

**CSP WEBINAR**

**[DIFFICULT AUDIO]**

**FS = UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER; MS = UNIDENTIFIED MALE  
SPEAKER; LS = LUTHER SMITH; DW = DAVE WHITE; SP = STEVE  
PARKIN**

**LUTHER SMITH**

LS: Okay, I'm gonna open it up.

FS: The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are in listen  
only mode.

LS: Welcome to the American Society of Agronomy's and the Soil  
Science Society of America's On-Line Educational Seminars.  
My name is Luther Smith, Director of Certification and  
Licensing for ASA and SSSA. Today's seminar is a special  
edition with USDA and NRCS. Our objective for this seminar  
is to provide internet-based continuing education and  
science-based information that assists a certified crop  
advisor, certified professional agronomist, and certified  
professional soil scientist and classifier, as well as the  
members of ASA and SSSA in their daily work, research and  
teaching.

It is also to provide information to other interested  
stakeholders as evidenced by today's seminar. Each seminar  
will be one hour in length from noon to 1:00 p.m. central  
U.S. time. Our next seminar will be Wednesday, September  
9th on climate change. It is a continuation of our August

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12th seminar and we'll provide a more in depth view of what carbon sequestration is and how an advisor could develop programs to help their clients. More details will be announced on the website.

The seminar today is worth one CEU in soil and water management. You will receive the CEU by having registered for the seminar and being attentive throughout the program. It will... **[B ROLL]** Sorry about that, folks. We had a little bit of a technical snafu. Today's seminar, for those who are certified, is worth one CEU in soil and water and you'll automatically receive that for attending today. If you have questions during the program, please use the question box to the left or right of your screen. And you can type those in at any time and then towards the end of the program our presenters will answer the questions.

And I'd encourage you to put the questions in as soon as you have em, that way you don't forget about it and it'll get it lined up for the instructors. Today's seminar we're going to talk--be talking about CSP, the Natural Resources Conservation Services new Conservation Stewardship Program. The new CSP is part of the new Farm Bill replacing the former Conservation Security Program. And, as they say, more than the name has changed. To talk with us about

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those changes and more regarding the new and revamped CSP, we have with us at NRCS Chief Dave White.

Dave White was named Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service on March 24th, 2009. He began his 32 year career with NRCS as a Conservation Aid in Missouri. Subsequently he has served the agency in South Carolina, Montana and its Washington, D.C. headquarters. As Chief, he leads 12,000 employees and manages a budget in excess of \$3 billion. From 2002 to 2008 Mr. White was assigned as the NRCS State Conservationist in Montana. For much of 2007 and 2008 he was also detailed to Senator Tom Harkin's Capitol Hill office where he helped the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry draft the conservation title of the 2008 Farm Bill.

Dave, I'd like to thank you for taking the time today and conducting this seminar, and I'll turn it over to you.

## **DAVE WHITE**

DW: Thanks, Luther. Really appreciate it. By the way, Luther, the only people that really care about a bio is your mom or dad, but thank you for that kind introduction. And I'd also like to thank everyone who has signed on this afternoon. And by the way, Luther, I think this ought to

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be worth more than just one CEU. That seems kind of chintzy (ph.). Anyway, thanks for taking the time to join us this afternoon. And I guess I should say, you know, we live in the information age and we're bombarded with different ways of communicating, but all the research still shows particularly the best way to share information with ag producers is directly through their network of people they trust.

And from our money, obviously, we think certified crop advisors and members of the three societies rank real high on that list. And we know that farmers and ranchers look to you for information that's timely, it's accurate, that's relevant to what they need, and generally if you tell em something, they can pretty much take it to the bank. And that's why I was so grateful when Luther suggested putting together this webinar to acquaint you with the Conservation Stewardship Program, or CSP, and ask your assistance in helping us let the producers know about it.

I'm just gonna give ya a brief overview of this program and I'm gonna turn you over to some other people. Luther mentioned that in 2007 I was loaned to Senator Harkin, and I was. I worked on--worked on revamping the Conservation Stewardship Program that came out in the new Farm Bill.

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What he didn't tell you is that in 2002 I was loaned to Senator Lugar to help create the old Conservation Security Program which is-- pretty much exists in name only.

Congress put enough money in there to honor all the existing contracts but what we're really focused on now is this new rascal. We wanted to make it difficult. We kept the same acronym but changed the program substantially. This is the stewardship program that's going to reward for existing conservation that's on the ground and it's gonna encourage new conservation on the ground. Key thing here, it's a working lands program. It is not a land retirement program.

