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## **CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM SIGN-UP CURRENTLY UNDERWAY.**

*Farm, ranch and forestland operators are encouraged to apply by June 14.*

LINCOLN, May 28, 2013 - Nebraska landowners and operators have until June 14, 2013, to sign up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) at their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office. The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking conservation activities and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems.

CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis. However, only applications received by the June 14 cutoff date will be considered for the current ranking and funding period.

Craig Derickson, NRCS state conservationist in Nebraska, encourages Nebraska farmers and ranchers to not miss out on this opportunity.

“The Conservation Stewardship Program is unique in how NRCS provides conservation program payments. CSP participants will receive an annual land use payment for the environmental benefits they produce on their operations. Under CSP, participants are paid for conservation performance - the higher the operational performance, the higher their payment,” Derickson said.

According to Derickson, CSP has been a very successful program for Nebraska’s farmers and ranchers. Over 2,000 CSP contracts occur in all 93 counties and cover 3.9 million acres in Nebraska.

“CSP is popular in Nebraska because farmers and ranchers don’t have to take land out of production to participate. CSP helps conserve natural resources on working lands. Keeping land in production while protecting natural resources creates a win-win for all Nebraskans. CSP makes it possible to produce crops and livestock while also improving water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat,” Derickson said.

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CSP is available statewide to individual landowners, legal entities, and Indian tribes. Eligible land includes cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe. Contracts are set at five years and include all the land controlled by an operator.

For more information about CSP, including eligibility requirements and a self-screening checklist to see if CSP is right for your operation, producers can visit <http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/CSP.html> or stop by their local NRCS field office.

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