

*Oregon NRCS Fact Sheet:  
Conservation Stewardship Program*

August 2009

***Overview***

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a new, voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their agricultural and forest land.

Through the program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides eligible participants with financial and technical assistance to producers to maintain and manage the existing conservation on their land while also undertaking additional conservation activities.

The Conservation Stewardship Program is available on Tribal and private agricultural lands, as well as for nonindustrial private forest lands statewide. The program provides equitable access to all producers, regardless of operation size, crops produced, or geographic location.

Persons, entities, corporations, and Indian Tribes may be eligible for the program. Eligible lands include cropland, grazing land, nonindustrial private forest lands, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

***How CSP Works***

Potential applicants interested in entering into a stewardship contract may file an application at any time. Applicants must:

- Be the operator of record in the USDA farm records management system for the eligible land being offered for enrollment;
- Have documented control of the land for the term of the proposed contract;
- Include the eligible land in their entire agricultural operation, as represented for other USDA programs;
- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions of 7 CFR Part 12, and adjusted gross income provisions of 7 CFR part 1400;
- Supply information necessary to determine eligibility and to rank the application. Requested information may include, but is not limited to, conservation and production records, and evidence documenting control of the land.

Applications will be evaluated relative to other applications addressing similar priority resource concerns. Agricultural land will compete in ranking pools separate from nonindustrial private forest lands.

Applications will be ranked for funding based on:

- The level of current level of conservation on the land, and
- The additional conservation activities the applicant proposes to complete.

Potential applicants should complete the Conservation Stewardship Self-Screening Checklist, available on the NRCS web site and at NRCS offices to help them decide whether the program may be right for them and their land.

***Application Process***

The Conservation Stewardship Program is offered as a continuous signup, and applications are accepted year-round. NRCS will announce cutoff periods to begin application evaluation and selection for funding.

To be considered for Fiscal Year 2009 funding, applicants must complete the following steps by Sept.30, 2009:

- Complete a Self-Screening Checklist.
- Work with the local USDA Service Center to verify their program eligibility.
- Submit a program application form (CPA-1200).
- Submit an operation map, aerial photograph or overlay that identifies their agricultural and/or forest operation and associated acreage amounts.

Once these steps are completed, NRCS will work with applicants to enter information about the operation in the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT). The CMT is an online questionnaire that collects information on land uses, existing conservation, and additional conservation activities the applicant is willing to undertake in order to estimate the conservation performance level the applicant will achieve. Using the information entered, the CMT determines:

1. Whether the applicant meets the land stewardship threshold necessary to participate in the program,
2. The applicant's ranking score, and
3. The payments that the producer will receive if he or she ranks for funding. *For the Fiscal Year 2009 signup, the agency will establish payment rates after the conclusion of the first ranking period, using enrollment information to set uniform, national payment rates per land use. After payment rates are established, applicants will decide whether to move forward with the contract.*

***Application Selection***

Applications will be evaluated and ranked for funding relative to other applications addressing similar priority resource concerns in a ranking pool specific to the geographic area and land use.

In addition, the program provides opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers and socially disadvantaged producers. Nationally, the program aims to enroll at least five percent of total program acres operated by beginning farmers and ranchers and another five percent operated by socially disadvantaged producers. Within each specified geographic area and land use, beginning farmers and ranchers and socially disadvantaged producers will have a separate funding pool.

***Program Contracts and Payments***

For approved applicants, NRCS can request farm records and conduct on-site field visits to verify the information entered into the CMT. Next, NRCS and the applicant develop a conservation stewardship plan and contract to outline the activities the participant agrees to maintain and adopt to achieve a higher level of conservation performance.

NRCS will make payment as soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous fiscal year. Payments for the 2009 signup will be made in October of 2010.

Contracts cover the eligible land in the entire agricultural operation and are for five years. For all contracts entered into, program payments to a person or legal entity may not exceed \$40,000 in any fiscal year or \$200,000 during any 5-year period.

***More Information***

For more information and updates about the Conservation Stewardship Program and other Farm Bill topics, please refer to the Oregon NRCS Web site at:

<http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/index.html>.