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Description of document: Department of Agriculture (USDA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Program Outreach Materials 2021 (Some Records Undated)

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VIA E-MAIL

RE: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Appeal Log Number 21-22
FOIAXpress Appeal Number 2021-FPAC-FSA-00149-A

This responds to your September 23, 2021, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) appeal. You are appealing the September 22, 2021, decision of Patrick McLoughlin, Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) FOIA Officer, to partially deny your FOIA request (2021-FSA-05061-F) of August 2, 2021.

On August 2, 2021, you requested a copy or a link access to: *“FSA’s CRP Program Outreach materials available to FSA State and County employees and State Outreach Coordinators. The Outreach Toolkit including the outreach meeting PowerPoints, CRP Fact Sheets, State press release templates, GovDelivery Toolkit and talking points.”*

FPAC’s Response to FOIA Request No. 2021-FSA-05061-F

On September 22, 2021, the FPAC FOIA Officer provided you a final response letter to your request. FPAC’s record was comprised of a total of 36 pages. Of those, the FPAC FOIA Officer released 27 pages in full, seven (7) pages in part, and withheld two (2) pages in full. Information redacted or not released was withheld pursuant to FOIA 5 U.S.C. §552 (b)(5) (Exemption B5).

Exemption 5 permits withholding information under the deliberative process privilege, including pre-decisional documents, or information that could be withheld under civil discovery, attorney-client, or attorney-work product privileges.

Your September 23, 2021, Appeal of FPAC’s Response to FOIA Request No. 2021-FSA-05061-F

In your appeal, you objected to withholding the Talking Points in the responsive records under Exemption B5. You believe that Exemption B5 is not properly applied to the Talking Points for the following reasons:

- 1) *Talking Points are innately not predecisional; they are the message being conveyed from the organization. They are after the decision, not before the decision.*
- 2) *Talking Points are factual, not opinion, and as such do not properly fall under exemption (b)(5), even though the FOIA Office has gone through contortions to argue that they do fall under (b)(5).*
- 3) *Talking Points are innately not deliberative - they are the agency message.*
- 4) *Empirically, Talking Points are typically released under FOIA.*
- 5) *The presumption of openness means that the agency is obliged to make the showing that these records must be withheld, which it has not.*
- 6) *The Department of Justice has specifically directed agencies to use their discretion to release records even if they are technically exempt, where they would not cause foreseeable harm, and particularly if the agency wants to use exemption b (5). Releasing "talking points" which are, after all, precisely the agency's public message would not cause any foreseeable harm, falls squarely within that guidance.*
- 7) *Withholding talking points is unreasonable and does not take into account the right of the public to know about their government.*

FPAC's Response to Your September 23, 2021, FOIA Appeal

A. FPAC's Review of the Information Redacted from FOIA Request No. 2021--FSA-05061-F

After further review of your appeal, we are releasing three pages in full (pages 22, 23 and 36). However, pursuant to Exemption B5, we are upholding the remainder of the determination FPAC provided to you on September 21, 2021.

i. Information Exempt from Disclosure Pursuant to Exemption 5

Exemption B5 permits the Government to withhold information under the deliberative process privilege, including inter and intra agency communications which would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency.

Regarding all your appeal reasons, certain information contained within the responsive records pertains to FSA's internal communications deliberating the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Pursuant to Exemption B5, FPAC is not releasing information that is protected by the agency's deliberative process privilege because it contains certain inter and intra-agency communications. Specifically, three policy purposes consistently have been held to constitute the bases for this privilege; (1) to encourage open, frank discussions on matters of policy between subordinates and superiors; (2) to protect against premature disclosure of proposed policies before they are actually adopted; and (3) to protect against public confusion that might result from disclosure of reasons and rationales that were not in fact ultimately the grounds for an agency's action.

We have determined that the information redacted was properly withheld and met the definition of “deliberative process privilege.” The deliberative process privilege is designed to protect the “decision making process of Government agencies.” The provision not only protects documents, but also the integrity of the deliberative process itself where the exposure of that process would result in harm. The information withheld under Exemption B5 includes a summary of internal agency meeting questions and answers as well as specific Talking Points. The information redacted focuses on potential scenarios or questions concerning a program and represents issues that management wants to emphasize. Further, it expresses management’s opinions and concerns about a program immediately before or soon after the announcement of that program. Therefore, FPAC agrees that it should continue to withhold certain information on these pages under Exemption B5 of FOIA.

Conclusion

Your appeal is granted in part and denied in part. This is the final administrative determination on your FOIA appeal. You have the right to seek judicial review of this decision in an appropriate U.S. District Court pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B).

Prior to seeking judicial review, as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (“OGIS”). OGIS was created within the National Archives and Records Administration when the Open Government Act of 2007 amended FOIA. OGIS provides mediation of FOIA disputes between appellants and Federal agencies. Participation in mediation does not affect your right to judicial review. Contact information for OGIS can be found at <http://www.archives.gov/ogis>.

Sincerely,



Date: 2022.08.01

07:56:00 -04'00'

Zach Ducheneaux
Administrator
Farm Service Agency



USDA Renews Conservation Programs to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

Stakeholder Toolkit

USDA will open the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a bigger focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well as providing healthy habitat for wildlife. Our goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP.

We need your help to get the word out on these important changes to CRP.

We've included some tools if you'd like to help FSA spread the word about this::

- ✓ "What's New with CRP" fact sheet (downloaded here)
- ✓ Newsletter Article
- ✓ Sample Social Media

If you have any questions, please contact Johnny Gibbons at john.gibbons2@usda.gov



Newsletter Article

USDA Expands and Renews Conserve Reserve Program to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including \$330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and \$25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement today at the White House National Climate Task Force meeting to demonstrate USDA's commitment to putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

The Biden-Harris Administration is working to leverage USDA conservation programs for climate mitigation, including continuing to invest in innovation partnership programs like RCPP and On-Farm Trials as well as strengthening programs like CRP to enhance their impacts.

