

Fact Sheet

June 2004

Conservation Security Program

Overview

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. CSP identifies and rewards those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

CSP provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, and range land, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation.

CSP is available in all 50 States, the Caribbean area and the Pacific Basin area. The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill) (Pub. L. 107-171) amended the Food Security Act of 1985 to authorize the program. CSP is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Benefits

CSP will help producers maintain conservation stewardship and implement additional conservation practices that provide added environmental enhancement, while creating powerful incentives for other producers to

meet those same standards of conservation performance.

The conservation benefits gained will help farms and ranches be more environmentally sustainable and will increase the natural resources benefits provided to all Americans.

How CSP Works

1. The CSP sign-up will be offered in selected watersheds across the Nation. Selected watersheds are listed on the Internet from:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/> and in NRCS offices nationwide.
2. Producers complete a self-assessment, including description of conservation activities on their operations, to help determine eligibility for CSP at this time. The self-assessment is available from:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/> and in NRCS state offices on compact disk or as a printed workbook.
3. Eligible producers in the selected watersheds submit an application at their local NRCS office.
4. Based on the application, description of conservation activities, and a follow-up interview, NRCS determines in which program tier and enrollment category the applicant may participate.

Eligibility

The producer and the producer's operation first must meet the basic eligibility criteria:

- The land must be privately owned or Tribal land and the majority of the land must be located within one of the selected watersheds.

- The applicant must be in compliance with highly erodible and wetland provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, have an active interest in the agricultural operation, and have control of the land for the life of the contract.
- The applicant must share in the risk of producing any crop or livestock and be entitled to a share in the crop or livestock marketed from the operation.

All applicants must meet the following minimum tier eligibility and contract requirements, plus any additional requirements in the sign-up announcement:

- For Tier I, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) standards on part of the agricultural operation prior to acceptance.
- For Tier II, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to the FOTG standards on the entire agricultural operation prior to acceptance and agree to address one additional resource by the end of the contract period.
- For Tier III, the producer must have addressed all resource concerns to a resource management system level that meets the FOTG standards on the entire agricultural operation before acceptance into the program and agree to additional enhancement activities outlined in the sign-up announcement.

Soil quality practices include crop rotations, cover crops, tillage practices, prescribed grazing, and providing adequate wind barriers.

Water quality practices include conservation tillage, filter strips, terraces, grassed waterways, managed access to streams, nutrient and pesticide management, prescribed grazing, and irrigation water management.

CSP Contract Payment

CSP contract payments include one or more of the following:

- An annual stewardship component for the existing base level conservation treatment.
- An annual existing practice component for the maintenance of existing conservation practices.
- An enhancement component for exceptional conservation effort and additional conservation practices or activities that provide increased resource benefits beyond the prescribed level.
- A one-time new practice component for additional needed practices.

Enhancements will be made for exceptional conservation effort and additional conservation practices or activities that provide increased resource benefits beyond the prescribed level. There are five types of enhancement activities:

1. The improvement of a significant resource concern to a condition that exceeds the requirements for the participant's tier of participation and contract requirements.
2. An improvement in a priority local resource condition, as determined by NRCS, such as water quality and wildlife.
3. Participation in an on-farm conservation research, demonstration, or pilot project.
4. Cooperation with other producers to implement watershed or regional resource conservation plans that involve at least 75 percent of the producers in the targeted area.
5. Implementation of assessment and evaluation activities relating to practices included in the conservation security plan, such as water quality sampling at field edges, drilling monitoring wells and collecting data, and gathering plant samples for specific analysis.

Total payments are determined by the tier of participation, the unadjusted stewardship rate and the acres enrolled:

- For Tier I, contracts are for 5 years; maximum payment is \$20,000 annually.
- For Tier II, contracts are for 5 to 10 years; maximum payment is \$35,000 annually.
- For Tier III, contracts are for 5 to 10 years; maximum payment is \$45,000 annually.

For More Information

If you need more information about CSP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the Internet at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.