We want the farmers and ranchers to keep producing and to recognize the commodities that they produce like clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife and a healthy environment for all of us. And hopefully through this we'll also be able to help producer's bottom line because all the conservation in the world is not gonna do us a bit of good if those men and women can't continue to make their living off the land. So we're very cognizant of that. Sign up for this program began last Monday, August 10th. It's going to occur nationwide. It will be a continual sign up. Producers can go in at any time.

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We are gonna cut off the first enrollment period on September 30th so we can make full use of the acres and the funds we have for Fiscal Year 2009. I'm gonna shut up and turn it over to Steve Parkin (ph.) and Dwayne Howard and they're gonna walk you through this program in more detail. They're our go-to guys on this and they're leading the implementation effort from NRCS's end. And then we'll have time for questions at the end. Steve, Dwayne.

### **STEVE PARKIN AND DWAYNE HOWARD**

SP: Thanks, Chief White. This is Steve Parkin. Luther, if you've got control switched over to our side?

LS: You're ready to go.

SP: All right. Thanks a lot. We're pretty excited about the launch of the new stewardship program. As the Chief said, sign up started last Monday and we're into the second week of the program now. And we're seeing some applications starting to trickle in and we certainly expect activity to pick up. We appreciate your assistance in helping us spread the word about the program. Today we wanna give you an overview about how the program operates so you might better help some of your clients learn about the stewardship program.

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The Secretary has placed the strong emphasis on the stewardship program, as well as the agency had, and for good reason. We think that this program will provide lots of environmental benefits, as well as help farmers and ranchers in their operations. To reinforce some of what the Chief has already provided to you, we are underway with the continuous sign up. Our first cutoff will be September the 30th. Again, this is a continuous sign up. We're not going to have small windows where producers can apply but, rather, they'll be able to come in at any time and we will have cutoff periods whereby we will rank the applicants that come in and make funding decisions at that time.

For this first ranking period we would expect to make pre-approvals of applications sometime in mid-November and have those contracts entered into sometime towards the end of November. The purpose for the program changed with the reauthorization. We're now moving towards encouraging producers to address their resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by installing and adopting new activities and improving, maintaining and managing the existing baseline conservation activities they have on the ground.

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The program is authorized for roughly 12.8 million acres for each year through 2017 and the program availability has expanded considerably. You'll recall the old program was offered in limited watersheds and only for limited sign up periods. The new program is now available nationwide. We'll have a continuous sign up with those periodic cutoffs for funding decisions and also add non-industrial, private forest lands as an eligible land use. Some of the positive, new features that we look forward to in the program will be shifting decision-making closer to the field level where conservation activity really takes place.

States are gonna be allocated acres they'll manage within those states. We're gonna rely on those state conservationists working with their state technical committees to focus the program on resource concerns that are identified as a priority for their state or geographic areas within that state. And that's gonna allow us to competitively rank farmers, ranchers and forestry producers among their peers who face the same types of resource challenges.

The benefits that we see the program offering to the participants certainly would be the recognition through the excellent land stewardship that they've applied to the land

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and, secondly, we will also offer to them payments for performance. Programmers can offer two payments types. One payment will be an annual payment for the installation of additional activities scheduled in the maintenance of the existing conservation systems they have on the land. A supplemental payment will also be available on the croplands for participants who are also receiving an annual payment who will adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation.

For society and for our natural resources we also see this program delivering valuable new conservation. It's gonna expand Ag and forestry producers' ability to produce environmental benefits through the application of new activity through the maintenance of existing systems. Certainly we see improvements there in soil and water quality. We look forward to the enhanced Wildlife Habitat Program will bring [sic], as well as some of our new venture goals within the agency to address global product change, encourage energy, conservation and production in an environmentally friendly fashion.

The program design emphasis, we've learned much from our implementation of the old security program and have tried to include some improvements, one of those being some new management controls to help us implement the program. And

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we are a conservation planning agency and this program relies heavily on our conservation planning process. And, as I've already alluded to, the program is about payment for conservation performance. Some of the critical management controls that we've implemented in program design as far as participation extent; we want to work with the folks who are involved in the day-to-day management and decision-making in these operations.

And we're going to look at working with those folks based on how they represent their operations for other USDA programs. The applicants--the eligible applicants--that we want to work with would be the operators in Farm Service Agency's Record Systems. That operation would include those lands that are farmed substantially separate from other operations. Owners could also participate in the program as participants but we would look at working with those operators who are responsible for that day-to-day operation on those--on those lands.