"Sometimes the best solutions are right in front of you. With CRP, the United States has one of the world's most successful voluntary conservation programs. We need to invest in CRP and let it do what it does best—preserve topsoil, sequester carbon, and reduce the impacts of climate change," said Vilsack. "We also recognize that we can't do it alone. At the White House Climate Leaders Summit this week, we will engage leaders from all around the world to partner with us on addressing climate change. Here at home, we're working in partnership with producers and local organizations through USDA programs to bring new voices and communities to the table to help combat climate change."

Conservation Reserve Program

USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.



“We want to make sure CRP continues to be a valuable and effective conservation resource for our producers for decades to come,” said Vilsack. “USDA will continue to find new and creative ways of putting producers and landowners at the center of climate-smart practices that generate revenue and benefit our planet.”

CRP’s long-term goal is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, improve soil health and carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a number of signups, including the general signup and continuous signup, which are both open now, as well as a CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing a new **Climate-Smart Practice Incentive** for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

- **Adjusting soil rental rates.** This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.
- **Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%.** This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.
- **Increasing payments for water quality practices.** Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.
- **Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate.** This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

Enhanced Natural Resource Benefits

To boost impacts for natural resources, FSA is:

- **Moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup.** Unlike the general signup, producers can sign up year-round for the continuous signup and be eligible for additional incentives.
- **Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones.** This aims to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.



- **Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups.**

Expanding Prairie Pothole Soil Health and Watershed Programs

CRP has two pilot programs — the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) and the Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers 30-year contracts (CLEAR30).

- For SHIPP, which is a short-term option (3, 4, or 5-year contracts) for farmers to plant cover on less productive agricultural lands, FSA will hold a 2021 signup in the Prairie Pothole states.
- The CLEAR30 pilot, a long-term option through CRP, will be expanded from the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay pilot regions to nationwide.

Increasing Technical Assistance Capacity and Impact Measurement

USDA technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is critical to enable producers to plan and implement conservation practices that are appropriate for their needs. To ensure increased enrollment and support for producers, USDA is increasing NRCS technical assistance capacity for CRP by \$140 million.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA will invest \$10 million in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

To learn more about updates to CRP, download our “What’s New with CRP” [fact sheet](#).

Partnership Programs Contribute to Priorities

In addition to changes to CRP, Secretary Vilsack also announced significant investments for climate-smart policies. First, NRCS is investing \$330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to address climate change and other natural resources challenges. NRCS will announce more details on the RCPP project selections on April 26.

Second, NRCS is investing \$25 million in proposals for On-Farm Trials, which are part of the Conservation Innovation Grants program. NRCS is seeking proposals through June 21. Project priorities include climate-smart agricultural solutions and soil health practices.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require



USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including state, local, and tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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Social Media

If you have questions, or if you'd like to connect on this topic or others, please contact our social media strategist at Jennifer.Strickland@usda.gov. All photos below are public domain.

Photo: <https://flic.kr/p/29joeAm> (trees in Washington by USDA)



Farmers and ranchers are part of the fight against #climatechange, and improvements to the Conservation Reserve Program will increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Learn more: <link to press release> @USDAFSA

Photo: <https://flic.kr/p/InAthx> (lamb by USFWS)



If you farm or ranch, are you enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program? New improvements mean increased payments for conservation practices on your operation. Plus, it's all voluntary. Learn more: <link to press release> @USDAFSA

Photo: <https://flic.kr/p/KTz9Qs> (meadowlark by USFWS)



Wildlife populations need habitat on public and private lands. The Conservation Reserve Program is offering new incentives to farmers and ranchers who want to support wildlife, including year-round sign-up for wildlife enhancement: <link to press release> @USDAFSA

Photo: <https://flic.kr/p/nXt37g> (pronghorn in grass by USFWS)



Improvements to the Conservation Reserve Program include the creation of National Grassland Priority Zones, increasing conservation of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas. Learn more: <link to press release> @USDAFSA

Photo: <https://flic.kr/p/oMs8W3> (water on a Wyoming ranch by USFWS)



The water we drink flows across public and private lands before making it to your tap. New incentives in the Conservation Reserve Program will support farmers and ranchers do more to keep our water clean. Learn more: <link to press release> @USDAFSA

Photo: <https://flic.kr/p/WKHf26> (sunflower/butterfly by USDA)



.@USDA expands and renews its conservation programs to boost enrollment and address climate change; and announces investments in partner programs to support climate-smart policies. <link to press release> @USDAFSA

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

What's New?

