

Conservation Security Program Comments
ATTN: David McKay
NRCS Conservation Operations Division
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013

308

I am writing to suggest important changes to the USDA's proposed rules for the operation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). I support the CSP as a nationwide conservation program focused on working farmlands and which would reward the best, and motivate the rest. As intended by Congress, the CSP should be open to all farmers in the U.S. practicing effective conservation.

First, USDA should issue a supplement to the rule, which would be open for public comment for 30 days. This should be done immediately to fix major problems with the proposed rules issued on January 2, 2004, which are not consistent with the law authorizing the CSP nor with the funding allocated by Congress making CSP an uncapped national entitlement program.

In addition,

1. USDA's preferred approach in the proposed rule would severely and unnecessarily prevent most farmers from gaining access to the CSP. USDA must adhere to the law, and to the recently appropriated full funding of CSP by Congress, and make CSP available nationwide to all farmers practicing effective conservation. The USDA needs to get rid of the idea of restricting sign-up for CSP to a few selected watersheds and undefined categories.
2. The USDA's proposed rules fail to make anywhere close to adequate payments for environmental benefits being produced by farmers currently practicing effective conservation. The best way to secure the vital conservation of our soil and other resources is to recognize and reward it when and where it is being done. Paying the best practitioners for results is sound economics and smart policy, providing both reward and motivation. CSP base payments should be set at the local rental rates based on land capability without the 90% reduction proposed by USDA. Enhanced payments should reward the most environmentally-beneficial systems and to the maximum extent possible pay for results. The enhanced payments should not be treated as cost-share but rather as real bonuses to reward exceptional performance.
3. CSP needs to recognize and reward resource-conserving crop rotations and managed rotational grazing as proven conservation farming systems that deliver environmental benefits to society. Both are specifically mentioned for enhanced payments in the CSP statute. The final rule should highlight substantial enhancement payments for these systems, as well as payments for management of existing practices.
4. USDA should not penalize farmers for shifting former cropland to pasture as part of a managed grazing system. Former or potential cropland that is pastured and put into a managed rotational grazing system must receive equal payment rates to other cropland, and not the lower rate of pastureland. The rules should establish base payments based on NRCS land capability classes, not current land use.
5. CSP should allow farmers with USDA-approved organic certification plans under the National Organic Program to simultaneously certify under both the National Organic Program and CSP, if they meet the standards of both. No need to tie farmers up in red tape.

Sincerely,

(David McKay)

(Additional comments on back)

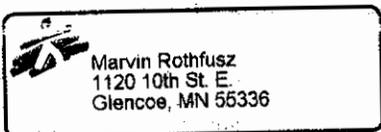
Additional Comments:

1. NRCS is seeking comments on the idea of a one-producer, one-contract approach to CSP contracts, as a way to provide the fairest treatment of all producers and to guard against program fraud and abuse. Do you agree with this approach? Do you agree that all CSP payments should also be attributed to real persons (not various corporate or business entities)? And do you agree that the payment limits set in the law (\$20,000 per year for Tier 1, \$35,000 per year for Tier 2, and \$45,000 per year for Tier 3) should be maintained? *Not sure*
Yes!

2. NRCS is proposing that CSP contracts in general not be renewable, except in special circumstances. The law, on the other hand, leaves it up to the farmer to decide if he or she wants to renew the contract, and USDA would renew unless the farmer was not fulfilling the contract. Do you agree that CSP contracts should be renewable, as part of an ongoing program, and not limited to one-time contracts? *Yes!*

3. Your additional comments on CSP and the USDA's proposed rules:

Protect the ecology of our precious natural resources.



Name (if not signed on front):

Marvin Rothfus

Conservation Security Program Comments
ATTN: David McKay
NRCS Conservation Operations Division
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013

309

I am writing to suggest important changes to the USDA's proposed rules for the operation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). I support the CSP as a nationwide conservation program focused on working farmlands and which would reward the best, and motivate the rest. As intended by Congress, the CSP should be open to all farmers in the U.S. practicing effective conservation.

First, USDA should issue a supplement to the rule, which would be open for public comment for 30 days. This should be done immediately to fix major problems with the proposed rules issued on January 2, 2004, which are not consistent with the law authorizing the CSP nor with the funding allocated by Congress making CSP an uncapped national entitlement program.

