

Alternatives and Options



Your CRP contract is expiring. What are your options?

Land in CRP is considered cropland, however not all cropland is created equal in terms of erosion and yield potential. In fact, many acres enrolled in CRP may be best suited to other land uses such as buffers, pasture or grazing land, hay production, forest land, or wildlife habitat.

Your choices will impact the local economy, landscape and environment. More than likely, the decision you make will depend on a variety of factors:

Personal goals and interests

- **Profitability**
- **Soil types**
- **Rental rates**
- **Family situations**
- **Yield expectations**

Options:

- Re-enroll eligible acres in CRP
- Return to a cropland rotation
- Convert acres to pasture or hayland
- Manage the expired CRP for wildlife
- Manage the expired CRP for forestry

It's a good idea to take a look at your soils, soil productivity and limitations, past yields, commodity prices, production, conversion or renovation costs and other required investments and consider these land use alternatives before making any decisions.

Steeper portions, potentially the more erodible soils of CRP land may be best suited to stay in CRP or used for pasture, forest land, or hayland with some renovation and investment. Other areas, including wetlands, filter strips or buffer areas where you may have established grass, trees or shrubs could continue to provide excellent wildlife habitat and add diversity to your farm. These areas may be eligible for re-enrollment under Continuous or general CRP. Land coming out of CRP also presents a unique opportunity to initiate organic farming production.

To help guide you through the decision process, review the following questions. Some are more general while others are specifically related to potential land use(s) you may be considering. Feel free to discuss any of these questions or issues with the staff at your local NRCS field office.

Land Use Decision Checklist: Re-enroll eligible acres into CRP

- Is the land eligible to re-enroll in CRP?
- Is a portion of the contract eligible for a continuous CRP practice?
- Is the land, or a portion of the land enrolled in the Managed Forest Law (MFL)?
- How many years will your CRP contract be re-enrolled for?
- What is the new CRP rental rate?
- What enhancements or renovations will be needed if the land is re-enrolled? (more species diversity, weed control, brush removal, mid-contract management, etc.)
- Other income or cost-share sources?

Convert to pasture or hayland

- If you don't own livestock would you consider leasing the CRP as pasture(s) to another operator?
- Would you need additional cattle to make a grazing system economical?
- Do you have a prescribed grazing plan?
- Is the land planted to trees?
- Is there an adequate source of water available? If not, cost-share may be available.
- What type of fencing would you use? Are current fences adequate? If not, cost-share may be available.
- Is there a noxious weed problem on the fields?
- Is the existing forage (grass and legumes mix) adequate for grazing and/or haying?
- What management activities (seeding, fertilization, weed control, prescribed grazing, etc.) are required to maintain or improve the existing stand?
- Farm loans may be available.

Manage the expired CRP for Wildlife

- Do you plan to build a home or some other structure on the site someday?
- Which species of wildlife do you want to support?
- Managed grazing can enhance the area for wildlife. Consider grazing as a management activity to maintain a healthy plant community.
- What improvements are needed to make the land more desirable for the wildlife species of your choice?
- Consider other income or cost-share sources.

Manage the expired CRP for Forest Land

- Do you plan to build a home or some other structure on the site someday?
- Does the plantation need forest stand improvement (thinning), brush management or pruning?
- Are you interested in wildlife species that require forested habitat?
- Implement a forest management plan to maintain a healthy, productive stand of trees.
- Consider entering the Managed Forest Law (MFL) for property tax benefits.
- If the land is already entered into MFL, how many years remain on that agreement?

Return to a cropland rotation

Do you plan to farm or rent the land for cropland?

- What is the planned crop rotation and expected yields?
- Is the land planted to trees?
- Do you have a current soil test?
- How will you kill the existing vegetation? Do you plan to apply herbicide the fall before planting?
- Do you plan to use a no-till system to initiate cropping?
- What conservation practices will be required to control erosion and for conservation compliance on HEL fields?
- Do you know where the more productive and less productive soils on the field are located?

*For more information contact NRCS at
your local USDA Service Center or at
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