



Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

What is CSP?

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary USDA program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by:

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

CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help land stewards conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land.

Protecting Resources

CSP addresses the following resource concerns:

- soil quality
- soil erosion
- water quality
- water quantity
- air quality
- plant resources
- animal resources
- energy



Examples of cover crops on Vermont fields. Cover crops address plant, soil and water resource concerns.

Who is eligible?

CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or crops produced.

Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, nonindustrial private forest land, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian tribes. They must:

- be the operator of record in the USDA farm records management system for the eligible land being offered for enrollment;
- have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract and be able to produce records documenting that control;
- 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.

What are the benefits?

CSP pays participants for conservation performance — **the higher the environmental performance, the higher the payment.**

It provides two possible types of payments:

1. An annual payment is available for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices.
2. A supplemental payment is available to participants who also adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation.



Application: What You Need

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

CSP Application Process

Signing Up

NRCS makes CSP available through continuous sign-up, with announced cut-off dates for ranking and funding applications.

Application Rankings

Applications are evaluated and ranked. (Agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land applications are 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: www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/

Payments

Through five-year contracts, NRCS makes payments after October 1 for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous fiscal year (Oct. 1 - Sept. 30).

- **Payment Limit.** A person or legal entity may have more than one CSP contract, but for all CSP contracts combined, may not receive more than \$40,000 in any year or more than \$200,000 during any five-year period.
- **Contract Limit.** The contract limit is the same as the payment limit except in the case of joint operations, for which the contract limit is
- \$80,000 per fiscal year and \$400,000 over the term of the contract period.

Participants who are historically underserved producers (limited resource farmers, beginning farmers, or socially disadvantaged farmers) may receive a minimum payment of \$1,000 if the contract amount in any given year is less than that amount.



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<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/vt/home/>

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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