Again, we will look at payment limitations down to individuals to help us monitor program participation. That's gonna allow these participants to be involved in multiple contracts. Servicing model is going to allow us to make payments for previous year activity which is gonna

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allow us to do some much needed field verification prior to us obligating contracts and prior to us making payments for the application of new activities. This servicing model becomes one we would ask the potential applicants to do a producer self-screening.

Then we would go through that conservation planning process that I alluded to. We would inventory their resources with new tools we've developed for the program and actually sit down with them to schedule the new conservation activities. From a program aspect, these new tools that we put in place are gonna help us to rank, approve, and those folks we pre-approve we'll go out and field verify prior to contract obligation. And then we get into the contract administration and the obligations of the parties to the contract.

The participants would be involved in installing and maintaining those conservation activities and for those-- for their efforts then they would be compensated through their program contract. Again, we are gonna do onsite verification for all pre-approved applications. We'll get those applicants records of their conservation and production systems, we'll go onsite with those folks to do field verification. And we're actually looking to

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substantiate the resource inventory information they provide us during the application process is out on the land and accurate.

The tool that I referred to earlier is a new conservation measurement tool that was called for in the statute and it builds on existing technologies that the agency's had in place for years. It's a conservation planning tool that combines some of the past functions of eligibility tools we used for the old security program. It actually uses our conservation planning process of looking at the physical effects of existing and new conservation activities on eligible land.

That tool's going to actually help us sit down with applicants and resource--do a resource inventory at the existing conservation performance levels. Once we go through that, we'll going to ask them to do a little projection of what new conservation activities they'd like to implement to improve conservation performance.

If you're sitting down with some of your clients out there and they're asking you how they could get geared up and ready to apply for this program, the first step we'd ask you to give those folks, first piece of advice you could

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give them is to have them either go on-line or visit their local NRCS field office and get a copy of the producer's self-screening checklist. This checklist is intended to be completed by the potential applicant independently so they can take a look--they can look at their operation and see whether this program is well suited for them and the conservation system they have out on the land that they manage.

In closing, Luther, you know, we look forward to what this program has to offer in terms of recognizing the existing stewardship and delivering new conservation. It's revamped and we're ready to roll it out and we hope you folks can help us spread the word.

## **LUTHER SMITH**

LS: Thank you. I'm gonna open it up for some questions and while I make some changes here on the technology side, maybe I'll throw a question out for all of you to consider and you can answer--whoever wants to answer it on your side, Dave. What would you say... As you compare the two programs, the old CSP and the new CSP, what would you think is the big advantage to the new or what the new benefit is?

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DW: Luther, I think its simplicity. This is one heck of a lot simpler for producers, for NRCS. Congress spent a lot of time trying to make it simpler. It's also national in scope. It's not going to be that watershed--selected watershed-by-watershed sign up. You don't have the tiers and sub-tiers and all this other kind of stuff. It's pretty simple. The acres are gonna be allocated to each state according to the proportion of land they have eligible.

The producer checklist that Steve just mentioned in the first CSP was like 50-some pages; now it's down to three and it's like five or six questions that a producer would [answer]. So I think simplicity and transparency are the big advantages, Luther.

LS: Okay. Thanks, Dave. I'm gonna move to the questions that have come in from our audience. The first one is will CSP applications from socially disadvantaged producers receive a priority or additional points in the ranking process?

SP: Luther, this is Steve. We've... What we'll actually do is we have set up separate ranking pools that will allow those potential applicants to compete against folks who face the similar challenges. We'll have a separate pool set up for beginning farmers, ranchers, forestry producers, as well as

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a separate pool set up for socially disadvantaged producers.

LS: Okay. I'm going to... I said this at the beginning of the program but for anybody that's wondering how do you get a copy of this, the entire seminar today is being taped and it will be housed on the ASA website, as well as the NRCS website. So you can access that probably within the week, that'll be posted, and either place you'll be able to get to it. It'll have the slide set in there, as well as the audio. Now one of the questions came in that Dave or Steve, whoever wants to answer this, do you wanna release these Power Point slides or just let them go to the websites like I mentioned?

MS: I'm fine with (inaud.).

MS: It's public information, Luther.

MS: Yeah. And, Chief, we've got this information posted on our NRCS website as well. We've got a Conservation Stewardship Program page there where they can obtain the producer self-screening check list. We've got the list of the activities that we'll be offering to help producers apply new conservation and several other pieces--information pieces that you folks could help us spread the word about the program.

LS: Okay. This next question is how do we find out what the different resource concerns are for different states?

