



USDA, Colorado Introduce Additional Conservation Practice to Address Regional Drought Concerns

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The Republican River Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

DENVER, Colo., May 8, 2023 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the State of Colorado are continuing and strengthening their Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) partnership to support and empower Colorado's agricultural producers and landowners in reducing consumptive water use and protecting water quality, while conserving critical natural resources. Specifically, the newly revised Colorado Republican River CREP project, now available through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, will offer producers a dryland crop production practice on eligible cropland. This option will give producers meaningful tools to continue farming as they work toward permanently retiring water rights and conserving the Ogallala Aquifer for future generations.

"This project is an example of how targeted and thoughtful federal-state partnerships can help address local natural resource concerns," said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. "The Colorado Republican River Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) will help us meet an intertwined and complex set of challenges head-on, providing opportunities for producers to keep working lands working while reducing their water use and adapting climate-resilient agricultural practices. With the new dryland crop production practice provided through this agreement, producers with eligible land will have both the authority and access to the necessary technical assistance to successfully transition away from irrigated production while maintaining soil health and wildlife habitat. I am deeply grateful for the State of Colorado's commitment to not just reaching an agreement but reaching the right agreement and strengthening a long-term partnership that will support Colorado producers into the future."

Through the revised Colorado Republican River CREP, USDA and the State of Colorado will make resources available to program participants who voluntarily enroll in CRP for 14-year to 15-year contracts. This CREP provides participants with two ways to enroll eligible land. Producers can enroll eligible land in "CP100, Annual Crop Production, Non-Irrigated." This practice transitions irrigated cropland to non-irrigated crop production and establishes complimentary wildlife habitat in and along the cropland. Additionally, participants within the Republican River CREP project area may enroll eligible land in "CP2, Permanent Native Grasses," "CP4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat," and "CP23 or CP23A, Wetland Restoration." These conservation practices remove cropland from agricultural

production and convert the land to an approved conservation cover.

Through both enrollment options, producers will earn an annual rental payment and cost share on eligible components of the practice.

The dryland crop production practice is unique because producers will be able to keep these lands working while they implement conservation-minded agricultural practices including no till farming, cover crop installation and wildlife-friendly harvesting. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will work with eligible producers to develop conservation plans which include an approved annual crop rotation, minimum crop residue requirements, and management practices that support erosion mitigation and wildlife habitat. Unlike continuous and general CRP enrollment, participants with land enrolled in the CP100 may earn additional income from crops harvested from this acreage.

"By leveraging this CREP program, we can combine significant long-term reduction of consumptive water use and conservation-based dryland crop production when drought and water conservation resource concerns exist, as they so currently do," said Kent Pepler, FSA's Colorado State Executive Director. "This approach showcases that when we work to promote both production and conservation hand-in-hand, we have the capacity to create unique partnerships that benefit our economies, landscapes, and communities."

Dan Gibbs, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, highlighted the positive impact this agreement will have on conservation efforts in the basin. Gibbs said, "We are excited about the outcome of this collaborative effort with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency. This agreement will help Colorado continue to advance its conservation efforts that are leading the basin toward a sustainable future in agriculture. The dryland production alternative provides more options that attract greater participation in the reduction of irrigation while helping preserve the economy and culture of the local region."

"Through partnership with DNR and USDA, Colorado farmers and ranchers will have the opportunity to continue production while focusing on conservation efforts," said Kate Greenberg, Colorado's Commissioner of Agriculture. "This agreement dovetails with CDA's STAR Soil Health program, which helps bring financial and technical assistance to producers interested in expanding or introducing new climate smart practices into their operations," said Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture Kate Greenberg. "Farmers and ranchers are experiencing first-hand the impacts of drought and climate change. Tools such as dryland CREP that focus on farmer-led solutions to healthy soils and water conservation are key to mitigating these effects in agricultural landscapes and providing producers options."

Interested farmers, ranchers, and agricultural landowners are encouraged to contact FSA at their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to participate. Find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator.

More Information

Currently, CREP has 35 projects in 27 states. In total, more than 784,800 acres are enrolled in CREP. The Colorado Republican River CREP is part of USDA's broader effort to leverage CREP as an important tool to address climate change and other natural resources challenges while expanding opportunities for producers and communities, especially those historically underserved by USDA. In December 2021, [USDA announced improvements](#) to the program as well as additional staff to support the program.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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