

Fact Sheet: Conservation Stewardship Program

June 2010

Overview

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by (1) undertaking additional conservation activities and (2) improving and maintaining existing conservation systems. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help land stewards conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land.

Eligibility

CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or crops produced, in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas.

Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian tribes. They must:

- Be the operator of record in the USDA farm records management system for the eligible land being offered for enrollment;
- Have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract;
- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions of 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 12 and

adjusted gross income provisions of 7 CFR part 1400; and

- Include the eligible land in their entire agricultural or forestry operation.

Benefits to Participants

CSP pays participants for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment. It provides two possible types of payments. An annual payment is available for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices. A supplemental payment is available to participants who also adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation.

Through five-year contracts, NRCS makes payments as soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous year.

- *Payment Limit.* A person or legal entity may have more than one CSP contract but, for all CSP contracts combined, may not receive more than \$40,000 in any year or more than \$200,000 during any five-year period.
- *Contract Limit.* The contract limit is the same as the payment limit except in the case of joint operations, for which the contract limit is \$80,000 per fiscal year and \$400,000 over the term of the contract period.

Payment limits and contract limits do not apply in the case of federally recognized Indian tribes or Alaska Native corporations.



Participants who are historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers or ranchers, beginning farmers or ranchers, or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers) may receive a minimum payment of \$1,000 if the contract amount in any given year is less than that amount.

How CSP Works

NRCS makes CSP available on a nationwide basis through continuous sign-up, with announced cut-off dates for ranking and funding applications. CSP addresses seven resource concerns (soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, and animal resources) as well as energy. Each NRCS State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Committee and local working groups, focuses the program on three to five priority resource concerns for their State.

Applications are evaluated and ranked relative to other applications that address similar resource concerns in the State. In the ranking process, producers get credit both for conservation measures they have already implemented and for new measures they agree to add. Agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land applications are ranked separately.

Potential applicants are encouraged to determine whether CSP is the right program for them by completing the self-screening checklist and downloading the CSP Conservation Activity List to identify new conservation activities they might install. Because some conservation enhancements work better when implemented as a group, the activity list identifies enhancement “bundles” that receive both higher rankings and higher payments. Both the checklist and the activity list are available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/new_csp.

If an applicant is preapproved for funding, NRCS requests the applicant’s conservation activity records and conducts on-site field verification to ensure that the information

provided is accurate. Once the information is verified, NRCS and the applicant proceed to develop the contract.

More Information

For more information and updates about the Farm Bill, visit www.usda.gov/farmbill or the NRCS Web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill; for more information on CSP, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/new_csp.