

## Questions and Answers

## ***Watershed Approach for the Conservation Security Program***

May 2004

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### **Q. Why is NRCS implementing CSP on a watershed basis versus a nationwide basis?**

**A.** A staged, watershed-based implementation of CSP makes sense – economically, practically and administratively. Here's why:

Focusing on high priority watersheds will reduce the administrative burden on applicants, and will reduce the costs of processing a large number of applications that cannot be funded.

NRCS expects that a significant number of producers will seek participation in CSP and ask for assistance to determine their potential eligibility for the program. By law, NRCS cannot incur technical assistance costs in excess of 15 percent of the funds expended in that fiscal year for CSP. That constraint, coupled with a constricted Congressional appropriation, meant that only an estimated 300 CSP contracts could have been signed nationwide with producers in fiscal year 2004. But thanks to a resourceful programmatic approach, 3,000 – 5,000 contracts, it is estimated, will now be signed.

### **Q. Will producers in every watershed have an opportunity to participate?**

**A.** Yes. Because everyone lives in a watershed, and because each year producers in approximately one-eighth of the nation's 2119

watersheds will be eligible for the signup, everyone will have the opportunity to participate over the eight-year period.

### **Q. Why not use county or state lines as the delineation for the signup area?**

**A.** Watersheds are nature's boundaries. They are also a common sense way to group together producers working on similar environmental issues. They offer a chance to measure our environmental success in a way that state or county lines couldn't be expected to do. Using a watershed approach will also help ensure that CSP's finite resources are focused first on the most achievable environmental performance areas. And since everyone lives in a watershed, as we rotate through the nation's watersheds every farmer and rancher will get a chance to participate within the next eight years.

### **Q. What if my watershed is not selected this year?**

**A.** Signups for participation in the program will be rotated between watersheds on an annual basis. Each year (after the initial signup) producers in approximately one-eighth of the nation's watersheds will be eligible for the signup. Producers who are not in a selected watershed can use that time to assess the resources on their farms and ranches and begin preparing for participation in the program

when their watershed is rotated into the signup. To help them do so, producers can select from a portfolio of USDA, state and local conservation programs to make the necessary natural resource improvements on their operations.

**Q. Will I get the help I need to participate?**

**A.** Yes. The staged approach using priority watersheds will allow existing agency staff and private technical service providers to more thoroughly assist landowners who apply during the CSP sign-up, as well as those landowners who will be seeking technical assistance to ready their farms and ranches for subsequent signups.

**Q. Will more money be available in future years?**

**A.** Over the next seven years the administration is committing \$13.4 billion in funding for the Conservation Security Program. Ultimately, Congress will determine the funding available for each future fiscal year.

The watershed approach allows NRCS all the flexibility needed to expand the program as Congress makes more funds available. The eligibility gates can easily be swung open to allow additional watersheds and farmers and ranchers – or even all watersheds and farmers and ranchers – to be added to the CSP sign up.

Within the watershed context, eligibility criteria can also be relaxed. However, watersheds *also* provide the necessary narrowing of the gate in years where funds *do not* exist to either adequately fund contracts or provide the conservation services necessary to run a quality CSP program.