

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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THREE WATERSHEDS INCLUDED IN HISTORIC EXPANSION OF THE NATIONAL CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM

SALT LAKE CITY, Nov. 2, 2004—Three Utah watersheds were among two hundred two across the nation invited to participate in a historic new program designed to reward farmers for long-term stewardship. U. S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman announced the selected watersheds today and said that sign-ups for the 2005 Conservation Security Program (CSP) would begin this winter.

The three primary watersheds announced for Utah are the Little Bear in Cache County, the San Pitch in Sanpete County, and the Montezuma in San Juan County.

CSP is a voluntary program that supports a tradition of ongoing stewardship of working agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. It is part of the 2002 Farm Bill and was introduced last summer in 18 watersheds nationwide. In this first opportunity for farmers from each state to participate, about one eighth of the Nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year over an eight-year period.

“As an agency and as a Nation we have helped farmers and ranchers correct past conservation problems such as soil erosion or water conservation since the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s,” said Sylvia Gillen, Utah State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) overseeing CSP. This, however, represents a whole new direction in conservation and agricultural policy and programs. These payments for demonstrable long-term stewardship will reward many of those who undertook conservation on their own initiative and who care for the resources we all share.”

Furthermore the program is available on pastureland, rangeland and all types of cropland—including Utah's orchards, vines, vegetables, and dry beans where agricultural programs have not always been available.

Participants will be enrolled in one of three tiers in the program, depending on the extent of the conservation treatment in place on their farm or ranch. Payments will be based in part on this existing conservation treatment as well as their willingness to undertake additional environmental enhancements.

Gillen said that while the historic application of soil and water conservation are the “price of admission” farmers will also have options to improve wildlife habitat, undertake on-farm energy conservation, improve air quality, participate in environmental monitoring, participate in watershed-wide stewardship programs, and improve nutrient and pest management activities.

NRCS will offer local workshops in the selected watersheds to more fully explain the program to interested potential participants.

CSP will continue to be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows. For more information on CSP and other NRCS programs see <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.

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