



## Conservation Reserve Program Contract Re-enrollments and Extensions

### Overview

On January 31, 2006, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced that it would offer certain Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants the opportunity to re-enroll in new CRP contracts or to extend their current contracts.

Between 2007 and 2010, 400,000 contracts covering 28 million acres are scheduled to expire. FSA is offering re-enrollments and contract extensions to certain contract holders in an effort to preserve CRP's significant and enduring environmental benefits to American farmland.

This decision is also meant to reduce the potential adverse effects CRP expiration could have on nearly 16 million acres of land in 2007.

In making the decision, FSA considered more than 5,000 comments received during a Federal Register public comment period; held a public meeting; and met with conservation, environment, commodity, and farm organizations.

### Eligible CRP Participants

Those generally eligible for CRP re-enrollments or contract extensions are CRP participants with contracts expiring between September 30, 2007, and September 30, 2010.

Participants with 15-year contracts will not be offered an extension.

### Contract Selection

FSA has determined that a contract may be re-enrolled or extended based on:

- Environmental Benefits Index factors at the time of the original CRP offer, and
- the land's location within a national conservation priority area.

### Environmental Benefits Index

The Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) is a ranking of the land's contribution to improving:

- soil erosion;
- water quality;
- air quality;
- wildlife habitat; and
- trees or other cover considered to be an enduring benefit to the land.

At the time of the original CRP offer, FSA collected EBI data based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. EBI rankings were unique for each piece of ground offered into CRP. Each offer was assigned a point score based on its relative environmental factors and competed against all other offers.

### National Priority Areas

To determine contract eligibility, FSA also considered whether the land was located within a national priority area. These areas are lands with significant adverse water quality or habitat issues. These areas are the:

- Chesapeake Bay;
- Long Island Sound;
- Great Lakes Region;
- Prairie Pothole Region in the Northern Plains Region; and
- Longleaf Pine Region in the southeast.

### Re-enrollment and Extension Terms

Contracts by sign-up will be offered in five groups. CRP participants ranking in the top one-fifth of the EBI can re-enroll their land in a new 10-year contract, with one exception. For those lands with restored wetlands, FSA will offer a 15-year contract.

The second one-fifth group will be offered a 5-year extension, the third one-fifth will be offered a 4-year extension, the fourth one-fifth will be offered a 3-year extension, and the remaining contracts will be offered a 2-year extension.

Eligible participants may re-enroll or extend all or any portion of their

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existing CRP contracts, but they may not increase the number of acres under contract.

#### **Notification of Contract Holders**

Beginning in February 2006, FSA sent letters to current CRP participants with contracts expiring September 30, 2007. The letters notified contract holders of:

- their contract status;
- the April 28, 2006, (originally April 14) deadline to accept offers; and
- the length of the contract offered.

CRP participants were asked to confirm their interest in a re-enrolled or extended contract subject to a compliance check.

FSA county offices are now beginning to notify CRP participants with contracts expiring in 2008-2010 of their re-enrollment and extension opportunities. The deadline for participants to respond is June 30, 2006.

#### **Rental Payment Rates**

CRP participants who accept a contract extension will maintain their current rental rates. CRP participants who accept re-enrollments will be paid based on the updated county posted soil rental rates effective at the time the contract was approved.

#### **Conservation Plans**

For re-enrollments, a new conservation plan will be developed. For contract extensions, the existing conservation plan will be used.

#### **Site Visits**

Regardless of which conservation plan participants take part in, each contract holder must agree to a site visit that verifies the contract is in compliance, including cover that is:

- appropriate for the site according to the conservation plan; and
- free from noxious weeds, insects, and pests.

If the cover is not properly maintained or there is another violation, FSA will notify the participant that the re-enrollment or extension may not be approved. Because all participants agreed to establish and maintain the cover appropriate for their area and contract, cost-share money will not be available for extensions or re-enrollments for most participants.

#### **For More Information**

Contract summaries are available online at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp.htm>

More information on CRP is available at local FSA offices and on FSA's Web site: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/default.htm>

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