

Sign-up for New Conservation Program Announced

Local News

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SPOKANE, Wash., (Aug. 10, 2009) — USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced that it will begin continuous sign-up for the revamped Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) today, August 10, with the first sign-up period cutoff scheduled for September 30. CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones on their operations.

The NRCS administers CSP, a voluntary conservation program designed to encourage agricultural and forestry producers to adopt additional activities and to improve, maintain and manage existing ones. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forestland—a new land use for the program—and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an American Indian Tribe. Individual landowners, legal entities, and American Indian Tribes may be eligible to apply for CSP assistance.

The program will be offered to producers nationwide through continuous sign-ups. Agricultural and forestry producers must submit their applications by Sept. 30 to be considered for funding in the first ranking period. Congress capped the annual acreage enrollment at 12,769,000 acres for each fiscal year nationwide.

USDA is finalizing the program’s policies and procedures. The CSP interim final rule, published in the Federal Register, is open for public comment through Sept. 28.

“We are holding a continuous sign-up nationwide to give agricultural and forestry producers greater opportunity to enroll their eligible acreage in CSP,” Washington NRCS Asst. State Conservationist Dave Brown said.

To apply for the newly revamped CSP, potential participants will be encouraged to use a self-screening checklist first to determine whether the new program is suitable for them or their operation. It will be available on NRCS web sites and at NRCS field offices.

In addition, Brown said, the application process requires the applicant to:

- 1.) Have farm records established with the USDA;
- 2.) Be the operator of the land;
- 3.) Provide evidence that they have control of the land for five years, and;
- 4.) Provide a map of the land showing land use and acreage.

“To be considered in the first round of funding,” Brown said, “this information needs to be in place before an application can be accepted and before the ranking cutoff date.”

Once a potential participant has determined program suitability, the next step will be to enter the producer's current and proposed conservation practices in the conservation measurement tool (CMT). This tool estimates the level of environmental performance to be achieved by a producer implementing and maintaining conservation activity. The conservation performance estimated by the CMT will be used to rank applications. Following the national procedures, Washington will determine its priority resource concerns, which is one of the criteria that will be used to rank applications. Washington will rank applications with similar resource concerns and will establish ranking pools to do so.

Agency field staff also will conduct on-site field verifications of applicants' information obtained from the CMT. Once the potential participant has been field verified and approved for funding, he or she must develop a conservation stewardship plan.

For additional information about CSP, including eligibility requirements and the interim final rule, please visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html or visit your local NRCS field office.