	UPDATE	BENEFIT
OVERALL	<p>Increase collaboration with partners and other USDA agencies on projects to monitor, measure, and verify the climate benefits, and environmental performance of CRP.</p> <p>Increase technical assistance capacity through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).</p>	<p>Improves environmental benefit estimates of CRP</p> <p>Increases program effectiveness by informing science-based program policy changes.</p> <p>Enables producers to plan and implement conservation practices that are appropriate for their needs.</p>
CRP GENERAL	<p>New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to incentivize practices that sequester carbon, reduce emissions.</p> <p>Additional one-time, 10 percent "inflationary" adjustment for the life of the contract.</p> <p>Adjustment of county rental rates, upward or downward, using a soil productivity index range of 50-150 percent of the county rental rate.</p>	<p>More land enrolled, using practices that maximize benefits for climate mitigation.</p> <p>Increases program payments to encourage more land enrollment.</p> <p>Increases program payments to encourage more land enrollment</p>
CRP CONTINUOUS	<p>New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to incentivize practices that sequester carbon, reduce emissions.</p> <p>Add a one-time, 10 percent "inflationary" adjustment for the life of the contract.</p> <p>Allow for the adjustment of county rental rates, upward or downward, using a soil productivity index range of 50-150 percent of the county rental rate.</p> <p>Increase Water Quality Incentive from 10 to 20 percent for water quality benefiting practices</p> <p>Move State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Practices from the CRP general signup to the CRP continuous signup.</p> <p>Make Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HEL) Practices available in both the CRP continuous and general signups.</p> <p>Increase Practice Incentive Payment from 20% to 50%.</p>	<p>More land enrolled, using practices that maximize benefits for climate mitigation.</p> <p>Increases program payments to encourage more land enrollment.</p> <p>Increases program payments to encourage more land enrollment</p> <p>More land enrolled, using practices that maximize benefits for water quality.</p> <p>Improves attractiveness of wildlife practices, including extending the signup to year-round, thus more habitat.</p> <p>Improves attractiveness of program by extending the signup to year-round, thus more land enrolled for natural resource benefits.</p> <p>Increases program payments to encourage more land enrollment.</p>
CRP GRASSLANDS	<p>Establish a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate of \$15.</p> <p>Establish National Grassland Priority Zones.</p>	<p>Returning to this minimum rate would benefit 1,347 counties that are currently under the \$15 minimum.</p> <p>Increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.</p>
PILOTS	<p>Hold a second signup for the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP), incentivizing producers to plant vegetative cover on less productive croplands for 3 to 5 years.</p> <p>Expand the Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers 30-year contracts (CLEAR30) to be nationwide. Previous pilots were in the Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes regions.</p>	<p>More land with short-term cover leads to healthier soil and better carbon sequestration.</p> <p>Pilot expansion enables producers across the nation to enter into these long-term contracts and implement practices important to water quality.</p>



Farm Service Agency

Conservation Reserve Program Forest Management Incentive

FACT SHEET
January 2021

Overview

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance.

The 2018 Farm Bill provided for financial assistance to CRP participants with existing tree covers to engage in management activities that improve forest resource condition, promote forest management, and enhance wildlife habitat. Congress authorized up to \$12 million in Forest Management Incentive (FMI) funds for this purpose.

CRP FMI Signup

CRP FMI signup begins on January 19, 2021. Signup will continue as long as CRP authority and CRP FMI funds are available.

Who is Eligible?

CRP FMI is limited to those farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners currently participating in CRP who have established conservation covers comprised of trees.

Eligible Land

All land currently enrolled in CRP CP3, CP3A, CP4D, CP11, CP22, CP22B, CP22S, CP31, CP36, CP38A-22, CP38C-3, CP38C-3A, CP38C-11, CP38C-31, CP38D-36, and CP38E-4D conservation practices, are eligible for CRP FMI.

Eligible Technical Practices

- 314 Brush Management
- 315 Herbaceous Weed Control
- 327 Conservation Cover
- 338 Prescribed Burning
- 394 Firebreak
- 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat
- 647 Early Successional Habitat
- 660 Tree/Shrub Pruning
- 666 Forest Stand Improvement



USDA photo



CRP FMI Payments

CRP FMI is a payment to eligible CRP participants who have properly completed authorized forest management practice activities, to improve condition of resources, promote forest management, or enhance wildlife habitat.

CRP FMI payments are equal to the lesser of the CRP participant's actual cost to implement the practice or 75% of the NRCS National Payment Scenario rate for the applicable NRCS technical practice.

A CRP participant may be eligible for more than one CRP FMI payment if multiple approved forest management activities are performed according to the conservation plan.

CRP participants will be given two years from the date of notification of COC approval of the FSA-848A agreement to complete the CRP FMI practice activities. Approved forest management activities must be reported completed by no later than September 30, 2023, for the CRP participant to receive CRP FMI payment for such activity.

CRP FMI payment is conditional upon completion, and certification on the FSA-848B agreement, of approved forest management activities as provided in the conservation plan.

Total CRP FMI payments is limited to \$200,000 per person or entity.

More Information

CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 and was reauthorized by the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The program is implemented by FSA on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation. This fact sheet is for informational purposes; other restrictions may apply. Consult your local

FSA office for details. For more information, contact your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office: farmers.gov/service-locator.



Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program

**56th General Enrollment Period
Environmental Benefits Index (EBI)**

FACT SHEET
June 2021

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is conducting a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general enrollment from Jan. 4, 2021 through July 23, 2021.

CRP is a federally-funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. Accepted contracts for the CRP enrollment period will begin Oct. 1, 2021.

CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 and was reauthorized by the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). 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 56th General Enrollment Period, Jan. 4, 2021, through July 23, 2021.**"

Ranking CRP Offers

FSA will rank offers submitted by landowners for the 56th CRP general enrollment period according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each EBI factor based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. EBI rankings are unique for each tract of land offered for CRP.

FSA assigns each offer a score based on the offer's relative environmental factors. Each offer competes with all other offers. FSA determines the acceptability of the offer based on the ranking results.

For the 56th CRP general enrollment period, FSA will use the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered, as follows:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acres (N1);
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching (N2);
- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion (N3);
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period (N4);
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion (N5) and;
- Cost (N6).



USDA photo



N1 - Wildlife Factor: (0 to 100 Points)

Factor N1 is an evaluation of the expected wildlife benefits of the offer and is comprised of three subfactors (N1a-c). The formula for $N1 = N1a + N1b + N1c$.

- **N1a - Wildlife Habitat Cover Benefits (0 to 50 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the wildlife habitat cover offered. FSA assigns points for cover practice planting mixtures based on the potential value to wildlife within each state. FSA awards higher scores for cover types that are more beneficial to wildlife. Local USDA Service Centers have a list of approved planting mixes and the assigned point scores for each cover mix. Point scores are based on the weighted average score for cover mixes the producer selects. Native mixes of diverse species generally receive the highest point scores. Eligible cover practices under the N1a criteria are in Table 1.

