

# NEWS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of Communications News Room 460-A  
Washington, DC 20250-1300  
Internet: News @usda.gov Phone: 202-720-9035  
World Wide Web Home Page:  
<http://www.usda.gov>

Release No. 0144.98

## Questions and Answers

### ILLINOIS CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

**1) Q: What is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program?**

**A:** The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a joint, State-Federal effort to retire land targeted to address State and nationally significant agriculture-related environmental effects. This voluntary program uses financial incentives to encourage farmers and ranchers to enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contracts of 10- to 15-years' duration to remove lands from agricultural production.

**2) Q: What is the Illinois CREP?**

**A:** The Illinois CREP has been developed to address environmental problems associated with the Illinois River. It is a Federal and State partnership agreement to retire environmentally sensitive land through the Conservation Reserve Program. An important feature of the Illinois CREP is that at the time producers enter into a 15-year CRP contract with the Federal government, they may voluntarily enter a supplemental contract with the State for an additional 15 or 35 years, or enter into a permanent easement with the State. In exchange, the State will make a bonus payment to the landowner for a contract extension or easement.

**3) Q: What are the goals of the Illinois CREP?**

**A:** Illinois and USDA have jointly developed several goals for the Illinois CREP. They include:

- Reduce sedimentation in the Illinois River by 20 percent;
- Reduce nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) in the Illinois River by 10 percent;
- Increase populations of waterfowl, and State and Federally listed species by 15 percent;
- Increase native fish and mussel stocks in the lower reaches of the Illinois River by 10 percent;

Illinois will conduct monitoring throughout the project lifespan to evaluate and record progress in achieving these goals.

-more-

-2-

**4) Q: What sections of the Illinois River are included in the program?**

**A:** The project area consists of the subwatersheds along the Middle Illinois and Peoria Lake sections of the Illinois River and the watersheds of the following tributaries of the Illinois River--Vermillion, Mackinaw, Spoon, Lower Fox, Lower Sangamon, and Kankakee. These areas were selected for inclusion in the program based on the heavy rates of sedimentation that originate within these watersheds.

**5) Q: What are some of the expected benefits of the Illinois CREP?**

**A:**

- Reduced sedimentation will improve navigation along the Illinois River and reduce flood mitigation costs;
- Restoration of natural ecosystems will improve wildlife habitat;
- Improved water quality will improve recreational opportunities and reduce water treatment costs.

**6) Q: What types of conservation practices are available under the Illinois CREP?**

**A:** Within the project area, eligible highly erodible land (weighted average erosion index  $\geq 12$ ) which must be adjacent to a stream corridor may be devoted to permanent native grasses, tree planting, or permanent wildlife habitat. Eligible frequently flooded lands, farmed wetlands, and prior converted wetlands may be devoted to shallow water areas for wildlife, wildlife food plot, filter strip, riparian buffer, and wetland restoration.

**7) Q: Who can sign up for the Illinois CREP and when?**

**A:** Enrollment for CREP will be on a continuous basis beginning May 1, 1998. In addition to offering acreage within the project area boundary, the applicant must satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP. Land must be cropland that has been cropped 2 out of the past 5 years that was physically and legally capable of being cropped. Marginal pasture land is also eligible to be enrolled provided it is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees. Producers are eligible if the land has been owned or operated for at least 1 year prior to enrollment. Persons who have an existing CRP contract or an approved offer are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

**8) Q: What are the payments under CREP?**

**A:** Participants in the Illinois CREP will receive a 30 percent increase above the annual per acre rental rate for enrollment of riparian buffers, filter strips, and wetland restoration and a 20 percent increase above the annual per acre rental rate for enrollment of erodible land. The Federal government will also pay 50 percent of the cost of installing the new vegetative cover. Participants may receive \$5 per acre for annual maintenance regardless of the conservation practice installed. If the participant chooses to extend the contract duration beyond 15 years, an extra bonus payment from the State will be paid in the first year of the CRP contract. In addition, the State will pay 40 to 50 percent of the cost to install the vegetative cover.

-more-

-3-

**9) Q: What is the cost of the Illinois program?**

**A:** For enrollment of 100,000 acres, the total financial obligation will be approximately \$250 million over 15 years, with \$48 million coming from the State and the remaining \$202 million coming from the Federal government. The State share is approximately 20 percent of the total program costs and the Federal government share is approximately 80 percent.

**10) Q: Can I still enroll in general CRP and continuous signup CRP?**

**A:** CREP is another option that a farmer or rancher may select to enhance his or her land. An applicant may instead choose to apply for the general CRP or continuous signup CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous signup.

**11) Q: Can I hay or graze my CREP land?**

**A:** Haying and grazing will not be permitted during the CRP contract period except under emergency conditions as determined by Farm Service Agency. If the contract is extended with the State for an additional 15 years or longer, some haying and grazing may be permitted according to the provisions of the State contract or easement.

**12) Q: Where can I get more information about the program?**

**A:** Contact the county U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Center, Soil and Water Conservation District, or State of Illinois Department of Natural Resources District Office.

#

NOTE: USDA news releases and media advisories are available on the Internet. Access the USDA Home Page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.usda.gov>