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- DW: Okay, this is Dave White. The statute requires each state to develop priority resources of concern, and most of them have done that. There may be one or two that are still in the process, but that should be on that state's home page. If you're familiar, if you go to--if you wanna get to the NRCS home pages, it's www. then it's the two state initials like MT for Montana, .nracs.usda.gov. We should... They should be located there for your particular state.
- LS: Okay, this next question talks about the supplemental point or part of CSP. It says you mentioned the supplemental payment for participants who adopt conservation crop rotation. Will there be any "reward" for those who already do conservation tillage?
- MS: The question I heard was will there be any reward for producers who are also doing conservation tillage.
- LS: Yeah, as you're--as they look at the supplement part.
- MS: Yeah. No, the supplemental part is--applies specifically to those folks who are adopting new or improved resource-conserving crop rotations. And just as those priority resource concerns are gonna be posted on our home pages within each of these states, the list of resource-conserving crops would also be posted on our home page. In terms of those folks who are applying conservation tillage currently out there, we are going to evaluate the conservation performance of the existing conservation

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systems out there and there will be conservation performance accrued within our accounting of environmental benefits that will be credited towards, one, their ranking, as well as, two, their payment, for those folks who are entered into the program.

MS: So they will get credit if they are conservation tillage farmers or no tillers.

LS: Okay, this next question deals with whether the person is the renter and the landowner. And the question is are lessees able to sign up for their leased land or does the landowner have priority?

MS: Actually, under the applicant's eligibility, again, we wanna be working with those folks who are involved in the day-to-day management of the land. One of the eligibility requirements is that the applicant has to be the operator of record in the Farm Service Records Management System. A second requirement would be that they would have to-- if they are a tenant, they would have to provide us with documented evidence of control for the term of that contract period.

If they're owner operators, those folks are operators too; you know, they're--they would meet the eligible applicant requirement. And those owners out there who aren't

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operators, you know, if the application is approved, those folks could definitely be participants in those contracts.

LS: The next question. You said there could be payments for conservation crop rotations. What about planting perennial grass for hay or grazing?

MS: Okay, there are--there are two types of payments that we'll be working with. The supplemental payment that we've already spoke a little bit about is for the resource-conserving crop rotation, and those folks who are already getting an annual payment on crop land would be able to receive that. The second type of payment is an annual payment. Now that annual payment is gonna be looking at conservation performance from the existing system that's out there, and that's where we'd be looking at, you know, what type of tillage operations are they doing on their cropland, have they got bumpers in place, grazing lands, do they have some type of a management grazing rotation system out there that they're dealing with.

And those will be credited towards the existing system payment. And if those folks are willing to do additional activities, to apply some of--some of the enhancement type activities that the program offers, some of those enhancements would be within the areas of water quality, say, in the use of corn stalk and our leaf tissue test to

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adjust nitrogen application rates, use of precision ag technologies. If those folks are willing to do those new activities, then they're also gonna be credited with additional conservation performance that will assist them in their annual payment.

DW: Hey, Luther, could I say something about the payment levels themselves?

LS: Sure. Please do.

DW: Steve mentioned to you--or... We have to achieve nationwide, statutory requirement of an \$18.00 an acre average as you move from Maine to Guam over every land type, and that includes all costs -- technical assistance, payments to farmers, everything. We could have set ahead of time a cost per acre. So if a producer comes in and they have cropland, we could have said, "Okay, well, it's gonna be \$20.46 an acre" or "If you have range land, its \$8.12," whatever that would be.

But we thought it would be smarter this first time if we actually had a sign up and looked at all the acres and all the environmental points that accrue and use that to set the payment amount per acre. So what's odd about this, Luther, this sign up, is when a producer comes in, we're not gonna be able to say, "Okay, you have pasture land. It's gonna be [X] dollars per acre." We're going to be

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able to give them a range which is based on a swag, really, and we'll say its go--for pasture land it's gonna be, oh, maybe seven to \$14.00 an acre, somewhere in there.

We don't know what it will be exactly until after the sign up is over. But once that's over we will set the per acre rates based upon this national sample, if you will, and we will continue those rates for the rest of the sign ups in this--during this farm bill, til 2012. And the rates we're estimating right now for cropland are somewhere between \$12.00 to \$22.00 per acre, non-industrial, private, porous (ph.) land \$6.00 to \$12.00 an acre, pasture, \$7.00 to \$14.00 per acre, and range would be \$5.00 to \$10.00 an acre.

