

Natural Resource News in South Carolina

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USDA Announces 2005 Conservation Security Program Contracts Over 150 contracts Eligible in South Carolina's Four Eligible Watersheds

EDGEFIELD, SC, July 28, 2005—Speaking from Edgefield County, Richard Coombe, Regional Assistant Chief - East, for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), announced that approximately 150 contracts will be offered under the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in South Carolina. The contracts cover 100,000 acres of agricultural land and provide over \$1.9 million to producers participating in the program. South Carolina had four eligible watersheds in 2005 including the Black, Lynches, Saluda, and South Fork Edisto River watersheds. A program sign up was conducted in South Carolina from March to May of 2005.

"CSP participants are conservation innovators. What they do today will lead to additional environmental benefits for the nation as they share their knowledge of conservation with others," said Coombe at a CSP signing ceremony at the Edgefield County farm of Lewis Holmes. Speaking from his peach operation, Holmes explained that his conservation ethic was passed down from family. He told the crowd, "My grandfather always said that if I took care of the land, it would take care of me." CSP provides financial assistance (over a ten-year period) for a broad range of conservation work that is protecting and enhancing natural resources including water quality, soil quality and wildlife habitat.

CSP contracts in 2005 cover about 9 million acres of private land in 220 eligible watersheds nationwide. USDA expects to fully invest the \$202 million provided by Congress for this fiscal year. "All successful applicants have achieved high technical standards for protecting soil and water quality," said NRCS South Carolina State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas. "This program is designed to reward producers like Mr. Holmes and encourage them to do more. We're looking for others to follow their lead, and we want more landowners to meet the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations," explained Douglas.

NRCS also extended the comment period on the interim final rule for CSP to September 9, 2005. This extension will give the public additional time to comment on key issues regarding implementation of the program.

CSP is a voluntary program that supports ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural working lands and enhances the condition of America's natural resources. NRCS financial and technical assistance promotes the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes. CSP will be available each year on a rotational basis in as many watersheds as funding allows. Additional information on CSP, including the self-assessment workbook and Federal Register notice, is at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.