

# BUFFERNOTES



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### BUFFER NOTES

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## CRP EXTENSIONS, RE-ENROLLMENTS PLANNED

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced this fall that farmers and ranchers can re-enroll or extend their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts expiring in 2007 through 2010.

An approach relying on the Environmental Benefits Index will help producers and USDA's Farm Service Agency to determine eligibility for re-enrollment or extensions.

Between 2007 and 2010, 400,000 contracts covering 28 million acres are scheduled to expire.

"Balance is the key to any good conservation plan. So we're offering farmers and ranchers re-enrollments and contract extensions to take full advantage of the environmental benefits of this program," said Johanns. "Re-enrolling and extending these contracts is part of the president's plan to fully use the nearly 40 million acres of CRP to improve water quality as well as wildlife habitat." President Bush last year committed to re-enrolling or extending contract acreage.

FSA will use the EBI that was in place when the contracts were first written. The EBI is a measuring system that assigns point scores to the contracts and then nationally ranks all CRP land enrollment offers. Several environmental outcomes factor into EBI point scores, including wildlife habi-

tat, water quality, and air quality and reducing soil erosion.

EBI scores are based upon a 100 percentile that is divided into five ranking tiers. In the first tier, CRP producers ranking in the top 20 percent of the EBI can re-enroll their land in new contracts and farmers and ranchers with wetlands in this ranking can receive contract terms of 10- to 15- years.

CRP producers ranking within the second tier, between the 61-80 percent, can extend their contracts for five years. Farmers and ranchers ranking within the third tier, 41-60 percent, can extend their CRP contracts by four years. Those ranking in the fourth tier, between 21-40 percent, can receive 3-year extensions. Those contracts ranking in the fifth tier, the lower 20 percent of CRP producers, can extend their contracts by two years.

### Producer contacts begin in spring

In spring 2006, FSA will write to CRP producers. Farmers and ranchers will confirm their contract interests, and a compliance check will be necessary. Those potentially eligible for re-enrollments and contract extensions are CRP participants with contracts expiring between September 30, 2007,

*Continued on next page*

## FIVE TIERS FOR CRP

Using the Environmental Benefits Index, FSA will determine eligibility of CRP lands for re-enrollment or extensions. EBI scores are based upon a 100 percentile that is divided into five ranking tiers. Here's a quick look at how it will apply to re-enrollments and extensions:

**Tier 1:** CRP producers ranking in the top 20 percent of the EBI can re-enroll their land in new contracts, and farmers and ranchers with wetlands in this ranking can receive contract terms of 10- to 15- years.

**Tier 2:** CRP producers ranking within the second tier, between 61-80 percent, can extend their contracts for five years.

**Tier 3:** Farmers and ranchers ranking within the third tier, 41-60 percent, can extend their CRP contracts by four years.

**Tier 4:** Those ranking in the fourth tier, between 21-40 percent, can receive 3-year extensions.

**Tier 5:** Contracts ranking in the fifth tier, the lower 20 percent, can extend by two years.

**JOHANN'S ON CRP: "Balance is the key to any good conservation plan. So we're offering farmers and ranchers re-enrollments and contract extensions to take full advantage of the environmental benefits of this program."**

and September 30, 2010. Fifteen-year contracts that expire on September 30, 2007, cannot be extended or re-enrolled. That's a small proportion of the 16 million acres to expire in 2007. Contracts of shorter duration that expire on that date can be extended for varying numbers of years, depending on the number of years in the original contract.

### FSA to update local market rates

During the next several months, FSA will update the CRP rental rates to better reflect local market rates for cropland on new contract re-enrollments and will review cropland enrollment limits on a county-by-county basis.

A list of CRP acres by state with contracts expiring in 2007-2010 can be found at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp.htm>.

For facts on the re-enrollment and extension plan, see an FSA Fact Sheet at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/html/crpgreenroll05.htm>

*For more information on the CRP program, contact*

*your local FSA office or visit the FSA Web site at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>.*

## LASSETER NAMED FSA ADMINISTRATOR

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns has appointed Teresa Coarsey Lasseter as administrator of the FSA.

