

October 15, 2004

## **CSP PROGRAM WATCH**

A USDA program initiated this last year called the Conservation Security Program (CSP) became available to eligible farmers in 18 priority watersheds across the nation this summer. In Nebraska, one watershed was able to implement the program and that was the Lower Little Blue watershed in Nebraska and Kansas. This watershed is mainly located in Jefferson and Thayer Counties.

We need to get ready for this program in Saline County. We should know in December where this program goes next in Nebraska. Local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservationist Ross Scott indicated to me last week some keys to becoming eligible for payments. Soil sampling is crucial. For land to be eligible for CSP, there must have been a soil sample taken in the last three years. Furthermore, good records on chemical and pesticide applications are important to qualify for CSP payments. If you do not have soil samples and any records of pest and nutrient applications on a farm, your foot will not be in the CSP payment door. This fall after harvest, it might be more important than ever to have soil samples taken if they have not been done in the last three years.

Locally, 70 contracts were made in Jefferson and Thayer Counties, with 50 contracts in Jefferson County. Ross indicated to me these contracts varied between \$9.00 to \$20.00 per acre, depending on the applications. One farmer who almost did not apply, but prevailed in the end, was awarded a quarter of a million dollar CSP long term contract.

Most working agricultural land will be eligible for CSP applications. Being accepted into this program is another matter. Producers on cropland, orchards, vineyards, pasture and range may apply for the program, regardless of size, type of operation or crops produced. Farms will all be given a soil condition index score. No-tillers on dryland farms will score high. Tillers on dryland farms will score low in this important ranking criteria area.

Payments can include four components: 1) an annual stewardship component for the benchmark conservation treatment, 2) an annual component for maintenance of existing conservation practices, 3) a one-time new practice component for specific additional needed practices, and 4) an enhancement component for exceptional conservation effort. For most producers, the enhancement component will be the largest component. Payments will be received under three tiers of conservation contracts. Payments for the three tiers are capped at \$20,000, \$35,000 and \$45,000 annually and will last for 5 years for Tier I and 5-10 years for Tier II and Tier III.

Enrollment data shows that nationwide, 37 percent of the applicants qualify for Tier I, 40 percent for Tier II and 23 percent for Tier III. The sign-up response indicates that some of the best conservationists are willing to do even more conservation through CSP. Environmental enhancement activities offered by applicants include improving soil quality, water quality, wildlife habitat management, nutrient and pest management, air quality management and on-farm energy management. Payments are even tied into energy questions such as using ethanol and biodiesel fuel. There is even payments on leaving some grain for wildlife and brush piles for quail and other wildlife improvement.



CSP or green payments are coming, we just don't know when. Use the hints in this article to make preparations for this program. We should know in December if Saline County producers will have a chance to apply. For more information, call Ross Scott at the NRCS in Wilber or get a new brochure and booklet from the NRCS office in Wilber at 821-3292, ext 109.

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