

## USDA TO INVEST \$150 MILLION THROUGH CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM TO HELP IMPROVE WORKING LANDS

*Applications for new contracts and to renew expiring contracts are due March 31, 2016.*

**LINCOLN, Feb. 5, 2016** – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced yesterday that \$150 million in funding is available for agricultural producers through the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP), USDA’s largest conservation program that helps producers voluntarily improve the health and productivity of private and Tribal working lands. USDA’s [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) plans to add an estimated 10 million acres to the rolls of CSP during fiscal 2016.

“The Conservation Stewardship Program is one of our most popular programs with producers because it results in real change on the ground by boosting soil and air quality, conserving clean water and enhancing wildlife habitat,” Vilsack said. “With this investment, we’ll be able to build on the already record number of acres enrolled in USDA’s conservation programs, enabling producers to achieve higher levels of conservation and adopt new and emerging conservation technologies on farms, ranches and forests.”

NRCS accepts applications for CSP throughout the year, but producers should submit applications by March 31 to [USDA service centers](#) to ensure they are considered for enrollment in 2016.

Participants with existing CSP contracts that will expire on Dec. 31, 2016, have the option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands. Applications to renew are also due by March 31.

According to Craig Derickson, NRCS state conservationist, “CSP has been a very successful program for Nebraska’s farmers and ranchers. Over 2,500 CSP contracts occur in all 93 counties and cover nearly 5 million acres in Nebraska.”

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Funding is available for more than 100 kinds of enhancements nationwide to help participants:

- Improve soil quality through use of cover crops, conservation crop rotations and other activities that increase soil productivity.
- Use water wisely and improve water quality through enhancements such as more efficient irrigation systems and weather monitoring.
- Restore habitat for wildlife and pollinators such as the greater sage-grouse, lesser prairie-chicken and monarch butterfly through the use of better grazing systems and improved plant management.

A [CSP self-screening checklist](#) is available to help producers determine if the program is compatible with their operation. As part of the application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land to determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

Through CSP, USDA has provided more than \$4 billion since 2009 in assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest managers to enhance conservation on more than 70 million acres. For more on technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit your [local NRCS office](#) or [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov).

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