(Producers should note that wildlife habitat cover selection is the most critical factor impacting wildlife benefits. Optimum cover types significantly increase the point score for this factor).

- **N1b - Wildlife Enhancement (0, 5 or 20 points)**

This subfactor provides up to 20 points for actions producers take to enhance the wildlife benefits for the offered acres. Enhancement to the acres is necessary in order to receive the points. For example, to receive 20 points producers may offer to establish a minimum of 10 percent of the acres offered to pollinator habitat N1b criteria are provided in Table 2.

- **N1c - Wildlife Priority Zones (0 or 30 points)**

FSA consulted with farm, commodity, wildlife and environmental groups to develop high-priority wildlife areas that would benefit from being enrolled in CRP. For land located within this defined geographic area, points are awarded for planting cover mixes to benefit wildlife species. This subfactor provides 30 points if at least 51 percent of the offered acres is located within the wildlife

priority zone and the weighted average N1a score is greater than or equal to 40 points.

N2 - Water Quality Benefits from Reduced Erosion, Runoff, and Leaching (0 to 100 Points)

One of CRP's main goals is to reduce the amount of sediment, nutrients and pollutants that enter our nation's waterways. Factor N2 is an evaluation of the potential impacts that CRP may have on both surface and groundwater quality. N2 is comprised of three subfactors (N2a-c). The formula for $N2 = N2a + N2b + N2c$.

- **N2a - Location (0 or 30 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the benefits of improving ground or surface water quality impaired by crop production. States have identified water quality zones for protection. At least 51 percent of the acres offered must be within an approved water quality zone to receive 30 points. Local USDA Service Centers have detailed maps of the approved water quality zones.

- **N2b - Groundwater quality (0 to 25 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the predominant soils, the potential leaching of pesticides and nutrients into groundwater, and the impact to people who rely on groundwater as a primary source of drinking water. Point scores are based on the weighted average leach index for soils offered for enrollment and the population that utilizes groundwater for drinking.

- **N2c - Surface water quality (0 to 45 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the amount of sediment (and associated nutrients) that may be delivered into streams or other water courses. This factor is determined by potential water erosion in the watershed in which the offer is located.



N3 - Erosion Factor (0 to 100 Points)

CRP helps maintain the long-term productivity of the land for future generations. Factor N3 is an evaluation of the potential for the land to erode as the result of either wind or water erosion. This factor is measured using an Erodibility Index (EI). FSA awards points for the weighted average of the higher value of either the wind or water EI, based on the results from Table 3.

N4 - Enduring Benefits Factor (0 to 50 Points)

Factor N4 is an evaluation of the likelihood for certain practices to remain in place beyond the CRP contract period. N4 values are determined by calculating the weighted average score for all practices in Table 4.

N5 - Air Quality Benefits from Reduced Wind Erosion (3 to 45 Points)

Factor N5 is an evaluation of the air quality improvements by reducing airborne dust and particulate caused by wind erosion from cropland. In addition, this factor has points for the value of CRP land that provides carbon sequestration. This factor is comprised of four subfactors (N5a-d). The formula for $N5 = N5a + N5b + N5c + N5d$.

- **N5a - Wind Erosion Impacts (0 to 25 points)**

FSA will determine the potential for the site to have wind erosion damage. FSA will award points based on potential wind erosion and the amount of population that may be impacted by the erosion. The potential wind erodibility is based on a climatic factor (wind speed, wind direction and duration of wind events) and soil erodibility.

- **N5b - Wind Erosion Soils List (0 or 5 points)**

A list of soils that are susceptible to wind and contribute significantly to nonattainment of air quality standards has

been developed. These soils have a dominant component of volcanic or organic materials that are highly erodible and can be transported great distances on the wind. If at least 51 percent of the offered acres are comprised of these soils, the offer is awarded five points.

- **N5c - Air Quality Zones (0 or 5 points)**

FSA awards a maximum of five points if at least 51 percent of the acres offered is located in an air quality zone that contributes to nonattainment of air quality standards and the calculated weighted wind EI is equal to or greater than three.

- **N5d - Carbon Sequestration (3 to 10 points)**

The subfactor is an evaluation of the benefits of sequestering greenhouse gases by practice over the expected life of the practice. FSA awards points based on a weighted average of carbon sequestration benefits for all practices using the value in Table 5.

N6 - Cost

Factor N6 is designed to optimize the environmental benefits per dollar for CRP rental payments. Factor N6 is comprised of two subfactors (N6a and N6b). The formula for $N6 = N6a + N6b$.

- **N6a - Cost (point value determined after end of enrollment based on actual offer data)**

Offers with lower per acre rental rates may receive more N6a points and have increased chances of being accepted.

- **N6b - Offer Less Than Maximum Payment Rate (0 to 25 points)**

Offers equal to the maximum payment rate will receive 0 points. Offers below the maximum payment rate will receive points according to the value in Table 6.



EBI Threshold for Acceptance

After the 56th CRP general enrollment period ends July 23, 2021, FSA will analyze and rank all eligible offers. The Secretary of Agriculture will then determine the EBI threshold used to accept offers. Because CRP is a highly competitive program, producers who would have met EBI during previous enrollment periods are not guaranteed an offer acceptance under the 56th CRP general enrollment period.

Making CRP Offers More Competitive

Maximum CRP enrollment authority is 27 million acres by 2023. As such, the demand to enroll land in CRP is expected to be high.