The only other thing above that is the supplemental payment which, as Steven has said, is for the crop rotations. We're estimating that would be \$12.00 to \$16.00 per acre. So... And it's only for cropland, that part of it. So say you have--you enroll a cropland acre and its \$20.00, what it ends up to be, and you're doing the crop rotation above it, so say that's another \$12.00. So that would be \$32.00 an acre for cropland. But, again, I wanna stress that these are estimates. We're gonna wait until we see the

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actual sign up. So if there's any confusion over that, it rests with me, Luther. Thanks.

LS: Hey, Dave, can I ask you a couple questions related to that?

DW: Sure.

LS: One, you said there will be ranges depending on the type of land, and will the ranges differ depending on where you are in the country?

DW: Not really. It's... What it's going to be based on is the conservation points that an individual gets. It's kind of a different way of looking at it because, you know, mostly you think about--well, you think about CRP and it's the average rental rate for an acre of land in that county, and that does vary across the country. But what we're trying to do here is pay for environmental benefits. So whether you're in a Aroosta County or a Wahoo will set the cost per point after this sign up.

LS: Okay. And then you said after this initial sign up, that'll be the rates for the life of the farm bill.

DW: Yeah.

LS: Okay.

DW: Well, I'm knocking on my head here. Yes, that would be the goal.

LS: Okay. I'm gonna move to the next question that came in. What role will technical service providers play?

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MS: Technical service providers, we would... I guess let's take a look at the kinds of activities that we'll use through this program. Most of these are what we refer to as enhancements and they are adjustments in management measures that producers apply some general tweaks to to their existing systems. So from that perspective I don't know that we see this as a program similar to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to where there will be a lot of design work and a lot of assistance in helping producers get those practices on the ground.

However, we do think in the delivery of the program there would be opportunities for states to enter into cooperative or contribution agreements with folks out there who could provide support to us in terms of working applicants through our conservation measurement tool. We might be able to involve folks in helping us with on-site field verification of pre-approved applications, things of that nature.

LS: Okay, our next question deals with rented acres. It says how will rented acreage be treated within CSP? And here's an example they give you. What if the landlord won't agree to a five year control of land with a farmer? Is that farmer not able to apply for CSP? And they say they've been hearing varying accounts from local county offices.

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- SP: Okay, again, we're gonna go back to one of our applicant requirements that says for them to make an application they're going to have to have documented--if they're a tenant, they're gonna have to have documented control of that acreage for the proposed term of the contract. So if they're not able to get some type of evidence that they can provide to us from their owner then they would not have the control of that land. It wouldn't be a part of the land that they could offer for the program.
- DW: Let me follow up on that a little bit Luther. One of the I thought goofy things in the old CSP Program was that we had a different definition for what an Ag operation is, and I heard a lot of that from the wheat growers in Montana, why there was the difference and I never could explain it. I didn't know. But one of the things here is how you configure your operation with FSA. We're gonna use the same definition or however that's configured so there's gonna be--there's not gonna be two different ways to look at something depending on what side of the hall you're on. So however that's configured at FSA is what we're going to use for this program.
- LS: Okay, the next question I believe you touched on this. It says how much money nation-wide are we talking about for fiscal year 2009?

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DW: Okay, Congress gave us it's an acre-based program and it's roughly 12.8 million [acres] and they said you have to achieve an average of \$18.00 so let me take \$18.00 times 12.8. I think it's like \$220-\$230 million--say 12.8 million times \$18.00 and that's the answer.

LS: Okay. This next question is looking for some specifics I believe on practices. It says I've heard some enhanced efficiency fertilizers will be included in CSP program. Specifically slow release and nitrification inhibitors. Why weren't urease (ph.) inhibitors included which protect air and water quality?

SP: Chief, let me take that one.

DW: Okay.

SP: Um, and I'm gonna qualify myself up front as not being an agronomist and not really able to speak to why one activity is included as compared to another. I guess what I would offer is that we do have this list of activities that has been developed based on our past work with the Conservation Security Program. We've tried to incorporate comments from other outside groups as to how can we best offer activities? How can we offer opportunities for conservation performance improvements through activities that will appeal to all level stewards, all sizes of operations, all types of production systems? The list that we have right now is being developed like I said based on

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past programs, based on extensive work that's been put in to development of the stewardship program, and I'm gonna tell you that it will evolve over time as well to incorporate additional activities that are needed, and we're gonna listen to folks and we're open to what you've got to say about that.

