

Land Stewardship Project Fact Sheet

Conservation Security Program

Overview

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance for the conservation, protection, and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private lands. The program provides payments for producers who practice good stewardship on their agricultural lands and incentives for those who want to do more. CSP assistance was authorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) and the program will be available in fiscal year 2003. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the program.

Benefits

The CSP will help owners and operators of agricultural lands maintain conservation stewardship and implement and maintain additional needed conservation practices. The conservation benefits gained will keep farms and ranches more sustainable and profitable and increase the benefits provided to all Americans through improved natural resources.

How CSP Works

An inventory will be conducted to identify resource concerns and determine the extent of conservation treatment that is being applied and maintained on the producer's land. Payments will include a base payment determined by the treatment level, maintenance payments for currently applied conservation practices, cost-share assistance for new conservation practices, and enhanced payments for exceptional conservation efforts.

A three-tiered approach will be used when offering base payments.

- Tier I addresses at least one natural resource concern to a nondegradation level on part of the agricultural operation. Base payment is 5 percent of either the average national rental rate for the 2001 crop year for the specific land use or another appropriate rate that ensures regional equity, up to \$5000. Tier I contracts are limited to 5 years.
- Tier II goes a step further; it must treat one or more natural resource concerns to a non-degradation level and involve the entire agricultural operation. Base payment is 10 percent of either the average national rental rate for the 2001 crop year for the specific land use or another appropriate rate that ensures regional equity, up to \$10,500. Tier II contracts range from 5 to 10 years, as determined by the producer.
- Tier III is the highest level of conservation management; it must treat all natural resource concerns to a non-degradation level and must involve the entire agricultural operation. Base payment is 15 percent of either the average national rental rate for the 2001 crop year for the specific land use or another appropriate rate that ensures regional equity, up to \$13,500. Tier III contracts range from 5 to 10 years, as determined by the producer.

In addition to the base payment, participants may receive up to 75 percent (up to 90 percent for beginning farmers and ranchers) of the cost of maintaining conservation practices as determined by the county average costs for 2001 of conservation practice maintenance, unless a maintenance agreement exists or practices are required by conservation compliance.

At the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture, payment enhancements may be added for such things as applying practices that exceed the minimum requirements for the tier, addressing local conservation

priorities in addition to the concerns for the agricultural operation, participating in research and demonstration projects, cooperating with other producers to implement watershed or regional resource conservation plans that cover at least 75 percent of the targeted area, or carrying out assessment and evaluation activities relating to practices included in a conservation security plan.

If a producer desires to improve treatment by adding new practices, cost-share payments for needed practices are available through the CSP at up to 75 percent of the cost of the new practice, or up to 90 percent in the case of beginning farmers or ranchers, as determined by the county average costs for 2001. Participants may contribute to the cost of the new practice through in-kind sources, such as personal labor, use of personal equipment, donated labor or materials, and use of on-hand or approved used materials. Cost-shared practices are to be maintained for the life of the practice.

Eligibility

The CSP is available to agricultural producers, including Tribal producers. Private agricultural land (including cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture land, and rangeland), land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe, and forested land that is an incidental part of the agricultural operation is eligible for enrollment in CSP. Land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Grassland Reserve Program and land converted to cropland after the enactment of the CSP legislation is not eligible.

For More Information

If you need more information about CSP, please 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 at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/