To make offers more competitive, producers should consider the following:

- The single most important producer decision involves determining which cover practice to apply to the acres offered. Planting or establishing the highest scoring cover mixture is the best way to improve the chances of offer acceptance.
- Offering the most environmentally sensitive land increases the likelihood of the offer being accepted. Where possible, subdividing fields to include only the most sensitive acres can substantially increase the point score for erosion and improve the water quality score and/or air quality score. Producers should consider enhancing covers for the benefit of wildlife or establishing pollinator habitat. In addition, producers may plant and manage hardwood or softwood trees that increase wildlife habitat values or restore certain rare and declining habitats. These potentially increase the EBI score in subfactors N1a and N4.
- Producers should consider accepting a lower payment rate than the maximum amount FSA is willing to offer.

FSA also encourages producers to consult with local USDA experts on steps to take to maximize EBI points and increase the likelihood that an offer will be accepted.

More Information

This fact sheet is for informational purposes; other restrictions may apply. Consult your local FSA office for details. For more information, contact your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office: farmers.gov/service-locator.



CRP-56th GENERAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD EBI – JUNE 2021

Table 1 – Cover Practices (CP) for the N1a Criteria		Point Score
CP1 Permanent introduced grasses and legumes		
Existing monoculture (1 species) stand of an introduced grass.		0
Existing stand of 2 to 3 species or planting new stand of 2 to 3 species of an introduced grass species		10
Existing stand or planting mixture (minimum of 4 species) of at least 3 introduced grasses and at least 1 forb or legume species best suited for wildlife in the area		40
CP2 Permanent native grasses and legumes		
Existing monoculture (1 species) stand of a native grass.		0
Existing stand (minimum 2 to 3 species) or planting new mixed stand (minimum of 3 species) of at least 2 native grass species and at least 1 forb, or legume species beneficial to wildlife.		20
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least 3 native grasses and at least 1 shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in the area.		50
CP3 Tree planting (general) 2/		
Southern Pines (Softwoods) - Solid stand of pines/softwoods (existing according to State-developed standards or planted at more than 550 trees per acre).		10
Northern Conifers (Softwoods) - Solid stand of conifers/softwoods (existing according to State-developed standards or planted at more than 850 trees per acre).		
Western Pines (Softwoods) - Solid stand of pines/softwoods (existing according to State-developed standards or planted at more than 650 trees per acre).		
Southern Pines (Softwoods) - Pines/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 500 to 550 per acre depending upon the site index (State-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.		50
Northern Conifers (Softwoods) - Conifers/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 750 to 850 trees per acre depending upon the site index (State-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.		
Western Pines (Softwoods) - Western Pines (softwoods) - Pines/softwoods existing planted at a rate of 550 to 650 per acre depending upon the site index (State-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.		
Opening for Southern and Western Pines are not to be less than a minimum of 2 acres or a maximum of 5 acres in size for fields of 20 acres and larger.		50
For smaller fields will be based upon percentage. Opening in Northern conifers will be one-half to 2 acres in size. Opening may include buffers on the interior of the field. Field edges (borders) may be used if they are irregular in shape and average 30 feet in width.		
Natural regeneration of native herbaceous or shrubby vegetation with required maintenance may be permitted within open areas if it is consistent with NRCS technical standards and concurred with by State FWS or U.S. FWS Officials.		
Open areas of native grasses and/or shrub planting best suited for wildlife in the area shall be considered CP3 for EBI scoring and contract purposes.		
CP3A Hardwood tree planting 2/		
Existing or planting solid stand of nonmast producing hardwood species		10
Existing or planting solid stand of a single hard mast-producing species		20
Existing or planting mixed stand of hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area		30
Existing or planting mixed Stand (3 or more species) of hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area		50
Existing or planting longleaf Pine or Atlantic White Cedar - Planted at rates appropriate for the site index.		50



Table 1 – Cover Practices (CP) for the N1a Criteria		Point Score
CP41 Permanent wildlife habitat		
Existing or planting mixed stand (minimum of 4 species) of grasses, trees, shrubs, forbs, or legumes planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited for various wildlife species in the area.		40
A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.		
Existing or planting mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of either of predominately native species including grasses, forbs, legumes, shrubs, or trees planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited to providing wildlife habitat. Only native grasses are authorized. Introduced grasses are not authorized and shall not be included in cover mixes for 50point N1a scores for CP41. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.		50
CP12 Wildlife food plot 3/		
Wildlife food plots are small non C/S plantings in a larger area. Wildlife food plots will never be the predominant cover.		NA
CP25 Rare and declining habitat restoration 4/		
Existing stand or seeding or planting will be best suited for wildlife in the area.		50
Plant species selections will be based upon Ecological Site Description data.		
CP42 Pollinator habitat		
Existing stand or planting (minimum of .5 acres) of a diverse mix of multiple species suited for pollinators		50

- 1/ Cover that is existing or will be established must accomplish the purpose of the practice.
- 2/ State Conservationist may revise FOTG on planting rate to be consistent with CRP.
- 3/ CP12 acreage is not included in the weighted average point score. For example, a 50-acre offer with a 45-acre CP25 planting and a 5-acre food plot calculates the weighted average using only the 45 acres of CP25 planting.
 $45 \text{ acres} \times 50 \text{ points (CP25 point score)} = 2250 \text{ points}$
 $2250 \text{ points divided by } 45 \text{ acres} = 50 \text{ points}$
- 4/ Technical practice standards for the selected habitat type must meet applicable standards and be approved by DAFP at least 30 calendar days before the beginning of signup



CRP-56th GENERAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD EBI – JUNE 2021

Table 2 – Practices for the N1b Criteria

Points

Establishment of pollinator habitat CP42 that remains in the location of CRP-1. The habitat size, shape, and composition must meet the following requirements.