MS: Yeah. You know this is rollout. This is version 1.0, and I think that's a heck of a good question, and there's no way on this earth that we're gonna pretend that we're the end-all, be-all of knowledge. That's why we're talking to you. So as we move through this if any of the folks here or any of your members if you have suggestions, if we have screwed up something, if there's something we can do better please let us know. Specificity is next to Godliness on this as well because as soon as this first thing is over we're gonna start the second one and if there's new enhancements or revisions to existing enhancements that have to be programmed in we need to know pretty doggone quick.

Also, we've got the whole--what do we call it--interim final rule out there for public comment. So it tells you who to send it to and where to send it to and stuff like that. So I would welcome, we would welcome that kind of input so we can make this better in the future.

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- LS: Uh this next question's from Tim. Will CSP contract holders be able to use other Farm Bill programs such as EQIP, WHIP or CRP to help meet the additional resource needs on a CSP contract?
- DW: Yes. Now CRP land is not eligible for the program, but you could certainly use the working lands programs like EQIP or the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. That's perfectly okay.
- LS: The next one asks if you could elaborate on what the forestry portion of the program encompasses.
- DW: Oh, well this was interesting. In 2002 in the old CSP Congress specifically did not allow non-industrial private forest land to be eligible other than you know if you had a ten acre wood lot out back that could be included. This time around Congress decided to carve out a piece of this 12.8 million acres for non-industrial private forest land, and they said not more than 10%. So 1.28 million acres can be non-industrial private forest land. We've got some enhancements. Because of the way the law was written we have to actually segregate it and require a separate application so we don't go over the 10%. So it requires some extra bookkeeping on our end. But other than that the land is eligible and there's a list of enhancements that are applicable to forest land.

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LS: This next question I pulled the Power Point slide up. Dave or Steve if you could verify this. They're asking where to find the producer checklist on the website, and the screen I have up is the website. Is that the correct one? It's on the lets get started page.

SP: Yeah. That should be the website--  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/new\\_CSP](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/new_CSP).

LS: Okay. So if you're looking for that producer self-screening checklist the website is at the bottom of the screen that's being shown now. We also have it linked on the ASA website page related to this seminar. So you have two places you can go to get it, and our link will just take you right to this same page within NRCS.

SP: And Luther there's some other information pieces that are gonna be available on this website. One is this Power Point presentation that we just went through. Secondly, there's another Power Point presentation that our folks are gonna be using out there with producers. Adding more of a how to Power Point. The fact sheet of the program is available on this website. The activity list, a list of enhancements as well as a limited list of practices that we're going to offer through the program is available there so your folks might be interested to take a look at that and see just what is being offered through the stewardship program.

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- LS: Okay. So it sounds like there's lots of resources available to you. Just check out the websites. The next question is what advice could you give a crop consultant that would help their growers rank better or be better prepared for the sign-up? Any advice you could give them?
- DW: Well I think for them to do an honest assessment with the producer on what that individual's goals are and what their operation is--to become familiar with those lists of enhancements and what--you know I wouldn't add a bunch of stuff the guy doesn't want to do to get points. What does the producer honestly--does he or she feel that they're willing to undertake? What's existing is existing. We'll have a better idea after September 30th or really after October or November once the first group gets in on what kind of existent conservation base is out there, and once we understand that maybe you work with producers. Well, you get an EQIP and you gotta do this or that. But I think become familiar with those enhancements and for a producer to honestly make an assessment this is what I want to do or I don't want to do it.
- LS: Okay. Uh, Dave, this one's addressed to you from a Mr.--is it Hinz, H-I-N-Z, in Bozeman.
- DW: So you can run but you can't hide is what's running through my mind.

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LS: Will there be any ranking advantage to producers who are a part of a collaborative water shed restoration project, the CSP aspects of that project in comparison to individual applications from land owners who are not working with their neighbors or on a restoration of their shared watershed? I know that's a lot there.

DW: Yeah. Well, no. The short answer is no. Everybody regardless of whether independent or working in a group will have the same point assessment. But I would mention that there is another section in the 2008 farm bill called the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, and up to 6% of the CSP acres can be used for that. So next year when we do the request for proposals for these cooperative conservation partnership initiatives if Mr. Hinz in Bozeman works with a group to put together EQUIP and WHIP and CSP in one package and that's accepted then the producers in that unified area will get extra points or they're a lot more likely to get into the program.

LS: This next question is asking about resource-conserving crop rotations. How will they be specifically rewarded?

SP: The resource conserving crop rotations, the newly adopted or improvements to existing rotations on crop land, would be rewarded--not rewarded necessarily but they would be--receive a payment, the supplemental payments, through the program.

