



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program – Vermont

OVERVIEW

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), the state of Vermont, and the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) are partners in a voluntary \$18.75 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to improve water quality and enhance wildlife and aquatic habitat in four major lakes and river basins and their tributaries within the state.

THE PROGRAM

CREP is an offshoot of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program. CRP is a federally-funded 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. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 and was reauthorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill).

CREP targets high-priority conservation issues identified by local, state, or tribal governments or non-governmental organizations.

This CREP uses both federal and state resources, including federal and state funding, to meet state environmental objectives and to protect environmentally sensitive land on 7,500 acres throughout the entire state of Vermont. Although producers can voluntarily enroll in CREP for 10 to 15 years, some practices may be enrolled with the state of Vermont for up to 30 years.

BENEFITS

This CREP will safeguard cropland or marginal pastureland surrounding streams and rivers in the four participating basins through changes in agricultural activity. Program participants will establish riparian forest buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways or

restore wetlands. Retiring cropland and planting it to protective vegetation will enhance water quality by reducing nutrient and sedimentation. Buffers planted along stream banks and rivers will filter phosphorous and nitrogen runoff. Wetland restoration will improve wildlife habitat and aquatic wildlife.

GOALS

Through voluntary changes in agricultural activity, the goals of the Vermont CREP are to:

- Reduce non-point source pollution and nutrient and sediment loadings throughout Vermont;
- Enhance wildlife and aquatic habitat; and
- Reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loads in the four major lakes and river basins and their tributaries within the state.

PROGRAM COST

The expected combined federal and state obligation is \$18.75 million over 15 years, and for some practices up to 30 years, with \$15 million from FSA and \$3.75 million from Vermont. This does not include any cost that may be borne by producers. Vermont's share is approximately 20 percent of the total program costs; FSA's share is approximately 80 percent.

ELIGIBLE AREAS

Producers can offer eligible cropland and marginal pastureland in all of Vermont's watersheds. A map of the eligible areas is available in USDA service centers.

APPROVED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Vermont CREP is authorized to enroll up to 7,500 acres devoted to the following CRP practices:

- CP8A Grass Waterways
- CP21 Filter Strips
- CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer
- CP23 Wetland Restoration

SIGNUP AND ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Sign-up will continue until enrollment goals are met and as long as there is statutory authority for such enrollments. Eligible producers can enroll in 10 to 15 year CRP contracts. Producers may extend the benefits of the program up to 30 years through separate contracts with the state.

Applicants must:

- Be able to offer eligible acreage and satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP; and
- Generally have owned or operated the land for at least one year prior to enrollment.

Land must be cropland that has been cropped four out of the past six years (2008-2013) and is physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible, provided it is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees.

Persons with an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires. Other requirements will also apply. Contract terms will be set out in the CRP contract and regulations.

CREP PAYMENTS

Vermont CREP participants are eligible for four types of USDA payments, subject to contract terms and limitations:

- Signing Incentive Payment – a one-time payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP (Rev. 5) for land enrolled in a riparian buffer practice, filter strip, or grassed waterway. FSA makes this payment soon after the contract has been signed.
- Practice Incentive Payment – payment equal to about 40 percent of the total cost for establishing riparian buffers, grass waterways, and filter strips. This payment is in addition to the 50 percent cost share assistance that FSA provides.
- Annual rental payment of about 200 percent of the maximum soil rental rate for the county in which the land is located, which includes an incentive payment of 100 percent of the base soil rental rate for CRP.
- Cost share assistance for installing the conservation practices in enrolled land.

ENROLLMENT IN OTHER PROGRAMS

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers and ranchers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll eligible land in the regular general CRP or other CRP sign-ups when CREP is initiated. However, CREP may provide additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous sign-up. For instance, per acre CREP payments are usually at a higher rate.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Vermont CREP, contact your local FSA office, or Soil and Water Conservation District office. To find your local FSA county office, click <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn more about FSA conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

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