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APPLICATIONS FOR CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM DUE JANUARY 17

Popular Farm Bill Conservation Program Seeks Producer Participation

ATHENS, GA, Dec. 6, 2013 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is opening the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) for new enrollments for federal fiscal year 2014. NRCS Chief Jason Weller recently announced that through January 17, 2014, producers interested in participating in the program can submit applications to NRCS.

“Through the Conservation Stewardship Program, farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners are going the extra mile to conserve our nation’s resources,” Weller said. “Through their conservation actions, they are ensuring that their operations are more productive and sustainable over the long run.”

CSP is an important Farm Bill conservation program that helps established conservation stewards with taking their level of natural resource management to the next level to improve both their agricultural production and provide valuable conservation benefits such as cleaner and more abundant water, as well as healthier soils and better wildlife habitat.

Weller said today's announcement is another example of USDA's comprehensive focus on promoting environmental conservation and strengthening the rural economy, and it is a reminder that a new Food, Farm and Jobs Bill is pivotal to continue these efforts. CSP is now in its fifth year and so far, NRCS has partnered with producers to enroll more than 59 million acres across the nation.

In Georgia, NRCS has taken an active role in partnering with producers and the agency’s efforts have garnered support statewide. State Conservationist James E. Tillman, Sr. said, “Georgia’s NRCS Team has done a phenomenal job with the Conservation Stewardship Program. Since 2010, our staff has worked alongside landowners and producers to voluntarily enroll 978,395 acres of private lands in CSP.”

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The program emphasizes conservation performance — producers earn higher payments for higher performance. In CSP, producers install conservation enhancements to make positive changes in soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, animal resources and energy.

Some popular enhancements used by farmers and ranchers include:

- Using new nozzles that reduce the drift of pesticides, lowering input costs and making sure pesticides are used where they are most needed;
- Modifying water facilities to prevent bats and bird species from being trapped;
- Burning patches of land, mimicking prairie fires to enhance wildlife habitat; and
- Rotating feeding areas and monitoring key grazing areas to improve grazing management.

Eligible Georgia landowners and operators can enroll in CSP through January 17, 2014 to be eligible during the 2014 federal fiscal year. While local NRCS offices accept CSP applications year round, NRCS evaluates applications during announced ranking periods. To be eligible for this year's enrollment, producers must have their applications submitted to NRCS by the closing date.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements and payment types.

Learn more about CSP by visiting the [Georgia NRCS website](#) or a [local NRCS field office](#).

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