20

Size

CRP Acreage Offered	Habitat Size Requirement
Less than 10 acres	At least 1 acre of pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least .5 acre.
10 acres or greater	At least 10 percent of acreage offered in pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least .5 acre.

Annual or permanent food plot (CP12) that remains in the same location for the contract length or rotated food plot for which the location changes during CRP-1 length. CP12 food plots must be consistent with NRCS FOTG up to 10 percent of a field, not to exceed 5 acres per field.

5

Example: A producer would like to enroll 200 acres. Field 1 is 120 acres, Field 2 is 45 acres, and Field 3 is 35 acres.

Field	Size	NRCS FOTG			Limited CP12 Acres
		Limit	10 Percent Limit	5 Acres	
1	120	12	12 acres	5	5.0
2	45	4.5	4.5 acres	5	4.5
3	35	3.5	3.5 acres	5	3.5
					13.0

Note: CP12 the NRCS FOTG standard, is limited by the lessor of either 10 percent of the field size or 5 acres/field for the food plot. The 5 acres of food plot may be either one 5 acre food plot or 2 or more food plots where the cumulative total would be ≤5 acres.

Note: Expiring CRP land with trees loses its cropland status after the expiration of the contract.

Table 3 – Erodibility Index Points 1/

EI	Points	EI	Points	EI	Points
4	1	10	22	16	79
5	2	11	29	17	92
6	4	12	37	18	97
7	7	13	46	19	98
8	11	14	56	20	99
9	16	15	67	21+	100

1/ EI of less than 4 = 0 points



CRP-56th GENERAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD EBI – JUNE 2021

Table 4 – Practices for the N4 Criteria		Points
New hardwood tree (CP3A), longleaf pines, or Atlantic White Cedar plantings or CP25 where the plant community is existing or will be established to primarily trees.		50
Existing or enhanced stand of hardwood trees, longleaf pine, and/or Atlantic White Cedar (CP3A)		40
New pine/softwood tree (CP3)		30
CP25, where the plant community is existing or will be established to a primarily grass and/or shrub complex or CP42.		25
Existing pine/softwood tree (original contract signed as CP3)		20
All other conservation practices not listed (CP1, CP2, CP4D)		0

Table 5 – N5d Carbon Sequestration	
Practice	Points
CP3, CP3A, CP25 (primarily trees)	10
CP25 (primary grass complex), CP42	5
CP4D	4
CP1, CP2	3
CP12	0

Table 6 – N6b Offer Less than Maximum Payment Rate	
Percent Below Maximum Payment Rate	N6b Points
1	2
2	4
3	6
4	8
5	10
6	12
7	14
8	16
9	18
10	20
11	21
12	22
13	23
14	24
>=15	25



Farm Service Agency

Conservation Reserve Program – Continuous Enrollment Period

FACT SHEET
June 2021

Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Signup.

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) CRP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers"), to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Continuous signup enrollment contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorized CRP. The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The program is implemented by FSA on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation. To offer land for continuous enrollment, producers should contact their local FSA office.

Benefits

CRP protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the nation's natural resources. By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds and streams. The vegetative covers also make CRP a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

Administration

FSA administers CRP while technical support functions are provided by:

- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- State forestry agencies;
- Local soil and water conservation districts; and
- Other non-federal providers of technical assistance



Continuous Enrollment

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. Unlike CRP enrollments under general CRP signups or CRP Grasslands, offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods.

If the offered acres are currently enrolled in CRP under a CRP contract that expires September 30, then the effective start date of the new CRP contract must be the following October 1.

If the offered acres are not currently enrolled in CRP, then the producer may choose to defer the effective start date of the new CRP contract for up to six months after the offer is approved.

Who is Eligible?

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 of redemption in accordance with state law; or
- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.



CRP – CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT PERIOD - JUNE 2021

Eligible Land

Land must be cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity four of the six crop years from 2012 to 2017 and is physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. Certain marginal pastureland that may be devoted to riparian buffers, wildlife habitat buffers, or wetland buffers is also eligible.

Eligible Practices

Land must be eligible and suitable for any of the following conservation practices:

- Grass Waterway
- Shallow Water Area for Wildlife
- Contour Grass Strip
- Filter Strip
- Riparian Buffer
- Denitrifying Bioreactor on Filter Strip and Riparian Buffer
- Saturated Filter Strip and Riparian Buffer
- Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds
- Wetland & Buffer SAFE Practices
- Wetland Restoration on Floodplain and Non-floodplain
- Prairie Strips
- Windbreaks, Shelterbelts and Living Snow Fences
- Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer and Wildlife Habitat Buffers
- Long Leaf Pine Establishment
- Duck Nesting Habitat
- Pollinator Habitat
- Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands
- Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) Constructed Wetland
- FWP Aquaculture Wetland Restoration
- FWP Flooded Prairie Wetland
- Farmable Wetlands and Farmable Wetland Buffer
- Wellhead Protection Area Practices
- State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)
- Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI)

Payments

Under CRP continuous signup, FSA provides eligible participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance.

A Signup Incentive Payment of 32.5 percent of the first full year annual rental payment is paid at contract approval on all newly enrolled Continuous CRP contract acreage. A Practice Incentive Payment of up to 50 percent is paid for installing the practice.

Annual Rental Payments

- In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides annual rental payments at 90 percent of the existing rate to eligible CRP continuous participants based on per acre cropland and marginal pasture land rental rates, plus a 10 percent “inflationary” adjustment, determined by FSA.
- The per-acre annual rental rate may not exceed the calculated rate or \$300/acre. Producers may elect to receive a rental rate amount less than the maximum payment rate.
- **Climate-Smart Practice Incentive:** FSA provides an incentive of 3, 5, or 10 percent for CRP practices that will increase carbon sequestration, reduce GHG emissions, and otherwise are climate smart practices. The incentive amount is based on the estimated benefits of each practice.
- **Water Quality Incentive:** FSA provides a 20 percent rental rate incentive for CRP water quality practices that will improve water quality by reducing sediment loading, nutrient loading and harmful algae blooms.