"Teresa Lasseter's experience at the local, state and federal levels, combined with her personal involvement with agriculture, provide her with tremendous insight and an ability to lead the Farm Service Agency into the future," said Johanns. "Her commitment to service fits perfectly with the agency's long tradition of serving America's farmers and ranchers."

Johanns announced the appointment prior to hosting the Georgia Farm Bill Forum this month, the 18th hosted by Johanns and the 345th in a series of forums in which members of the public are invited to express their views about farm and rural policy, in preparation for the development of the next Farm Bill in 2007.

As FSA administrator, Lasseter will oversee farm programs, farm loans, commodity operations, conservation programs, disaster assistance and field operations at FSA offices.

Lasseter, a Georgia native, served at FSA from 2001 to 2003, first as state executive director in Georgia and later as associate administrator for farm programs in Washington, D.C. Previously, she served as executive director of the Georgia Agrirama Development Authority from 1993 to 1999 and also worked for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, FSA's predecessor, in several positions from 1977 to 1993, culminating as a county executive director for Lee County.

Lasseter and her husband, Willard, have two children.

## FSA, DU SIGN NEW MOU

USDA and Ducks Unlimited have agreed to work together to maintain and enhance waterfowl and other wildlife habitats in the United States.

Steve Connelly, assistant deputy administrator for farm programs with FSA, signed the memorandum of understanding with Ducks Unlimited (DU) Executive Vice President Don Young.

"This arrangement supports the goals that President Bush set forth in his Wetlands Initiative announced on Earth Day 2004," said Connelly. "By working to protect and improve waterfowl habitats across America, USDA and Ducks Unlimited will help ensure the country continues to gain wetlands and continues to protect these important ecosystems."

The signing ceremony took place during the DU Annual Expo being held at the Memphis Agricenter in Memphis, Tenn. DU is a non-profit organization that works to conserve, restore and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl.

Under the MOU, FSA and DU will collaborate on activities that help improve wildlife habitat by working with agricultural producers and private landowners. These measures will include conservation projects, educational efforts, habitat and wildlife research, and the development of techniques that enhance habitat.

FSA will receive wetland restoration training from Ducks Unlimited and will inform private landowners with connections to FSA-administered programs about waterfowl and associated wildlife conservation practices and programs.

FSA will provide Ducks Unlimited with information on FSA-administered conservation programs and activities that positively affect waterfowl conservation programs. Ducks Unlimited will give FSA information about the status of waterfowl populations, habitat restoration and management techniques, and progress on creating new habitat.

Ducks Unlimited will assist in training FSA employees on waterfowl and associated wildlife conservation and management. In addition, the organization will inform its members and the general pub-

## CRP BENEFITS CAPSULIZED

Here's a list of the widespread environmental benefits that have evolved from CRP, as noted in a recent USDA news release:

- Reductions in soil erosion are reaching more than 450 million tons per year, thereby increasing air quality due to less airborne contamination.
- Sediment and nutrient runoff into rivers and streams is improving.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that CRP is increasing duck populations by more than two million per year.
- Ring-necked pheasant populations in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Ohio are rising by 200 percent.
- CRP is increasing grasshopper sparrow, lark



**Elk are among the wildlife species that have benefited from CRP plantings, especially in the West. (NRCS photo)**

bunting and eastern meadowlark populations.

- Long-absent prairie chickens in Texas are reappearing.
- CRP is helping Columbian sharp-tailed grouse recover.

• New bird habitats in the Northern Great Plains are emerging.

- Western state populations of big game elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer and pronghorn antelope are increasing.



lic about conservation programs conducted in cooperation with FSA.

The new arrangement will be administered through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

## **'WALK A MILE' TO ENCOURAGE WORK EXCHANGE**

NACD and the NRCS are joining forces with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on the "Walk a Mile in My Boots" initiative. The program is a work-exchange program between agriculture producers and government employees that was developed by NCBA and FWS in 2003.

