

NEWS RELEASE

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USDA NRCS Accepting Applications for Conservation Stewardship Program

\$100 million Expected to Attract Enrollment of 7.7 Million Acres for Conservation

LINCOLN, Jan. 29, 2015 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service has \$100 million available this year through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their agricultural and forestry land.

Although applications are accepted all year, farmers, ranchers and forest landowners should submit applications by Feb. 27, 2015, to ensure they are considered for this year's funding (applications received after that date will be considered for future funding). This year's investment may result in the enrollment of up to 7.7 million acres in the program by private landowners.

Brad Soncksen, acting NRCS state conservationist, encourages Nebraska farmers and ranchers to not miss out on this opportunity.

"The Conservation Stewardship Program is unique. CSP participants will receive an annual land use payment for the environmental benefits they produce on their operations. Under CSP, participants are paid for conservation performance - the higher the operational performance, the higher their payment," Soncksen said.

According to Soncksen, CSP has been a very successful program for Nebraska's farmers and ranchers. Over 2,300 CSP contracts occur in all 93 counties and cover 5.1 million acres in Nebraska.

"CSP is popular in Nebraska because farmers and ranchers don't have to take land out of production to participate. CSP helps conserve natural resources on working lands. Keeping land in production while protecting natural resources creates a win-win for all Nebraskans. CSP

makes it possible to produce crops and livestock while also improving water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat,” Soncksen said.

CSP is available statewide to individual landowners, legal entities, and Indian tribes. Eligible land includes cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe. Contracts are set at five years and include all the land controlled by an operator.

The 2014 Farm Bill brought changes to CSP including expanding conservation activities, called enhancements, available to participants to protect natural resources on their land. These enhancements include cover crops, intensive rotational grazing, wildlife friendly fencing, and more. There will also be additional funding opportunities available to irrigators through the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative.

Applications should be submitted to local NRCS offices. As part of the CSP application process, applicants will work with NRCS personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land, which will help determine the performance of existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

A [CSP self-screening checklist](#) is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements and payment types.

For more on technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, [visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or a [local USDA service center](#).

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