

For: State and County Offices

CRP Tree Thinning Incentive (TTI) Batching and Updates

Approved by: Acting Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs



1 Overview

A Background

The Agricultural Act of 2014 authorized incentives to eligible CRP participants to encourage proper thinning and other practices to improve the condition of resources, promote forest management, or enhance wildlife habitat. This authority was integrated into 7 CFR 1410.2 and 2-CRP, paragraph 627.

These management tools are beneficial to restoring and creating diverse and healthy ecosystems, and will help address the habitat needs for threatened and endangered species, candidate species, grassland and early successional birds, state species of greatest conservation need, pollinators, and others.

Existing Tree Thinning Incentive (TTI) funds remain available until the end of FY 2018. All requests are subject to the availability of funds.

B Purpose

This notice announces:

- CRP-816, CRP-829, and CRP-844 are obsolete;
- updated payment validation procedures;
- updated TTI request and payment processes;
- acceptance of all previous TTI requests;
- continuous TTI batching periods;
- deactivation of previous SharePoint sites used for TTI.

Disposal Date

October 1, 2020

Distribution

State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices, NRCS State Offices, and Forest Service

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2 Administration

A TTI Eligibility

The CRP TTI payment is limited to authorized CRP conservation practices identified in 2-CRP, paragraph 627, which includes CP3, CP3A, CP4D, CP11, CP22, CP22B, CP22S, CP31, CP36, CP38A, CP38C, CP38D, and CP38E.

Only activities completed after October 22, 2015 are eligible for TTI.

Only activities beyond the minimum CRP contract requirements for mid-contract management are eligible for TTI. Such additional activities must be included in an existing or modified Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO). CRP participants who only perform the one required mid-contract management activity are not eligible for TTI, although they may be eligible for cost-share assistance.

A participant may be eligible for more than one TTI payment if multiple eligible activities are performed under the CPO. Each TTI request must be entered as a separate entry on the TTI Survey and documented using separate FSA-848, FSA-848A, and FSA-848B forms.

All requests are subject to the availability of funds.

B TTI Eligibility Examples

Example 1 A CRP contract requires one mid-contract management activity. The CPO includes a prescribed burn as the mid-contract management activity. This one activity is all the CRP participant wishes to perform. Cost-share is authorized for this mid-contract management activity, but the participant is not eligible for TTI.

Example 2 A CRP contract requires one mid-contract management activity. In addition to the one required mid-contract management activity, the CPO describes implementing additional mid-contract management activities (tree thinning and prescribed burning) in an integrated manner. The additional activities (tree thinning and prescribed burning), but not the one required activity, are eligible for TTI. A participant may receive both cost-share for the mid-contract management activity and TTI on the additional activities (tree thinning and prescribed burning).

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2 Administration (Continued)

C TTI Eligible Customary Forestry Activities and Rates

Eligible customary forestry activities include tree thinning and prescribed burning. The following national rates have been established for TTI.

Technical Practice	Technical Practice Code	National Incentive
Tree Thinning and Burning	TTI-666/338/394	\$150/acre
Tree Thinning	TTI-666	\$75/acre
Prescribed Burning	TTI-338/394	\$25/acre for first burn \$35/acre for subsequent burns

TTI may only be paid after the participant and technical service provider (TSP) have certified completion of the activity.

Note: TTI may be available whether or not a participant incurs costs in completing the eligible activity.

D TTI Requests

FSA County Offices will:

- manually complete an FSA-848 to document a request for TTI;
- scan and upload the FSA-848 to the TTI Survey; and
- enter all data on the TTI Survey located at https://sharepoint.fsa.usda.net/mgr/dafp/CEPD/county_office/Lists/Tree%20Thinning%20Incentives%201/AllItems.aspx.

The FSA-848 must be completed as described in paragraph 4 A of this notice. After completion of the FSA-848, the form must be uploaded to the TTI Survey the same business day.

Note: For TTI, a manual FSA-848 is **not** a request for cost-share, but is used to document the request for TTI. County Offices must not initiate or generate the FSA-848 in the Cost Share System (CSS).

All previous SharePoint sites used for CRP TTI are deactivated. All data on those sites have been combined and placed into the survey document located at the link above.

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2 Administration (Continued)

E TTI Funds Availability and Obligations

I Existing Requests

All prior requests for TTI are now obligated, including all requests where performance was completed for the third batching period. Where the participant has completed performance and the County Office has completed all applicable sections of the Validating Existing Obligations and Payments checklist in Exhibit 1, the participant may be paid. If the participant has not yet completed performance, the County Office shall complete all applicable sections of the Validating Existing Obligations and Payments checklist, then notify the participant that funds are available using the letter in Exhibit 2.