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DW: And basically the statute, Luther, is pretty specific on outlining. This has to be something that interrupts a pest cycle or adds nitrogen or scavages [sic] nitrogen, and there is some more criteria on the enhancement list related to that. An individual who does it would get an extra payment called a supplemental payment.

LS: Okay.

SP: Luther, one thing that might help there too I was going over some of the items that are posted on our stewardship program website. We do have all of the job sheets posted for the enhancements that go through the criteria and requirements, and the resource-conserving crop rotation job sheet is posted under water quality. The code for that is CCR-99. That would give a little more detail about what the requirements for that activity are.

LS: Okay. This question is can someone that currently has a conservation security program. Old program. Contract. Also applied for a conservation stewardship program contract on this same property.

DW: No.

LS: No double dipping. Nope. Okay. Do you see the program being more black and white than the first one? And he goes on to say the first one left too much to interpretation. It seemed that you got different answers depending on who

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you dealt with within NRCS. This variability left some bad tastes in grower's mouths.

DW: I think your question brings up I think one of the big problems with the first one with those various tiers and sub-tiers and all that other stuff. It was confusing and I think this is much clearer and much simpler. Now if we find out differently or if you're finding out differently please let me know.

LS: I think this one you might have touched on but I'm gonna read it anyway just to make sure. Are there different payments or enrollment levels like the old CSP and what is the payment level based on if it is? You did describe the payments was based on the type of cropping system we're looking at, but how does it compare with the old CSP?

SP: Well this--it's gonna be very different than the old [CSP]. We're not dealing with tiers or anything of that nature. We will be paying for performance again and for each of the eligible working lands that we have under the program we'll offer a payment based on the conservation performance, the existing activities that are on the land and the new activities that folks are willing to apply. We'll help them accrue conservation performance points, and we will have a conservation performance payment rate for those land uses. So really what the producer comes through the door with in terms of their existing system and the new

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activities that they're willing to take on payment rate is gonna be the same. But folks are gonna have different conservation performance levels that they'd offer up.

LS: This next question is also asking about the payment levels, and they want to know what--if there is an upper level of funding provided for conservation practices, and the example they give if a property owner would like to build a bridge over a riparian region--example is that a protected waterway between endangered fish species--would that level of a conservation project be funded or is that above the scope of the CSP?

DW: No. What we will fund is the existing conservation they have there plus one of these--there's 81 enhancements they can choose from or a multiple of those being on the producer. But building bridges is not on that list I don't think. So that would be beyond the scope of this program. I think a way to look at this new conservation stewardship program is [if] EQIP is more of your nuts and bolts, infrastructure, bricks and mortar, the Conservation Stewardship [Program] is more of the management end, the mine end, the things you do above and beyond. It's not gonna be so much construction of things.

SP: You know chief our payment mechanism is not the same old cost share model that we've used for programs like EQIP. Now again we're gonna be paying for conservation

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performance. We'll be looking at the performance levels that existing and new activities provide. We're not gonna be paying on the average cost of applying a foot of terrace or an acre of buffer strip and then paying a percentage of that. It's a departure and a new model that we'll be using for this program for payment.

SP: Okay. I'm gonna have to ask you to define a couple acronyms in this next questions. They're not sure what they are. What is F- as in Frank-R-P-P?

DW: That is the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program.

LS: Okay.

DW: It is a purchase of development rights. It's been in the Farm Bill for oh good many years. But essentially (unint.) who wants to keep farming or ranching it's a way to get money. They essentially sell their development rights.

LS: Okay.

DW: And it's--it doesn't turn into a Wal-Mart or a shopping center or something.

LS: Okay. I wasn't understanding the acronym but I got what you're talking about. So the question is if a producer received funds under that program, the FRPP, they completed a CE, would they be eligible to apply for CSP? What's a CE? Do you know?

DW: Would you repeat that part again. You broke up a bit.

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- LS: Okay. If a producer received funds from the FRPP and it says they completed a CE would they be eligible to apply for CSP?
- SP: I think the CE is probably referring to a conservation easement, and the FRPP is not--land in FRPP are not ineligible lands. Grazing Land Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, those lands are ineligible for the program. So FRPP would not--it would be eligible land but I guess we're very conscious of not making duplicate payments. The payment that's being referred to here is the payment for the easement. We're paying for conservation performance through this program so I guess I wouldn't see any conflict there.
- DW But if CE means easement, conservation easement, the lands in the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program are eligible.
- LS: Okay. And that helped clarify it. They were also asking if there were other ineligible areas and Steve you did--you took care of that. How might a not industrial forest land owner take advantage of the new program?
- SP: I hope folks are looking at it as an opportunity one to assist them in improving the conservation conditions on their operation. I guess take advantage of--I guess kind of catches me a little off guard. But this is an opportunity for those folks one, to be recognized as good

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stewards for the past work they've done and secondly to use this program to help them produce greater environmental benefits on their operation.

