

Fact Sheet

December 2003

Conservation Security Program

Proposed Rule Available for Comment

The proposed rule for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) is available for comment. You may access it via the Internet through the NRCS home page at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>. Select "Farm Bill."

We are seeking comments on all facets of the program. Please send your comments by mail to Conservation Operations Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), P.O. Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013 or by e-mail to david.mckay@usda.gov; Attn: Conservation Security Program.

Comments will be accepted for 60 days. All comments will be considered as NRCS develops the final rule.

Overview

CSP is a voluntary conservation program to support ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural lands by providing payments to producers who maintain and enhance the condition of natural resources. CSP will identify and reward those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

In addition, CSP will create powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance.

In short, CSP will reward the best and motivate the rest. Through these rewards and incentives, CSP will build a foundation of natural resource conservation that will provide benefits to the public for generations to come.

Benefits

CSP will help producers maintain conservation stewardship and implement additional conservation practices that provide added environmental enhancement. The conservation benefits gained will help farms and ranches be more economically and environmentally sustainable and will increase the natural resources benefits provided to all Americans.

How CSP Works

The first CSP sign-up will be offered in selected priority watersheds across the Nation. Producers within these watersheds may submit an application once they meet eligibility criteria outlined below and complete a benchmark inventory documenting the existing conservation treatment on each land use within the agricultural operation for land to be enrolled. NRCS will provide the necessary materials for completing the inventory prior to the first sign-up.

Based on the benchmark inventory and a follow-up interview, NRCS will determine in which program tier the applicant could participate.

Eligibility

Both the producer and the producer's operation must first meet the basic eligibility criteria:

- The land must be privately owned or Tribal land and the majority of the land must be located within a selected priority watershed.
- The applicant must be in compliance with highly erodible and wetland provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, have an

active interest in the agricultural operation, and have control of the land for the life of the contract.

- The applicant must share in the risk of producing any crop or livestock and be entitled to a share in the crop or livestock marketed from the operation.

All applicants must meet the following minimum tier eligibility and contract requirements, plus any additional requirements in the sign-up announcement.

- For Tier I, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) standards on part of the agricultural operation prior to acceptance.
- For Tier II, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to the FOTG standards on the entire agricultural operation prior to acceptance and agree to address one additional resource by the end of the contract period.
- For Tier III, the producer must have addressed all resource concerns to a resource management system level that meets the FOTG standards on the entire agricultural operation before acceptance into the program and agree to additional enhancement activities outlined in the sign-up announcement.

Soil quality practices include crop rotations, cover crops, tillage practices, prescribed grazing, nutrient and manure management, and providing adequate wind barriers.

Water quality practices include conservation tillage, filter strips, terraces, grassed waterways, managed access to streams, nutrient and pesticide management, prescribed grazing, and irrigation water management.

CSP Contract Payment

CSP contract payments include one or more of the following:

- An annual base component for the benchmark conservation treatment.

- An annual existing practice component for those maintaining existing conservation practices.
- A one-time new practice component for additional needed practices.
- An enhancement component for exceptional conservation effort and additional conservation practices or activities that provide increased resource benefits beyond the prescribed level. The five enhancement components are: installing additional conservation measures, addressing locally identified conservation needs, participating in watershed related activities, on-farm research and demonstration, and assessment and evaluation activities.

Total payments are determined by the tier of participation:

- For Tier I, contracts are for 5 years; maximum payment is \$20,000 annually.
- For Tier II, contracts are for 5-10 years; maximum payment is \$35,000 annually.
- For Tier III, contracts are for 5-10 years; maximum payment is \$45,000 annually.

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 on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.