Cost-Share Assistance

Cost-share of up to 50 percent of the re-reimbursable cost of installing the practice is provided by FSA. Cost-share assistance is not available for any management activity.

More Information

For more information about FSA and its programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov or contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit:

farmers.gov/service-locator

Conservation Reserve Program General Signup Reminder

Announcement

July 19, 2021; 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time for National Distribution

Key Messages and Talking Points

Main Messages

- CRP has improved water quality, reduced soil erosion and increased habitat for many species, including endangered and threatened. FSA) offers several signups for CRP, including its signature general enrollment period that **runs through July 23, 2021**. Visit your local FSA office to sign up if you are interested in the general CRP or learning more about it.
- CRP benefits have been expanded to offer incentives to producers to incorporate climate-smart conservation practices in their operations. Visit www.fsa.gov/crp to learn more.

Talking Points

General CRP

- The Conservation Reserve Program is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs in existence, and it is one of the most important tools in our nation's effort to reduce the worst impacts of climate change on our farmers, ranchers and foresters.
- CRP is a voluntary land conservation program administered by FSA.
- In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length. The long-term goal of the program is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and create wildlife habitat. By enrolling in CRP, producers are improving water quality, reducing soil erosion, and creating or restoring habitat for wildlife. This in turn spurs hunting, fishing, recreation, tourism, and other economic development across rural America.
- Farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program receive a yearly rental payment for voluntarily establishing long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands.
- CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) — about the same amount the state of Delaware emits annually.
- In addition to climate mitigation, other natural resource benefits include:
 - Preventing more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, which is enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks;

Unredacted
released in
full

- Reducing nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95 and 85 percent, respectively;
- Creating more than 3 million acres of restored wetlands while protecting more than 175,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, which is enough to go around the world seven times; and
- Benefiting bees and other pollinators and increasing populations of ducks, pheasants, turkey, bobwhite quail, prairie chickens, grasshopper sparrows, and many other birds.

CRP General Signup

- FSA is reminding farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners that **CRP's current general enrollment period runs through July 23, 2021**. Visit your local FSA office to sign up if you are interested in the general CRP or learning more about it.
- The CRP General enrollment **signup began on January 4, 2021**.
- FSA has increased signup options to provide incentives for producers and increase its conservation benefits, including reducing the impacts of climate change.
- Producers can adjust or resubmit their offers to take advantage of planned improvements to the program before the general enrollment signup ends.

CRP Changes Announcement and Overview Meeting Q&A
22 April 2021 (1-1:30 pm)

B5 redaction upheld

Answered on Call

(b)(5)

Not Answered on Call (follow up)

B5 redaction
upheld

(b)(5)

News Release

1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Contact:
NAME
EMAIL

USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

STATE, April 21, 2021 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program’s role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including \$330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and \$25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement today at the White House National Climate Task Force meeting to demonstrate USDA’s commitment to putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

The Biden-Harris Administration is working to leverage USDA conservation programs for climate mitigation, including continuing to invest in innovation partnership programs like RCPP and On-Farm Trials as well as strengthening programs like CRP to enhance their impacts.

“Sometimes the best solutions are right in front of you. With CRP, the United States has one of the world’s most successful voluntary conservation programs. We need to invest in CRP and let it do what it does best—preserve topsoil, sequester carbon, and reduce the impacts of climate change,” said FSA State Director **NAME**. “We also recognize that we can’t do it alone. At the White House Climate Leaders Summit this week, we will engage leaders from all around the world to partner with us on addressing climate change. Here at home, we’re working in partnership with producers and local organizations through USDA programs to bring new voices and communities to the table to help combat climate change.”

Conservation Reserve Program

USDA’s goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world’s largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.

“We want to make sure CRP continues to be a valuable and effective conservation resource for our producers for decades to come,” said Vilsack. “USDA will continue to find new and creative ways of putting producers and landowners at the center of climate-smart practices that generate revenue and benefit our planet.”

CRP’s long-term goal is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, improve soil health and carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a number of signups, including the general signup and continuous signup, which are both open now, as well as a CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing a new **Climate-Smart Practice Incentive** for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

- **Adjusting soil rental rates.** This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.
- **Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%.** This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.
- **Increasing payments for water quality practices.** Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.
- **Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate.** This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

Enhanced Natural Resource Benefits

To boost impacts for natural resources, FSA is:

- **Moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup.** Unlike the general signup, producers can sign up year-round for the continuous signup and be eligible for additional incentives.
- **Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones.** This aims to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups.**

Expanding Prairie Pothole Soil Health and Watershed Programs

CRP has two pilot programs — the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) and the Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers 30-year contracts (CLEAR30).

- For SHIPP, which is a short-term option (3, 4, or 5-year contracts) for farmers to plant cover on less productive agricultural lands, FSA will hold a 2021 signup in the Prairie Pothole states.
- The CLEAR30 pilot, a long-term option through CRP, will be expanded from the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay pilot regions to nationwide.

Increasing Technical Assistance Capacity and Impact Measurement

USDA technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is critical to enable producers to plan and implement conservation practices that are appropriate for their needs. To ensure increased enrollment and support for producers, USDA is increasing NRCS technical assistance capacity for CRP by \$140 million.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA will invest \$10 million in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

To learn more about updates to CRP, download our “What’s New with CRP” [fact sheet](#).

Partnership Programs Contribute to Priorities

In addition to changes to CRP, Secretary Vilsack also announced significant investments for climate-smart policies. First, NRCS is investing \$330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to address climate change and other natural resources challenges. NRCS will announce more details on the RCPP project selections on April 26.