Initial participation in this cooperative conservation partnership program will involve up to 10 pilot exchanges in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah. Eligible applicants will be paired in an exchange that is local and relevant to each person's areas of interest.

Farmers and ranchers participating in exchanges will visit field offices and or state and national offices. They may shadow biologists, managers or other specialists; conduct outdoor field activities; attend agricultural meetings and work with USDA officials. Outdoor activities might include conducting water control monitoring or assisting with fish and wildlife habitat planting.

Government employees will visit a ranch or farm and shadow producers in their daily operations. Activities might include branding and vaccinating calves, moving and feeding livestock, irrigating cropland, building and maintaining conservation buffers or haying.

The "Walk a Mile in My Boots" work-exchange is intended to cultivate relationships among government employees and agricultural producers, increase appreciation for rural lifestyles and related economic pressures, improve opportunities to

develop and implement effective solutions that are viable alternatives to regulation and explore ways to increase sustainability of natural resources and agricultural livelihoods.

Application information is available at [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsis.dll/NB/NB\\_260\\_6\\_1.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsis.dll/NB/NB_260_6_1.htm).

## **NACD PLANS HISTORIC 60TH ANNUAL MEETING**

NACD's 60th annual meeting is set for Jan. 29 to Feb. 2, 2006, at the Hilton Americas Hotel in Houston, Texas.

In addition to carrying on conservation business, attendees will be treated to a historical display highlighting the association's work over the past six decades. "Our 60th Annual Meeting will give us an opportunity to reflect on the past, assess the present and make plans for an even stronger NACD in the future," said NACD Executive Director Krysta Harden. Originally planned for New

Orleans, the meeting was moved to Houston following Hurricane Katrina.

Attendees will get down to work Monday, Jan. 29, with a plenary session and 12 different issues and subject matters during policy and operations sessions.

Addresses from leaders of agencies conservation districts work with are scheduled the following day, as are several training opportunities for participants.

An outdoor classroom field trip is being scheduled to give participants a close look at natural resources issues facing the Houston area.

Key leaders in agriculture, conservation and wildlife will discuss their perspectives on the future Farm Bill, highlighting challenges and areas of common interest. Also planned is a facilitated town hall session to give participants the opportunity to share their priorities for the upcoming Farm Bill debate. The feedback collected at this Farm Bill town hall meeting will be heavily weighted by the NACD Farm Bill Task Force as it develops the association's recommendations and policy positions for 2007.

Program details are located at <http://2006.nacdnet.org/program.htm>. General conference information is at <http://2006.nacdnet.org/>.

The advance registration deadline has been extended to Nov. 21, 2005.

## **WISCONSIN GROUP FOCUSES ON FUTURE**

### **Agriculture, rural life to be examined**

"The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin" is the focus of an 18-month project undertaken by leaders throughout the state.

The project is sponsored by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, a nonprofit organization based in Madison. The project seeks to develop a new vision for the future of agriculture and rural life in the state.

Forty-five participants from agriculture, conservation, business, academics and government were invited to the gathered at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine this fall, where they helped to

## **BUFFERNOTES IS BACK**

After a one-month lapse between contract periods, BufferNotes newsletter is back in business.

BufferNotes began in July 1999 as a joint project between the US Department of Agriculture and the National Association of Conservation Districts. Partners over the years have included the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency. NRCS had been the primary federal partner for the past few years. FSA has taken over that role for the new contract period.

BufferNotes was originally created to help communicate the economic and environmental benefits of conservation buffers and other practices in the continuous Conservation Reserve Program to a nationwide audience. The newsletter's mission has now expanded to cover all aspects of CRP, including the general signup, CCRP and the popular federal-state partnership known as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. NACD and its Agricultural Lands Resources Committee also plan to work with FSA and other partners to further refine the newsletter's mission and goals. More on that in future issues.