DW: To give you a couple specific examples on the enhancement I mean they could look at forest slash treatment, fuel breaks, prescribed grazing if it's forested grazing lands. Wildlife, there's a couple different wildlife things foresters could--forestry owners could take advantage of. Of course the figgle [sic] in anybody's book is how we deal with the invasive species and that cuts across a lot of different land uses. So if you pull up this enhancement list, go down and see which ones foresters are eligible for.

LS: When will the conservation measurement tool be available for stakeholders to evaluate, use, understand?

SP: Right now we're still in the development stages. We're just about ready to have a test version that we'll be posting on one of our internal sites for use internally. We are looking at, depending on how the completion of the tool goes; we are looking at having a national demo as early as the first week in September. Folks who would like to be involved in that I guess we'll have lines open nationwide and folks can call in and watch the demonstration of how the tool operates.

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- SP: Will taking land out of production that provides wildlife habitat and soil and water benefits be valued in CSP?
- DW: Would taking land out of production... There are some wildlife enhancements in there that if you put that odd area in a planting and provide for pollinators, yeah. But that would have to--you know the land owner would have to make that decision. But there are several wildlife-related enhancements. They would just have to make a determination is the cost per acre worth it?
- LS: Okay. So taking land out of production and putting it in those areas that would all be eligible.
- DW: Yeah.
- LS: Okay. This question relates to the supplemental payment. What types of crop rotations are eligible for payment?
- SP: Uh, again I think the best I can do to get down to specifics is refer you folks back to our web page and to the job sheet that we have posted there. You know it will specifically define the lengths of rotation, the percent of the rotation that would have to be devoted to a resource conserving crop and will give you the specifics that I think your audience is looking for.
- DW: If you want, Luther, we can just--we can hop you that one since it seems to be a lot of interest. You can post--if you wanted to post that as well. Do you want that?
- LS: Yeah. That would be great.

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DW: Okay.

LS: Yeah. Anything that you feel is helpful we'll gladly put it up there on the website and we can keep the link live that they can link over to the USDA site as well. Okay. Um, I'm getting a second question here related to TSP, and they were asking for you to re-address it specifically for a private sector TSP and not so much from the--on a contribution agreement or the soil and water conservation district. So they're asking about a private sector TSP. How would they be involved I believe with the program?

DW: Well, on this particular one NRCS is really not going to be entering into any separate TSP arrangements. If the producer wishes to make an arrangement with a third party provider that is certainly their right. But we're not gonna be doing those as separate ones on this.

LS: Okay.

DW: Now I shouldn't make that as a blanket statement because there may be some states that will enter into an agreement with a group of folks to provide that or they could go through a request for proposals. But at the national level we're not going to be doing that. That's gonna be more of a state-based decision.

LS: Okay. Um, this question I believe it's gonna--I'm gonna let you go with it. What is the last possible sign up date?

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SP: Well, the sign....

DW: 4:59 September 30th to get in the '09 sign-up.

SP But sign up is continuous. But for this first ranking period we'll need to have those applications in by September 30th. And the only reason for that, Luther, is that is the absolute positive drop dead date end of the fiscal year.

LS: Okay. Will land owned and operated by a university be eligible? And [with] this example they do currently receive FSA payments on owned land but not rented land--university-owned land.

DW: Right. It's not going to be eligible.

LS: Not el....

DW: It's private.

LS: Okay. So it's just say private lands.

DW: Yep.

LS: Um, that pretty much brings us to the end of our time, and there's still some questions here and anybody who did not get their question answered we will get those addressed via e-mail. Everything's recorded so we'll follow up with you. I'm sure Dave or Steve or someone from NRCS can also--will help us with that to get you your answers. The website for NRCS is on the screen yet. Please use that if you want additional information and ASA will also post some of the same information and we'll link to that as well. So feel

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free to use our site if you forget this one and come over to this one.

I want to thank Dave and Steve for being with us today and providing all the information. It sounds like a great new opportunity for farmers and their consultants who work with them. I'm sure more information will be coming out about it as we go ahead. Again our next online seminar is September 9th and it's a continuation of our climate change discussions. I want to thank everybody for being with us, and hope you have an enjoyable rest of your day. Thanks a lot.

DW: Thanks Luther.

LS: You're welcome.

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