



August 28, 2009

NEW CSP PROGRAM WORTH CONSIDERATION

Further Farm Bill details have finally hit the local level on the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). If you have an old CSP contract expiring October 1st, keep your ears open for the second go around this fall or winter. The first cut-off is for new CSP applications and the deadline for operators to apply is September 30th.

Ask yourself the following three questions. If you can say yes, you need to apply. (1) Are you willing to commit time to inventory and document your conservation activities and production system to determine eligibility and ranking? (2) Do you have records of your farming activities and are you willing to continue maintaining records to document your conservation activities? (3) Are you ready to enter into a 5 year contract requiring you to apply additional conservation activities and to improve, maintain, and manage existing conservation activities?

Nebraska is divided into four ranking areas so applicants with similar resource concerns will compete with comparable operations. Saline County is in District 4 or the east district. For example, a Sandhills rancher application will be ranked against other ranchers and not against a no-till farmer in Saline County.

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary program that encourages ag producers to maintain existing conservation practices and adopt new ones in their operations. You know what you are agreeing to upon application. This program was authorized through 2017 in the 2008 Farm Bill. While September 30th is the deadline for the first round of CSP contracts, NRCS will be taking applications on a continuous signup.

During the application process the operator will need to provide some documentation of their operation. If you have some rented land, a form was created to show control of the land for five years or the length of the contract. This is not a legal and binding crop share lease but the control form makes USDA happy. CSP is not a cost-share program but rather pays for conservation work already accomplished and offers incentives to apply additional conservation practices.

To apply for the new CSP, potential participants are encouraged to first complete the 2009 Conservation Stewardship Self-Screening Checklist to determine whether the program is suitable for them. The checklist is available at NRCS offices or on-line www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/CSP.html.

The payment rates are variable depending on environmental benefits of existing and future farming practices over a five year period. Cropland (irrigated and dryland) payments are estimated to be in the 12 to 22 dollar per acre range and pastureland is in the 7 to 14 dollar per acre range. It all depends on the interview at the NRCS office and how producers rank out in a conservation measurement tool. Producers agree to address one resource concern at application and by the end of the contract one priority that is identified.

For those with an existing CSP contract take note the Tier levels are now gone, the application process has been simplified, and NRCS is required to do on-site evaluations of all applications. Operators (as defined by the FSA) are the people that are eligible to apply. Eligible land does not include WRP, GRP and CRP land. To be eligible for the new CSP contracts, operators include their entire agricultural operation in the applications. In Wilber, questions should be directed to Ross Scott at the NRCS office at 402-821-3292 or email ross.scott@ne.usda.gov.



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