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CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKBOOK AVAILABLE FOR PRODUCERS

WASHINGTON, Dec. 6, 2004—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight today announced that the self-assessment workbook is available for potential participants in the 2005 winter sign-up for the Conservation Security Program (CSP). CSP is a voluntary program that supports ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural working lands and enhances the condition of America's natural resources.

"The workbook is significant because "self-assessment" is a new way of doing business with NRCS. Used as a pilot that proved successful in last year's program, farmers and ranchers can assess their potential eligibility by themselves on their own time at their convenience," Knight said.

The initial self-assessment will help producers identify whether their individual agricultural operation meets sign-up criteria and answer the question, "Have I fully addressed the minimum requirements for both soil quality and water quality on the land I manage?" By going through the workbook, producers will get an initial idea about whether they are eligible for CSP at this time. Local NRCS offices in the watershed will be hosting informational workshops to provide more information about program requirements and benefits.

Producers who may not be eligible at this time can find out about other USDA programs that can help them achieve a higher level of conservation so that they may apply for CSP in the future.

To apply for the program, NRCS asks potential participants to complete the self-assessment to determine if their operations meet the requirements of the program and qualify for program participation. The self-assessment process is completed using a self-screening questionnaire for each land use to be enrolled.

NRCS provides up-to-date technology, tools and resource information to meet the conservation needs of the nation's producers. Soil quality assessment information at http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/soil_quality/assessment/index.html includes the Soil Conditioning Index, a tool used to predict the consequences of cropping systems and tillage practices on the status of soil organic matter. Water quality resources, including a Manure Management Planner, are at <http://wmc.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/wq.html>.

On Nov. 2, 2004, USDA announced that the fiscal year 2005 CSP will be available to eligible farmers and ranchers in 202 watersheds across the nation during a sign-up to be held this winter. A sign-up announcement will be published along with the final rule that will detail specific program requirements in these watersheds. The program will be offered each year on a rotational basis in as many watersheds as funding allows.

The CSP self-assessment workbook is available in hardcopy or compact disk (CD) from local NRCS offices and online at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>. Also at that Web site is a map of the CSP watersheds and additional information on the program.

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