II New Requests

Beginning on July 30, 2018, the National Office will make funds available to State Offices, every two weeks, for all new requests, subject to funds availability.

Note: This action replaces the previous practice of using batching periods to determine when funds were obligated.

Once the National Office has made funds available, the State Offices will be notified by email. After the notification of funds availability, County Offices must:

- manually complete an FSA-848A as described in subparagraph 4 B;
- scan and upload the FSA-848A to the TTI Survey the same business day; and
- notify participants of approval using the letter in Exhibit 2.

FSA-848A approvals must be made by September 28, 2018. There is no authority to obligate TTI funds after FY18.

Note: County Offices must:

- not use CSS to initiate or generate the FSA-848A
- complete and upload the FSA-848A before notifying participants of approval.

Once notified, a participant has two years from the date of notification to complete the TTI activities. Extensions may only be granted by the Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs. Funds will be de-obligated after two years.

In the event a participant is ineligible for TTI, funds are not available, or authority for the incentive ends, County Offices must notify participants using the ineligible letter in Exhibit 3.

Note: Do not fill out an FSA-848A for producers who receive an ineligible letter.

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2 Administration (Continued)

E TTI Funds Availability and Obligations (Continued)

If at any point a participant indicates they are no longer interested or able to complete TTI activities, County Offices should notify the National Office, through their State Office. Any funds obligated for that participant will be de-obligated.

F TTI Performance and Payment

Performance of approved activities must be completed according to the CPO.

Performance of approved activities must be certified on the FSA-848B by:

- the participant and
- the technical service provider.

Directions to manually complete the FSA-848B are in subparagraph 4 C. After completion, the FSA-848B must be scanned and uploaded to the TTI Survey the same business day. The TTI payment cannot be issued until the FSA-848B is completed and uploaded to the TTI Survey.

Note: County Offices must not use CSS to initiate or generate the FSA-848B.

Payments are made through the Conservation Payments System, and are subject to the requirements of 1-PL, 4-PL, and 5-PL, as applicable.

The applicable alpha program code is XXCRPTTI (where XX represents the fiscal year in which the FSA-848A is completed) and the program accounting code is 3352.

Note: The fiscal year in which TTI is requested and the year in which TTI is paid may be different. The applicable alpha program code must be the fiscal year when TTI is requested, regardless of when performance and payment takes place.

Once payment is made, the payment date must be entered on the TTI Survey the same business day, along with the NPS payment identification number.

G Planned Activities Not Completed

CRP participants are not in violation of their CRP contract if they are unable to perform any activities eligible for TTI.

Note: Participants must still complete the one required mid-contract management activity required by the CPO. Failure to do so may cause them to be out of compliance with their CRP contract.

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3 Validation and Spot Checks

A County Office Action

County Offices must:

- ensure timely and accurate completion of all forms, including entering information into the TTI Survey and uploading the FSA-848, FSA-848A, and FSA-848B to the TTI Survey;
- have the forms and TTI Survey entries for all TTI requests verified by two different people using the validation checklist for Validating Future Payments, as found in Exhibit 1; and,
- maintain completed checklists in the producer's CRP file.

For all requests submitted prior to the date this notice was issued, the County Office must:

- validate all data using the Validating Existing Obligations and Payments checklist, as found in Exhibit 1. This must be completed no later than July 30, 2018.

B State Office Action

State Offices must:

- spot check 10% of all requests, and not less than 10 requests, to ensure compliance with all applicable procedures, including 2-CRP; and,
- use the appropriate validation checklist, depending on when the TTI was received, as found in Exhibits 1 and 2.

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4 Forms Completion

A FSA-848

Use the following instructions to complete FSA-848 when the producer requests TTI. The form can be found at

<https://fsaintranet.sc.egov.usda.gov/dam/ffasforms/currentforms.asp>.

Item	Instructions
	In the top margin of the form, write “For CRP TTI Purposes.”
1	Enter the State and County codes.
2	Enter the County Office name, address, and telephone number.
3	Enter the unique identification number. The number will be XX-YYY-SEQUENCE where XX is the State Code, YYY is the County Code, and SEQUENCE is sequential number starting with 001 in each County. The first contract in each county will be XX-YYY-001, followed by XX-YYY-002, etc.
5	Enter the CRP contract number.
6	Record if the CRP contract location is within a Wildlife Priority Zone (N1c) and/or if the location is within a SAFE project area.
10A	Enter the farm number.
10B	Enter the tract number.
10C	Enter the field number.
10D	Enter the eligible CRP conservation practice (e.g., CP3).
10E	Enter the technical practice from the TTI Menu (e.g., TTI-666 Tree Thinning/Forest Stand Improvement).
10F	Enter “acres.”
10G	Enter the amount of contract acres.
10H	Enter the amount of acres on which the TTI activity will be performed.
10I	Enter the requested TTI amount (Item 10H multiplied by the incentive rate in subparagraph 2C).
10J	Enter the total amount of TTI requested (Add all rows in column 10I).
11A	Enter the participant’s name, address, and contact telephone number.
11F	Have the participant sign and date the request.
11G	Enter the title/relationship, if applicable.
11H	Have the participant, or designee, enter the date of the request.
	When completed, upload the form to the TTI Survey.

