



Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Sign-Up

OVERVIEW

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Continuous sign-up contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorized CRP. The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The program is implemented by FSA on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation. More detailed information on CRP is available in the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program" located at www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/2014_crp-general.pdf

BENEFITS

CRP protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams. The vegetative covers also make CRP a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

ADMINISTRATION

FSA administers CRP while technical support functions are provided by:

- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- USDA's National Institute of Food and Agricul-

- ture (NIFA);
- State forestry agencies;
- Local soil and water conservation districts;
- Other non-federal providers of technical assistance.

CONTINUOUS SIGN-UP

Under continuous sign-up authority, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements. Unlike CRP enrollments under general sign-up authority, offers for continuous sign-up are not subject to competitive bidding.

The effective date of the CRP contract is the first day of the month following the month of approval. In certain circumstances, producers may defer the effective date for up to six months.

If the acreage is currently under CRP contract and is within one year of the scheduled expiration date, the effective date is Oct. 1 following the expiration date.

To offer land for continuous sign-up, producers should contact their local FSA office.

ELIGIBLE PRODUCERS

A producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to submitting the offer, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner's death;
- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with state law or;
- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

ELIGIBLE LAND

Land must be cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity four of the previous six crop years from 2008 to 2013, and is physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity.

ELIGIBLE PRACTICES

The land must be eligible and suitable for any of the following conservation practices:

- Riparian buffers;
- Wildlife habitat buffers;
- Wetland buffers;
- Filter strips;
- Wetland restoration;
- Grass waterways;
- Shelterbelts;
- Living snow fences;
- Contour grass strips;
- Constructed wetlands;
- Restoration of aquaculture wetlands;
- Wildlife habitat restoration within approved State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) projects;
- Salt tolerant vegetation or;
- Shallow water areas for wildlife.

Land within an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-designated public wellhead area also may be eligible for enrollment on a continuous basis.

PAYMENTS

FSA provides CRP continuous sign-up participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentives and cost-share assistance:

• Rental Payments

◦ In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides annual rental payments to participants. FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dry-land cash rent or cash rent equivalent as guidelines.

◦ The per-acre annual rental rate may not exceed the calculated rate determined in advance of enrollment. While continuous sign-up acceptance is not determined by a competitive offer process, producers may elect to receive an amount less than the maximum payment rate.

• Cost-Share Assistance

◦ An upfront signing incentive payment (SIP) up to **\$150** per acre. The one-time SIP will be made after the contract is approved and all payment eligibility criteria are met and;

◦ A practice incentive payment (PIP) equal to 40 percent of the eligible installation costs for eligible participants who enroll certain practices. The one-time PIP will be issued after the practice is installed, eligible costs are verified and other payment eligibility criteria are met.

MORE INFORMATION

To find more information about FSA programs, contact your local FSA office or USDA Service Center, or visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov.

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