

Conservation Security Program: 2005 Sign-up

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private, working 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.

In addition, CSP creates powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance. In short, CSP rewards the best and motivates the rest. Through these rewards and incentives, CSP builds a foundation of natural resource conservation that will provide benefits to the public for generations to come.

Watershed Approach

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is using watersheds as a basis to determine CSP participation. This makes sense economically, practically, and administratively.

Watersheds are nature's boundaries and are the best science-based way to group together producers working on similar environmental issues.

The budget for CSP in fiscal year 2005 is \$202 million. Focusing on selected watersheds reduces the administrative burden on applicants and reduces the costs of processing a large number of applications that cannot be funded. The law requires that NRCS not incur more than 15 percent technical assistance costs associated with CSP.

2005 Watersheds

In fiscal year 2005, CSP will touch 220 watersheds (one or more in every State and the Caribbean Area), about 1,000 counties, and nearly 1,000 local conservation districts. Combined, these watersheds include about 185 million acres, an area about the size of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida (which total 190.5 million acres). About 235,000 farms and ranches are within these watershed boundaries and they cover about 100 million acres, an area nearly the size of California (which is 101 million acres). About 54 percent of this working agricultural land is cropland and 46 percent is grazing land.

A map showing the locations of the watersheds is online at:

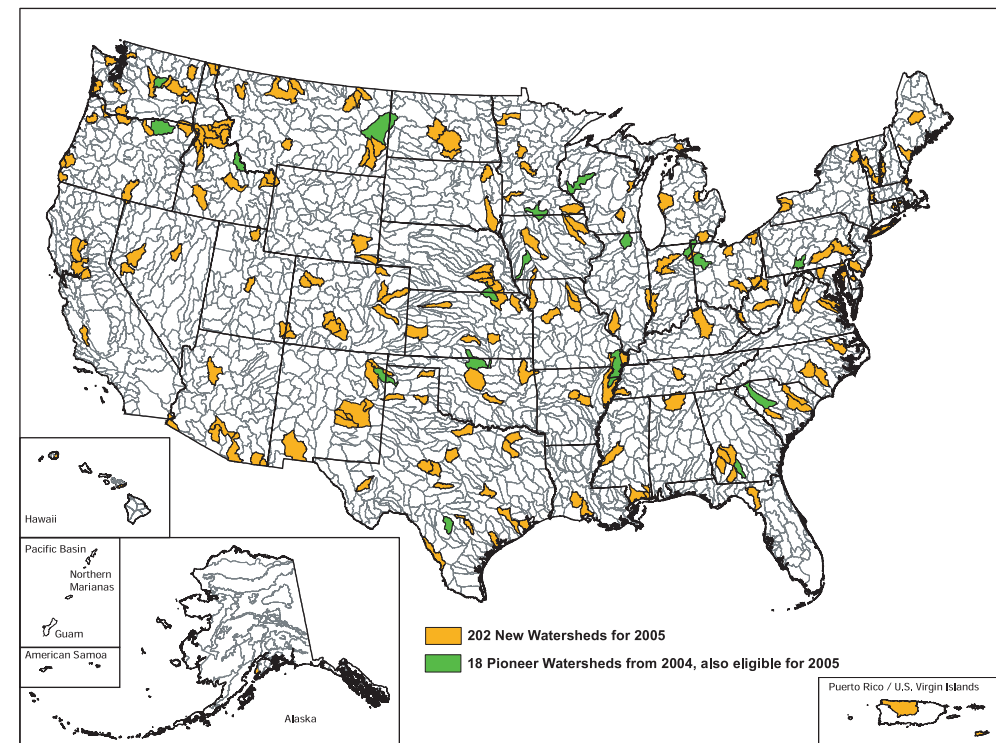
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>

Watershed Selection

NRCS used several criteria for selecting the watersheds to participate in CSP, including:

- Contain a variety of land uses (crops, rangeland, pasture, vineyards/orchards) and input intensities.
- Have high-priority resource issues to be addressed, including issues that meet State priorities.
- Have a history of good land stewardship on the part of landowners.
- Have the technical tools necessary, such as digitized soils information to streamline program implementation.
- State level input was provided by NRCS State Conservationists to integrate State resource priorities into the watershed selection process.

CSP Watersheds: FY-2005 Sign-up (All 220 watersheds will be eligible)



Watersheds also were evaluated from a national perspective regarding regional resource issues that would enhance CSP's overall environmental goals. Preference was given where improving resources would assist the recovery of threatened and endangered species or add measurably to critical resource recovery efforts and extensive watershed-wide measures were in place.

Other watersheds will be selected each year until landowners in every watershed have had a chance to participate. Every agricultural operation is in a watershed.

How To Participate

1. Access the CSP self-assessment workbook either online or by getting a hard copy or CD-ROM from the local USDA Service Center or NRCS office.
2. Using the workbook, producers (1) determine whether they meet basic eligibility requirements, (2) document their stewardship work to date, and (3) prepare a benchmark inventory documenting conservation they have undertaken so far.
3. Submit the completed self-assessment workbook to the local NRCS office during the sign-up period.
4. Meet with NRCS personnel to go over any additional needed documentation.
5. NRCS determines the enrollment category for which the producer qualifies.
6. Finally, NRCS will select the categories to be funded for CSP contracts.

All CSP applications that meet sign-up criteria will be placed in an enrollment category regardless of available funding. In addition to legal contract requirements, the categories will consider the applicants' current stewardship (soil condition, tillage intensity, existing practices, and activities) and will sort producers based on these factors. Categories also will examine producers' willingness to perform additional conservation activities during their CSP contract.

For More Information

For additional information about CSP, 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:

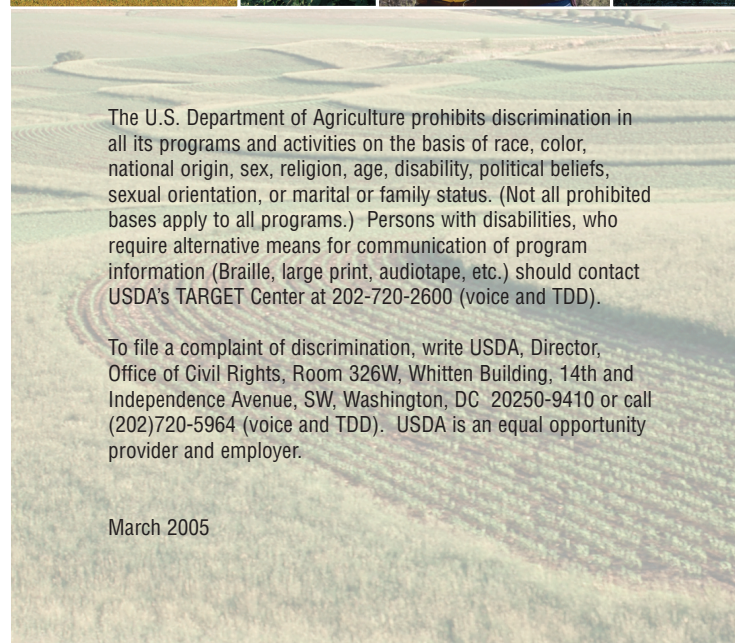
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United States Department of Agriculture
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