



Natural Resources Conservation Service 2014 Conservation Stewardship Program



The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) rewards farmers and forestry producers who want to take their land management practices to the next level by paying for conservation performance – the higher the environmental performance, the higher the payment. This voluntary USDA program encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by:

1. undertaking additional conservation activities (enhancements) and
2. maintaining and improving existing conservation systems.

Applications are accepted continuously. Sign up by February 7, 2014 to be considered for limited funding.

Program Description

CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help land stewards conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. It is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or crops produced. Eligible lands include crop-, grass-, improved pasture-, and nonindustrial private forest land. Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, or joint operations.

Payments for the five-year contract are limited to \$40,000/year for individuals and \$80,000/year for joint operations. Participation requires documentation of existing conservation activities and proposed enhancements.

Applicants must:

- be the operator of record in the USDA farm records management system for the land being enrolled;
- have records showing effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract;
- be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions and adjusted gross income provisions; and
- include the eligible land in their entire agricultural or forestry operation.

Resource Concern

Sample Enhancements*

*A CSP "Enhancement" is a conservation activity used to treat natural resources and improve conservation performance. Enhancement activities exceed the sustainable level for a given resource.

Soil (Quality and Erosion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive no-till • Use of cover crop mixes • Use of deep-rooted crops to break up soil compaction • Intensive cover cropping in annual crops
Water (Quality and Quantity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant tissue tests and analysis to improve nitrogen management • Split nitrogen application (50% after crop emergence or pasture green up) • Cover crops to scavenge residual nitrogen • Precision application technology to apply nutrients
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel use reduction for field operations • Variable frequency drive electric motors • Use of legume cover crops as a nitrogen source

Resource Concern	Sample Enhancements*
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-burning alternatives for removal of crop residues • Drift reducing nozzles, low pressures, lower boom height, and adjuvants to reduce pesticide drift • GPS, targeted spray application, or other chemical application electronic control technology • Nitrification or urease inhibitors
Plant Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovation of a windbreak, shelterbelt or hedgerow for wildlife habitat • Intensive rotational grazing • High residue cover crop (or mixtures) to suppress weeds and improve soil health • Creating forest opening to improve hardwood stands
Animal Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grazing management to improve wildlife habitat • Hay harvesting in a manner that allows wildlife to flush and escape • Shallow water habitat • Stockpiling of forages to extend the grazing season

What You Need to Apply

- Pre-Screening Tool
- Signed CSP Application
- Completed Direct Deposit Form
- Completed Control of Land Form
- Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT)

CSP Application Process

Application Rankings

Agriculture and forestry applications are evaluated and ranked separately. In the ranking process, producers get credit for:

- conservation measures they have already implemented, and
- new measures they agree to add.

Self-Screening

Potential applicants are encouraged to determine whether CSP is right for them by completing the self-screening checklist and reviewing the CSP Conservation Activity List

to identify new conservation activities they might install. Because some conservation enhancements work better when implemented as a group, the activity list identifies enhancement “bundles” that receive both higher rankings and higher payments.

Both the checklist and the activity list are available on the national NRCS website at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/>.

If an applicant is pre-approved for funding, NRCS requests the applicant’s conservation activity records and conducts on-site field verification to ensure that the information provided is accurate. Once the information is verified, NRCS and the applicant proceed to develop the contract.

Learn More

For more information about CSP, visit your local NRCS office located in the USDA Service Center near you. CSP information is also available on the national website at www.nrcs.usda.gov or the Virginia NRCS website at www.va.nrcs.usda.gov.