In addition,

1. USDA's preferred approach in the proposed rule would severely and unnecessarily prevent most farmers from gaining access to the CSP. USDA must adhere to the law, and to the recently appropriated full funding of CSP by Congress, and make CSP available nationwide to all farmers practicing effective conservation. The USDA needs to get rid of the idea of restricting sign-up for CSP to a few selected watersheds and undefined categories.
2. The USDA's proposed rules fail to make anywhere close to adequate payments for environmental benefits being produced by farmers currently practicing effective conservation. The best way to secure the vital conservation of our soil and other resources is to recognize and reward it when and where it is being done. Paying the best practitioners for results is sound economics and smart policy, providing both reward and motivation. CSP base payments should be set at the local rental rates based on land capability without the 90% reduction proposed by USDA. Enhanced payments should reward the most environmentally-beneficial systems and to the maximum extent possible pay for results. The enhanced payments should not be treated as cost-share but rather as real bonuses to reward exceptional performance.
3. CSP needs to recognize and reward resource-conserving crop rotations and managed rotational grazing as proven conservation farming systems that deliver environmental benefits to society. Both are specifically mentioned for enhanced payments in the CSP statute. The final rule should highlight substantial enhancement payments for these systems, as well as payments for management of existing practices.
4. USDA should not penalize farmers for shifting former cropland to pasture as part of a managed grazing system. Former or potential cropland that is pastured and put into a managed rotational grazing system must receive equal payment rates to other cropland, and not the lower rate of pastureland. The rules should establish base payments based on NRCS land capability classes, not current land use.
5. CSP should allow farmers with USDA-approved organic certification plans under the National Organic Program to simultaneously certify under both the National Organic Program and CSP, if they meet the standards of both. No need to tie farmers up in red tape.

Sincerely,

Dave Baker

2-19-04

(Additional comments on back)

Additional Comments:

1. NRCS is seeking comments on the idea of a one-producer, one-contract approach to CSP contracts, as a way to provide the fairest treatment of all producers and to guard against program fraud and abuse. Do you agree with this approach? Do you agree that all CSP payments should also be attributed to real persons (not various corporate or business entities)? And do you agree that the payment limits set in the law (\$20,000 per year for Tier 1, \$35,000 per year for Tier 2, and \$45,000 per year for Tier 3) should be maintained?

2. NRCS is proposing that CSP contracts in general not be renewable, except in special circumstances. The law, on the other hand, leaves it up to the farmer to decide if he or she wants to renew the contract, and USDA would renew unless the farmer was not fulfilling the contract. Do you agree that CSP contracts should be renewable, as part of an ongoing program, and not limited to one-time contracts? *YES*

3. Your additional comments on CSP and the USDA s proposed rules:

Name (if not signed on front): _____

Conservation Security Program Comments
ATTN: David McKay
NRCS Conservation Operations Division
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013

I am writing to suggest important changes to the USDA's proposed rules for the operation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). I support the CSP as a nationwide conservation program focused on working farmlands and which would "reward the best, and motivate the rest." As intended by Congress, the CSP should be open to all farmers in the U.S. practicing effective conservation.

First, USDA should issue a supplement to the rule, which would be open for public comment for a minimum of 30 days. This should be done immediately to fix major problems with the proposed rules issued on January 2, 2004, which are not consistent with the law authorizing the CSP nor with the funding allocated by Congress making CSP an uncapped national entitlement program.

Four comments on the proposed rule:

1. USDA's "preferred approach" in the proposed rule would severely and unnecessarily prevent most farmers from gaining access to the CSP. USDA must adhere to the law, and to the recently appropriated full funding of CSP by Congress, and make CSP available to all farmers practicing effective conservation. The USDA needs to get rid of the idea of restricting sign-up for CSP to a few "selected watersheds" and undefined "categories."
2. The USDA's proposed rules fail to make anywhere close to adequate payments for environmental benefits being produced by farmers practicing effective conservation. The best way to secure the vital conservation of our soil and other resources is to recognize and reward it when and where it is being done. Paying the best practitioners for results is sound economics and smart policy, providing both reward and motivation. CSP base payments should be set at the rates established in the CSP law without the 90% reduction proposed by USDA. Enhanced payments should reward the most environmentally-beneficial systems and to the maximum extent possible pay for results. The enhanced payments should not be treated as cost-share but rather as real bonuses to reward exceptional performance.
3. CSP needs to recognize and reward resource-conserving crop rotations and managed rotational grazing as proven conservation farming systems that deliver environmental benefits to society. Both are specifically mentioned for enhanced payments in the CSP statute.
4. USDA should not penalize farmers for shifting former cropland to pasture as part of a managed grazing system, as the USDA's proposed rule does. Former or potential cropland that is pastured and put into a managed rotational grazing system must receive equal payment rates to other cropland, and not the lower rate of pastureland. The rules should establish base payments based on NRCS land capability classes, not current land use.
5. CSP should allow farmers with USDA-approved organic certification plans under the National Organic Program to simultaneously certify under both the National Organic Program and CSP, if they meet the standards of both. No need to tie farmers up in red tape.

Sincerely,

Tom Bestul

2-18-04

COMMENT FORM

This form may be helpful to you in making comments on the proposed rules for the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Just circle the response below each statement that best mirrors your thought. Use the space below each statement to add any personal comments, or attach additional sheets of paper. This form is not intended to comment on all aspects of the program, but to provide a guideline for you in making comments.

The completed form should be mailed to: Conservation Security Program Comments, ATTN: David McKay, Operations Division, NRCS, PO Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013 BY MARCH 2, 2004.

You may access the full text of the proposed rules through the NRCS home page at "www.nrcs.usda.gov," then selecting "Farm Bill." Or contact your local soil conservation district.

Please feel free to make copies of this form for your friends and neighbors and ask them to comment as well.