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4 Forms Completion (Continued)

B FSA-848A

Use the following instructions to complete FSA-848A after the request is obligated.

Item	Instructions
	In the top margin of the form, enter "For CRP TTI Purposes."
1	Enter the State and County codes.
2	Enter the County Office name, address, and telephone number.
3	Enter the unique identification number. This is the same number entered in box 3 of FSA-848.
5	Enter the fiscal year the funds are obligated.
7	Enter program accounting code 3352.
8	Enter the CRP contract number.
9A	Enter the farm number.
9B	Enter the tract number.
9C	Enter the field number.
9D	Enter the technical practice from the TTI Menu (e.g., TTI-666 Tree Thinning/Forest Stand Improvement).
9E	Enter program accounting code 3352.
9G	Enter "acres."
9H	Enter the number of acres on which the activity is requested to be completed.
9I	Enter two years after the date the approval notification letter is sent to the participant. For example, if the letter is sent to the participant on 9/30/2018, the date entered in this box would be 9/30/2020.
9K	Enter the incentive rate for the activity requested. This should match the rate used to calculate the initial request in box 10I of FSA-848.
9L	Enter the total amount approved. This should be equal to the amount in box 10J of FSA-848. This should also be equal to the amount in box 9H multiplied by the amount in box 9K.
9M	Enter the total amount of all TTI approved in this request. (Add all rows in column 9L.)
11A	The County Office staff member must sign.
11B	The County Office staff member must enter the date.
12	Have the participant sign and date the request.
14	County office 2 nd party reviewer sign and date.
	When completed, upload the form to the TTI Survey.

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4 Forms Completion (Continued)

C FSA-848B

Use the following instructions to complete FSA-848B when the TTI activities are completed and certified.

Item	Instructions
	In the top margin of the form, enter “For CRP TTI Purposes.”
1	Enter the State and County codes.
2	Enter the County Office name, address, and telephone number.
3	Enter the unique identification number. This is the same number entered in box 3 of the FSA-848 and box 3 of the FSA-848A.
5	Enter the program year of the approved TTI activity.
8	Enter the CRP contract number.
9A	Enter the farm number.
9B	Enter the tract number.
9C	Enter the field number.
9D	Enter the eligible CRP practice (e.g., CP3).
9E	Enter the practice unit as “acres.”
9F	Enter the amount of acreage approved and obligated for payment from FSA-848A box 9M.
9G	If practice is complete, enter “yes.” If not complete, enter “no” and do not make payment.
9H	Enter the number of acres on which the TSP certified the approved activity was completed.
9I	Enter the approved TTI payment amount. This should be equal to the number of acres included in 9H multiplied by the approved incentive rate in subparagraph 2C. This should be no larger than the amount in box 9F.
9K	Enter the TTI component code.
9L	Enter the total payment amount. This amount should be equal to the sum of all rows in column I.
15A Row 1	The participant, or designee, must sign and date, certifying completion of the activity.
15A Row 2	The TSP must sign, date, certifying completion of the activity and enter a brief Performance Statement validating the activity conforms to the CPO.
15E Row 3	County office 2nd party reviewer sign and date.
	When completed, upload the form to the TTI Survey.

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5 Action

A State Office Action

State Offices shall:

- follow provisions of this notice and forward copies to the:
 - State NRCS office
 - State forestry agency office
- ensure all required information in the TTI Survey is added and updated simultaneous to completion of the FSA-848, FSA-848A, and FSA-848B.

B County Office Action

County Offices shall follow the provisions of this notice, including validating all previous TTI payments and obligations.

C Contact

For questions about this notice, contact Trevor Findley at trevor.findley@wdc.usda.gov or at 202-690-3595.

TTI Obligation and Payment Validation Checklist

Validating Existing Obligations and Payments

This checklist is to be used to validate all requests, obligations, and payments.

This form is available electronically.

