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Check Your Conservation Plan If You Add Corn to Your Rotation

INDIANAPOLIS, April 2, 2007 – Ag Corn prices have gone up, and farmers all over Indiana are thinking about adding corn to their crop rotations. One consideration for producers with highly erodible land should be staying eligible for USDA benefits.

“Don’t forget to check your conservation plan when you make planting decisions this spring,” says Jane Hardisty, State Conservationist for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “If your conservation plan requires a crop rotation to protect against erosion, you will have to continue the same level of protection to stay eligible for USDA programs.”

The 1985 Farm Bill put conservation compliance issues in place. Farmers with highly erodible soils are required to have a conservation plan that reduces erosion in order to stay eligible for USDA benefits. “If the conservation plan is based on a particular crop rotation or specified tillage decisions, they’ll want to be sure that changes to add corn don’t put fragile soils in jeopardy,” says Barry Fisher, State Agronomist for NRCS.

“This is an important issue for farmers. USDA program benefits can be substantial because they include Conservation Programs, the Farm Loan Programs and Disaster Assistance, in addition to Commodity Price Support Programs.” Management decisions play a role too, and Fisher offers the following list of considerations to farmers:

- There is a reduction in yield when corn follows corn instead of soybeans. If additional tillage is planned to reduce that yield loss, there are additional costs for those operations. And, make sure tillage operations don’t bury too much crop residue.
- Corn after corn takes 40-60 more pounds of nitrogen than corn after soybeans.
- There is added risk for insect and disease problems with corn after corn, so additional pesticides and/or stacked-trait resistant hybrids may be needed.

- Shifting to more corn will likely add to the time needed for planting, and that can push more acres of corn outside of the optimum planting window.
- At harvest, trucking, drying and storage costs are considerably higher for corn than soybeans.
- The additional inputs can be expected to add at least \$62 per acre and can be as high as \$150 per acre.

"Farmers can certainly make their own choices about cropping rotations and what they plant, however, we ask that you check your conservation plan when considering management decisions in order to remain eligible for USDA program benefits."

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