water, and wildlife resources. Cost-share assistance is available in an amount equal to not more than 50 percent of the eligible costs of establishing approved practices. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

2006 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the implementation of the first CRP contracts. Through those 20 years, CRP has made impressive achievements. In Montana alone, tons of soil are saved from erosion each year, which means Montanan’s have fresher air and cleaner, safer water for drinking, recreation and wildlife habitat.

**Submitting CRP Offers**

Land that is currently not enrolled in a CRP contract and CRP contracts expiring on September 30, 2006 may be offered for enrollment during CRP general sign-up 33. To submit CRP offers,

producers must visit their local county FSA office. Offers will be accepted only during the CRP 33 general sign-up period (March 27 through April 14, 2006).

**Eligible Producers**

To be eligible for CRP enrollment, a producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to the end of the CRP 33 general sign-up period which is April 14, 2006, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the death of the previous owner;
- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right or redemption in accordance with state law; or
- The circumstances of the acquisition can be proven to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP. Only the national FSA can approve such a waiver.

**Land Eligibility**

- Cropland (including field margins) that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity four of the previous six crop years from 1996 to 2001, and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity.

**Additional Cropland Requirements**

In addition to the land eligibility 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 general sign-up 33 participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentive payments, and cost-share assistance;

**Annual Rental Payments**

In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides 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 soil rental rates for each county have recently been updated and are available at your local county FSA office. FSA calculates the maximum CRP rental rate for each offer prior to enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or offer a lower rental rate to be more competitive in having the offer be accepted.

- **Maintenance Incentive Payments** – CRP annual rental payments may include an additional amount 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 not exceed 50 percent of the participant's costs to establish approved practices.

***For More Information***

Contact your local county Farm Service Agency office or visit the Montana FSA web site at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt>.

***Ranking CRP Offers***

Offers for CRP general sign-up 33 will be ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA ranks each eligible offer nationally, in comparison to all other offers and selects from that ranking. After the sign-up ends, FSA will decide where to make the EBI cutoff. The EBI score will be calculated differently during sign-up 33, therefore, those who have met previous sign-up EBI thresholds are not guaranteed a contract under this sign-up.

***CRP Continuous Sign-up***

In addition to CRP general sign-up 33, producers can enroll the most environmentally sensitive land at any time under the CRP Continuous Sign-up. Refer to the "*CRP Continuous Sign-up Fact Sheet*" for detailed information.

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