Second, NRCS is investing \$25 million in proposals for On-Farm Trials, which are part of the Conservation Innovation Grants program. NRCS is seeking proposals through June 21. Project priorities include climate-smart agricultural solutions and soil health practices.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including state, local, and tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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Announcement Toolkit

USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

Last Updated: **4/21/2021**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that it will expand and renew the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a bigger focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million acres in the program by raising rental rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife. Recognizing the central role CRP could play in climate mitigation, the Biden-Harris Administration is strengthening the program to boost participation among private landowners and agricultural producers to maximize benefits and to reinvigorate climate-smart policies at the USDA.

This toolkit includes:

- ✓ State Level News Release template (Attached)
- ✓ Key Messages and Talking Points (Attached)
- ✓ State Level GovDelivery Bulletin

Please:

- **Please localize the state level news release** and issue to state and local media.
- Issue **State Level GovDelivery** articles as outlined within this toolkit.

Please flag regional or national media inquiries to FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov, and we will work with you on next steps.

If you have any questions, contact john.gibbons2@usda.gov



Gov Delivery

As a reminder, GovDelivery will no longer auto send state office news releases. State GovDelivery Coordinators will need to follow guidelines provided for manually pushing the releases out through GovDelivery once they are posted to the webpage. [Download guide.](#)

Title: USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program

Preheader: USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

Text: Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including \$330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and \$25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement today at the White House National Climate Task Force meeting to demonstrate USDA's commitment to putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

The Biden-Harris Administration is working to leverage USDA conservation programs for climate mitigation, including continuing to invest in innovation partnership programs like RCPP and On-Farm Trials as well as strengthening programs like CRP to enhance their impacts.

Conservation Reserve Program

USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.

CRP's long-term goal is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, improve soil health and carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a number of signups, including the general signup



and continuous signup, which are both open now, as well as a CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing a new **Climate-Smart Practice Incentive** for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

- **Adjusting soil rental rates.** This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.
- **Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%.** This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.
- **Increasing payments for water quality practices.** Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.
- **Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate.** This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

Enhanced Natural Resource Benefits

To boost impacts for natural resources, FSA is:

- **Moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup.** Unlike the general signup, producers can sign up year-round for the continuous signup and be eligible for additional incentives.
- **Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones.** This aims to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups.**

Expanding Prairie Pothole Soil Health and Watershed Programs

CRP has two pilot programs — the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) and the Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers 30-year contracts (CLEAR30).

- For SHIPP, which is a short-term option (3, 4, or 5-year contracts) for farmers to plant cover on less productive agricultural lands, FSA will hold a 2021 signup in the Prairie Pothole states.



- The CLEAR30 pilot, a long-term option through CRP, will be expanded from the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay pilot regions to nationwide.

Increasing Technical Assistance Capacity and Impact Measurement

USDA technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is critical to enable producers to plan and implement conservation practices that are appropriate for their needs. To ensure increased enrollment and support for producers, USDA is increasing NRCS technical assistance capacity for CRP by \$140 million.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA will invest \$10 million in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

To learn more about updates to CRP, download our “What’s New with CRP” [fact sheet](#).

Partnership Programs Contribute to Priorities

In addition to changes to CRP, Secretary Vilsack also announced significant investments for climate-smart policies. First, NRCS is investing \$330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to address climate change and other natural resources challenges. NRCS will announce more details on the RCPP project selections on April 26.

Second, NRCS is investing \$25 million in proposals for On-Farm Trials, which are part of the Conservation Innovation Grants program. NRCS is seeking proposals through June 21. Project priorities include climate-smart agricultural solutions and soil health practices.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including state, local, and tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and



committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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Announcement Talking Points

USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

Last Updated: 4/21/2021

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that it will expand and renew the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a bigger focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million acres in the program by raising rental rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife. Recognizing the central role CRP could play in climate mitigation, the Biden-Harris Administration is strengthening the program to boost participation among private landowners and agricultural producers to maximize benefits and to reinvigorate climate-smart policies at the USDA.

Messaging

Main Message

- The Conservation Reserve Program is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs in existence, and it is one of the most important tools in our nation's fight to reduce the worst impacts of climate change on our farmers, ranchers and foresters.
- Now more than ever, we need CRP to do its job and to do it well.
- USDA has closely evaluated CRP and is refreshing the program with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a bigger focus on the program's role in climate mitigation.
- The Biden-Harris Administration is strengthening this important program to boost participation among private landowners and agricultural producers to maximize benefits and to reinvigorate climate-smart policies at the USDA.

Talking Points

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General CRP Talking Points

- The Conservation Reserve Program is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs in existence, and it is one of the most important tools in our nation's fight to reduce the worst impacts of climate change on our farmers, ranchers and foresters.
- CRP is a voluntary land conservation program administered by FSA.
- In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality.
- Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length.
- The long-term goal of the program is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and create wildlife habitat.
- By enrolling in CRP, producers are improving water quality, reducing soil erosion, and creating or restoring habitat for wildlife. This in turn spurs hunting, fishing, recreation, tourism, and other economic development across rural America.
- Farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program receive a yearly rental payment for voluntarily establishing long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) — about the same amount the entire state of Delaware emits annually.
 - If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons each year.
- In addition to climate benefits, other natural resource benefits include:
 - Preventing more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, which is enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks;
 - Reducing nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95 and 85 percent, respectively;
 - Creating more than 3 million acres of restored wetlands while protecting more than 175,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, which is enough to go around the world seven times; and
 - Benefiting bees and other pollinators and increasing populations of ducks, pheasants, turkey, bobwhite quail, prairie chickens, grasshopper sparrows, and many other birds.

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