

NEWS RELEASE

CONSERVATION COMMENTS

Date: 09/17/09

Conservation Stewardship Program sign-up deadline fast approaching!

The first sign-up for the Conservation Stewardship Program, the CSP, is open now. Farmers have until September 30 to file the preliminary application. Farmers who apply now will then have more time to complete the conservation assessment and other paperwork for the program.

The 2008 Farm Bill Authorized the Conservation Stewardship Program as a continuous sign-up program in all areas of all 50 states. The new CSP Program replaces the previous Conservation Security Program, which was limited to designated watersheds. The old program had a three-tier system, in which a farm or sections of farms went into higher tiers as they added more conservation practices. The new program has only one level and the application will involve all the owned/rented land that the operator/applicant has control of for the 5 year agreement period.

The Conservation Stewardship Program focuses on working agricultural lands: cropland, pasture, range, privately-owned managed woodlands, and other types of privately-owned agricultural land. The intent of the program is not to take land out of agricultural production, but rather to ensure that production is done in a sustainable, resource-conserving manner. Farmers need not have a perfect whole-farm system right now in order to enroll. Applications will be scored to determine who is accepted for this first-sign-up. Part of the scoring has to do with practices that you are already doing, but part of the scoring looks at practices or activities, that you are willing to adopt over the next few years, in order to improve your conservation of resources.

The program is authorized to enroll 12.8 million acres of land per year during the Farm Bill period. Over the six years of its existence, the old CSP enrolled a total of about 20 million acres, so the new program has the potential to move well beyond that, and really make an impact on how agriculture is practiced in this country. If you are a farmer who wants to grab this opportunity, check out the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program official website www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html for program information, self-assessment checklists, and program application form, or stop by the NRCS office in Madison for more information (320-598-7321 x3).

Although the Conservation Stewardship Program sign-up is underway, final rules for implementation are still being developed. Public comments are still being accepted until September 28, 2009. If you would like to help shape the CSP final rule by submitting your comments, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/pdfs/E9-17812.pdf for a copy of the official Federal Register notice of the rules for CSP implementation, and instructions on how and where to submit your comments.

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