CRP-120 (07-19-18) U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Commodity Credit Corporation TREE THINNING INCENTIVE (TTI) OBLIGATION AND PAYMENT VALIDATION	A. Participant's Name	B. Payment Year
	C. State Office Name	D. County Office Name
	E. Contract Number	F. Unique ID Number

PART A - VALIDATING EXISTING OBLIGATIONS AND PAYMENTS

Validate all requests, obligations, and payments made prior to July 20, 2018. By July 31, 2018, this checklist must be completed for each TTI request and included in the CRP participant's file.

ITEM	Verifier Initials	2nd Party Reviewer Initials
1. Verify that request/payment was assigned a unique identification number.		
2. Verify CRP-1 was active when tree thinning activities were completed.		
3. Verify practices on CRP contract are eligible for TTI (2-CRP para. 627).		
4. Verify acreage request for TTI does not exceed CRP contract acreage.		
5. Verify conservation plan includes eligible TTI activities in addition to required mid-contract management activities.		
6. Verify tree thinning activities were completed after October 22, 2015.		
7. Verify incentive rate is correct for activity (i.e. \$75/acre for thinning).		
8. Verify total payment amount (total acreage x incentive rate).		
9. Verify that all data is entered correctly into the TTI Survey on SharePoint.		
10. Verify payment has been made and unique identification number was loaded into the TTI Survey.		
11. Name and Initials of Verifier _____ and Reviewer _____ certifying completion of all items.		

PART B - VALIDATING FUTURE PAYMENTS

Validate all requests and payments made after July 20, 2018. This checklist must be completed for each request and included in the CRP participant's file.

ITEM	Verifier Initials	2nd Party Reviewer Initials
1. Verify that request/payment was assigned a unique identification number.		
2. Verify CRP-1 is active when the tree thinning activities are or will be completed.		
3. Verify practices on CRP contract are eligible for TTI (2-CRP para. 627).		
4. Verify acreage request for TTI does not exceed CRP contract acreage.		
5. Verify conservation plan includes eligible TTI activities in addition to required mid-contract management activities.		
6. Verify tree thinning activities were completed after October 22, 2015.		
7. Verify performance date is no later than 2 years after the date the participant is notified of acceptance.		
8. Confirm that FSA-848 is properly completed, including participant signature.		
9. Confirm that FSA-848A is properly completed.		
10. Confirm that FSA-848B is properly completed, including signature of participant and TSP.		
11. Confirm that FSA-848, FSA-848A, and FSA-848B are all uploaded on the TTI Survey SharePoint site.		
12. Confirm unique identification number was loaded onto the TTI Survey.		
13. Name and Initials of Verifier _____ and Reviewer _____ certifying completion of all items.		

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Funds Availability Letter

Following is an example of the letter for accepting CRP tree thinning requests.

Notice of CRP Tree Thinning Incentive Request Approval

Date: (MM-DD-YYYY)

Name of CRP Participant
Street Address
City/State/Zip Code

Dear _____:

This notice is to inform you that your request for the Tree Thinning Incentive payment under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) on tract _____ has been approved. The Tree Thinning Incentive payment is earned by performing tree thinning or other approved customary forestry activities, such as prescribed burning, in an integrated manner to enhance wildlife habitat.

The approved customary forestry activity must be performed in a manner consistent with the conservation plan developed or modified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Technical Service Provider (TSP). You must complete the approved activity no later than _____ [two years after the date the FSA-848A is completed].

Payment will be made following your notification to this office of practice completion and certification by NRCS or TSP.

Please contact the _____ County FSA Office for more information.

Sincerely,

/s/ _____
County Executive Director

Ineligibility Letter

Following is the ineligibility letter for CRP tree thinning requests that are not acceptable.

NOTICE REGARDING NOT ACCEPTABLE CRP TREE THINNING REQUEST

Date: (MM/DD/YYYY)

Name of CRP Participant
Street Address
City/State/Zip Code

Dear _____:

Thank you for your interest in the Conservation Reserve program (CRP) Tree Thinning Incentive payment.

This notice is to inform you that your request for this incentive payment on tract _____ was not approved for the following reason:

___ your request did not meet eligibility requirements

___ insufficient funds are available to honor your request.

Please contact the _____ County FSA Office for more information.

You may appeal this determination to the County Committee by filing a written request no later than 30 calendar days after you receive this notice in accordance with the FSA appeal procedures found at 7 CFR Part 780. If you appeal to the County Committee, you have the right to an informal hearing which you or your representative may attend either personally or by telephone. If you appeal this determination to the County Committee, you may later appeal an adverse determination of the County Committee to the FSA State Committee or the National Appeals Division or request mediation. To appeal, write to [insert County Committee address] the County Committee at the following address and explain why you believe this determination is erroneous.

Sincerely,

/s/ _____
County Executive Director