



FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

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Conservation Reserve Program - Highly Erodible Land Initiative (Continuous Sign-Up)

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that helps agricultural producers safeguard environmentally sensitive land. CRP participants plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance.

FSA administers CRP, while other USDA agencies and partners provide technical support. More detailed information on CRP is available in the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program."

CRP Highly Erodible Land Initiative

Up to 750,000 acres of highly erodible cropland (defined as an Erodibility Index (EI) of 20 or greater) devoted to certain conservation practices may be enrolled in CRP at any time under continuous sign-up. Offers are accepted provided that certain eligibility requirements are met. Offers for continuous sign-up are not subject to competitive bidding. Continuous sign-up contracts are for a 10-year duration.

To offer land for continuous sign-up, producers should contact their local FSA office. To find your local office, visit FSA's website at: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=us&agency=fsa>.

What Are the Benefits of Enrolling Highly Erodible Land?

On average, Highly Erodible Lands (EI >20) have an erosion rate in excess of 20 tons per acre per year. This erosion contributes to significant reductions in water quality and in the Western states it helps impair the air quality (dust storms) and offsite impacts such as windblown soil filling drainage ditches.

The conversion of highly erodible land to wildlife friendly conservation covers also will provide substantial benefits to wildlife while reducing soil erosion.

Producers that enroll in the practices will receive 10 years of annual rental payments plus up to 50 percent of the cost to establish the conservation cover. The payment rate will be dependent on the county where the land is located and the type of soils presented on the land offered for enrollment. Dependent on the location of the site producers have a number of cover options including: (1) native grasses; (2) wildlife cover mixes; and (3) trees, if suitable. A conservation plan must be developed in consultation with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to assist in the establishment and management of the cover.

How Do I Find Out If My Land Qualifies for the Program?

Producers can stop by a local FSA office to determine what lands may qualify for the initiative. FSA uses the NRCS soil survey data

along with Geographic Information Systems to be able to identify which lands on a given farm are eligible. A producer can identify the field or a portion of a field that they would like to protect and within a few minutes FSA can determine if the land is Highly Erodible (EI greater than or equal to 20).

A producer may also want to visit either the NRCS or local soil and water conservation district office to assist them in determining if their land maybe eligible.

Contract Effective Date

For continuous sign-up, 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 6 months.

If the acreage is currently under CRP contract and is within one year of the scheduled expiration date, the effective date is Oct. 1 following the expiration date.

Eligible Producers

To be eligible for CRP continuous sign-up enrollment, a producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to submitting the offer, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner's death;
- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right or redemption in accordance with state law; or
- The circumstances of the acqui-

sition present adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

Eligible Land

To be eligible for placement in CRP, land must be cropland (including field margins) that is all of the following:

- Planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of the previous 6 crop years from 2002 to 2007
- Physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; and
- Have a weighted average Erodibility Index of 20 or greater. The Erodibility Index uses the higher of the Erodibility Index for wind or water erosion.

Eligible Practices

Also, the land must be eligible and suitable for any of the following conservation practices:

- Introduced grasses and legumes (only as needed as determined by the Technical Service Provider)
- Permanent native Grass – wildlife friendly
- Tree planting – wildlife friendly
- Hardwood tree planting – wildlife friendly
- Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- Rare and Declining Habitat – wildlife friendly

Highly Erodible Land Initiative Payments

FSA provides CRP continuous sign-up participants with rental payments, including any incentives, and cost-share assistance:

- *Rental Payments*

In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides annual rental payments to participants. FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent or cash rent equivalent. The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment.

While continuous sign-up acceptance is not determined by a competitive offer process, producers may elect to receive an amount less than the maximum payment rate.

- *Cost-Share Assistance*

FSA provides cost-share assistance to participants who establish approved cover on eligible cropland. The cost-share assistance can be no more than 50 percent of the participant's cost to establish approved practices.

There are no other financial incentive payments for the initiative.

For More Information

For more information on CRP continuous sign-up, contact your local FSA office or visit FSA's website at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp>.

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