1. All CSP contracts should be limited to five years in length, with annual payments.

Agree Disagree No Comment

2. Any technical assistance or monitoring should only be carried out by personnel approved by the landowner.

Agree Disagree No Comment

3. If some of the property under CSP contract changes ownership, the buyer should have the option of continuing the contract, regardless of the status of the rest of the buyer's operation.

Agree Disagree No Comment

4. If some of the property under CSP contract changes ownership, the seller should be liable for any charges, penalties, etc. IF THE BUYER CHOOSES NOT to continue the contract, but such financial penalties shall not exceed the total CSP dollars received under the contract.

Agree Disagree No Comment

5. If an operator with a signed CSP contract purchases or rents additional land that does not meet CSP guidelines, the operator should not be penalized.

Agree Disagree No Comment

6. If the property changes hands after the CSP contract has ended, the buyer shall not be required to maintain such practices for their lifespan and the buyer shall not be penalized.

Agree Disagree No Comment

7. Once the CSP contract has ended, operators should not be required to maintain such practices for their lifespan.

Agree Disagree No Comment



8. All decisions by the agency should be able to be appealed.

Agree

Disagree

No Comment

9. CSP participants should have a choice between using the administrative review process and use of the court system to satisfy disputes.

Agree

Disagree

No Comment

Board of Arbitration

10. The emphasis of the CSP practices should be to enhance the agricultural productivity of soil and water resources rather than for wildlife production.

Agree

Disagree

No Comment

Boyle

11. Producers should not be required to sign any permanent easements on their property in order to enroll in any portion of the CSP program.

Agree

Disagree

No Comment

12. CSP contracts should recognize that some practices may not be able to be implemented or maintained due to natural disasters such as fire, flood, tornado, etc.

Agree

Disagree

No Comment

13. Other Comments:

1) Keep the courts out of it. Use a Board of Arbitration to settle problems.

CSP Practice should be to enhance both agriculture & wildlife.

SIGNED:

Robert M. Mink, Sr.

(Your signature, please)

NAME:

Robert M. Mink, Sr.

ADDRESS:

5925 - 91st Ave S E.

CITY:

Dickey

STATE: ND

ZIPCODE:

58431

Please note that UNSIGNED comments are not rated as highly as signed comments.

2151 Folwell Ave.
Saint Paul, MN 55108
February 18, 2004

Mr. David McKay
NRCS Conservation Operations Division
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013

Dear Mr. McKay:

We are writing about the USDA's proposed rules for the operation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). We strongly support a nationwide CSP conservation program. As intended by Congress, the CSP should be open to all U. S. farmers who are willing to practice effective conservation.

We feel that the proposed rules issued on January 2, 2004 are not consistent with either the law authorizing the CSP or the funding allocated by Congress making CSP an uncapped national entitlement program.

USDA's "preferred approach" in the proposed rule would prevent most farmers from gaining access to the CSP. USDA must adhere to the law, and to the recently appropriated full funding of CSP by Congress, and make CSP available nationwide to all farmers practicing effective conservation. The USDA should not restrict sign-up for CSP to a few "selected watersheds" and undefined "categories."

The USDA's proposed rules do not provide adequate payments for environmental benefits produced by farmers currently practicing effective conservation. Paying the best practitioners for results is sound economics and smart policy, providing both reward and motivation. CSP base payments should be set at the local rental rates based on land capability without the 90% reduction proposed by USDA. Enhanced payments should reward the most environmentally-beneficial systems and to the maximum extent possible pay for results. The enhanced payments should not be treated as cost-share but rather as real bonuses to reward exceptional performance.

CSP needs to recognize and reward crop rotations and managed rotational grazing as proven conservation farming system. Both are specifically mentioned for enhanced payments in the CSP statute. The final rule should highlight substantial enhancement payments for these systems, as well as payments for management of existing practices.

USDA should not penalize farmers for shifting former cropland to pasture as part of a managed grazing system. Former or potential cropland that is pastured and put into a managed rotational grazing system should receive payment rates equal to those for other

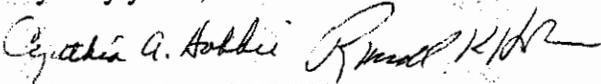
cropland, not the lower rate of pastureland. The rules should establish base payments based on NRCS land capability classes, not current land use.

CSP should allow farmers with USDA-approved organic certification plans under the National Organic Program to certify under both the National Organic Program and CSP, if they meet the standards of both.

NRCS should utilize a one-producer, one-contract approach to CSP contracts, in order to provide the fairest treatment of all producers and to guard against program fraud and abuse. All CSP payments should be attributed to real persons, not corporate or business entities. Payment limits set in the law should be maintained.

CSP contracts should be renewable as part of an ongoing program, and not limited to one-time contracts. The NRCS proposal that CSP contracts should not be renewable except in special circumstances conflicts with the law, which leaves it up to the farmer to decide if he or she wants to renew the contract. NRCS's proposed restriction to one-time contracts is contrary to the entire purpose of the CSP to secure ongoing conservation of our nation's national resources.

Very truly yours,


Cynthia and Russell Hobbie