



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1300 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Contact:
Kent Politsch
(202) 720-7163
kent.politsch@wdc.usda.gov

USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program General Sign-up

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 26, 2010 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that a general sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will begin on August 2, 2010 and continue through August 27, 2010. During the sign-up period, farmers and ranchers may offer eligible land for CRP's competitive general sign-up at their county Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. The 2008 Farm Bill authorized USDA to maintain CRP enrollment up to 32 million acres. Jim Miller, Agriculture Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agriculture Services, made the announcement on behalf of Secretary Vilsack during a conference call with reporters.

"America's farmers and ranchers play an important role in improving our environment, and for nearly 25 years, CRP has helped this nation build sound conservation practices that preserve the soil, clean our water, and restore habitat for wildlife," said Miller. "Today's announcement will help us create a greener and healthier America, and I encourage all interested farmers and ranchers to contact their local FSA office to learn more how to take advantage of this opportunity."

To help ensure that interested farmers and ranchers are aware of the sign-up period, USDA has signed partnership agreements with several conservation and wildlife organizations, which will play an active role in USDA's 2010 CRP outreach efforts. Additionally, Secretary Vilsack has recorded two public service announcements, which are available to the press and public at www.fsa.usda.gov/psa.

CRP is a voluntary program that assists farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers to use their environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolling in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers in exchange for rental payments, cost-share, and technical assistance. CRP protects millions of acres of America's topsoil from erosion and is designed to improve the nation's natural resources base. Participants voluntarily remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production by entering into long-term contracts for 10 to 15 years. In exchange, participants receive annual rental payments and a payment of up to 50 percent of the cost of establishing conservation practices.

By reducing water runoff and sedimentation, CRP also protects groundwater and helps improve the condition of lakes, rivers, ponds and streams. Acreage enrolled in the CRP is

planted to resource-conserving vegetative covers, making the program a major contributor to wildlife population increases in many parts of the country. As a result, CRP has provided significant opportunities for hunting and fishing on private lands.

Land currently not enrolled in CRP may be offered in this sign-up provided all eligibility requirements are met. Additionally, current CRP participants with contracts expiring this fall covering about 4.5 million acres may make new contract offers. Contracts awarded under this sign-up are scheduled to become effective Oct. 1, 2010.

FSA implements CRP on behalf of Commodity Credit Corporation. FSA will evaluate and rank eligible CRP offers using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) for environmental benefits to be gained from enrolling the land in CRP. The EBI consists of five environmental factors (wildlife, water, soil, air and enduring benefits) and cost. Decisions on the EBI cutoff will be made after the sign-up ends and after analyzing the EBI data of all the offers.

Those who would have met previous sign-up EBI thresholds are not guaranteed a contract under this sign-up. In addition to the general sign-up, CRP's continuous sign-up program will be ongoing. Continuous acres represent the most environmentally desirable and sensitive land. For more information, visit <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp>.

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