These are important times for CRP. Huge

blocks of contracted acres are scheduled to expire in the coming years, and USDA has announced plans to re-enroll or extend contracts for many of those acres. Stories in this issue of BufferNotes cover several important developments.

Likewise, there's plenty of action in other areas. CCRP signups are way up this year, compared to last. CREP agreements across the country are helping to address state-based resource needs.

We add a new feature in this issue, too. "CRP Enrollment Activity and News" will focus on monthly trends and developments and provide a link to more detailed information.

When it comes to controlling erosion, enhancing water quality and improving wildlife habitat on working lands, CRP is America's premier conservation program. We look forward to telling the story, but we need your help. Share your successes with us, and we'll share them with the nation. Feel free to contact us at [billnick@charter.net](mailto:billnick@charter.net) or 715-341-9119.

Onward!  
Bill Berry, editor

shape the project's future after engaging in a series of presentations and topical roundtables.

"The project will examine current status and trends, explore constraints and opportunities, and develop specific action and policy recommendations," said Academy Director Michael Strigel. "It will energize implementation strategies and action networks that will lead to a more sustainable, diverse and economically viable future for Wisconsin's agricultural sector, the state's rural communities and economies, and ultimately for all citizens of the state."

Participants included FSA State Executive Director Ben Brancel, NRCS State Conservationist Pat Leavenworth, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Secretary Rod Nilsestuen and Wisconsin Land and Conservation Association Executive Director Rebecca Baumann.

Agricultural producers and local community leaders also participated, as did leaders from the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives and the Wisconsin Farmers Union. Academic leadership came from the University of Wisconsin-Extension and UW-Madison, UW-Platteville and UW-Stevens Point.

### Five focus areas, activities outlined

The project includes five focus areas: Production Agriculture; Natural Resources Conservation; Public Policy and Government Influence; Food Systems; and Social, Economic and Cultural Aspects of Rural Life. Project participants in each focus area laid out plans that include five regional roundtable forums.

Other project activities over the next 18 months will include arts and culture exhibitions, a final conference or forum and a final report.

*For more information, visit the Academy's Web site at [www.wisconsinacademy.org](http://www.wisconsinacademy.org).*

### BUFFER BRIEFS

#### Wanted: Playa buffer research cooperators

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture is looking for research cooperators to evaluate how effective grass buffers are in reducing sedimentation on playa lakes. Buffers are assumed to adequately protect playas from sedimentation, but have not been formally studied. PLJV seeks to develop a research partnership to address this issue. Researchers seeking funding for a playa buffer study are encouraged to

## ENROLLMENT ACTIVITY AND NEWS

The following information is excerpted from FSA's September 2005 CRP Monthly Summary. "Enrollment and Activity and News" will be a regular feature in BufferNotes.

- Through September 2005, continuous sign-up No. 30 is 58 percent ahead of FY 2004 continuous sign-up No. 28. The increase, 70,563 acres, represents the fourth largest monthly increase since continuous sign-up began in 1997.
- Since Earth Day 2004, contracts on 86,769 acres of wetland practices have been approved. As of September 2005, wetland practice (including general and continuous sign-up) contracts total 1,956,323 acres. This includes non-wetland buffers enrolled as part of the practice.
- As of September, 63,970 acres of upland bird habitat buffers (CP33) have been enrolled, including 18,183 acres in Illinois and 11,858 acres in Kansas.
- One-year extensions were offered to holders of contracts expiring Sept. 30, 2005.

For a detailed look at the full September 2005 CRP Monthly Summary, go to [www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp\\_statistics.htm](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp_statistics.htm).

apply for a PLJV ConocoPhillips grant. Funds are available through a competitive granting process, and extra incentive funding is available for playa buffers. Proposals for the 2006 grant cycle are due Nov. 15, and funds will be awarded during the winter PLJV board meeting in January. More information is available at <http://www.pljv.org/>. For more

information, contact biological team leader Brian Sullivan at [brian.sullivan@pljv.org](mailto:brian.sullivan@pljv.org).



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