



**Conservation Reserve Program --
Continuous Sign-Up for High Priority
Conservation Practices**

Authorization

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorizes the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which is implemented through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

Overview

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that offers annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term resource-conserving covers on eligible land. The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) makes annual rental payments based on the agriculture rental value of the land and provides cost share assistance in an amount equal to not more than 50 percent of the participant's costs in establishing approved practices. The durations of contracts are from 10 to 15 years.

Start Date

Continuous Sign-Up began September 4, 1996, and is scheduled to be available indefinitely.

Continuous CRP Sign-Up

Continuous sign-up provides management flexibility to farmers and ranchers to implement certain high-priority conservation practices on eligible land. Offers are automatically accepted, provided the acreage and producer meet certain eligibility requirements. The per-acre rental rate may not exceed the CCC's maximum payment amount. While acceptance is not determined by a competitive bidding process, producers may elect to receive an amount less than the maximum payment rate.

Eligible Land and Practices

To be eligible under continuous sign-up, land must first meet the basic CRP eligibility requirements. Acceptable land is the following:

- (1) Cropland that was planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 2 of the 5 most recent crop years (including field margins) which is also physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or
- (2) Marginal pasture land that is suitable for use as a riparian buffer to be planted to trees.

The acreage must also be determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to be eligible and suitable for any of the following practices:

- Riparian buffers;
- Filter strips;
- Grass waterways;
- Shelter belts;
- Field windbreaks;
- Living snow fences;
- Contour grass strips;
- Salt tolerant vegetation; or
- Shallow water areas for wildlife.

Also eligible is acreage within an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated wellhead protection area.

Producer Eligibility Requirements

Land must have been owned or operated for at least 12 months prior to close of the sign-up period unless:

- The new owner acquired the land as a result of death of the previous owner;

Fact Sheet

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- The only 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 CCC that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

If a tenant, the producer must be a participant with an eligible owner or operator.

Rental Rates

The CCC bases rental rates on the average value of dryland cash rent or the cash rent equivalent for the past three years and adjusts rates to reflect the relative productivity of soils within each county. The maximum CRP rental rate is calculated in advance of enrollment.

In addition, CCC offers additional financial incentives of up to 20 percent of the soil rental rate for field windbreaks, grass waterways, filterstrips, and riparian buffers. An additional 10 percent may be added to the soil rental rate for land located within EPA- designated wellhead protection areas. A per-acre payment rate may also be added for maintenance of eligible practices.

Offers for rents greater than the maximum rental rate are not considered, and the maximum rental rate may not be appealed.

Only determinations by USDA officials regarding soil type and related soil type acreage may be appealed.

Cost-Share Payments

In addition to the payments described above, the CCC will pay up to 50 percent of the cost of establishing a permanent cover.

Contract Effective Date

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 contract and is within one year of the scheduled expiration date, the effective date is the October 1st following the expiration date.

Length of Contracts

Contracts are granted for no less than 10 and no more than 15 years in duration.

Cooperating Agencies

CRP is administered by the Farm Service Agency in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, State forestry agencies, and local soil and water conservation districts. These are usually listed in local telephone books under "United States Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

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