

At a Glance: **Grassland Reserve Program**

May 2008

Overview

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program for landowners and operators to protect, restore, and enhance grassland, including rangeland, pastureland, shrubland, and certain other lands. The program emphasizes support for working grazing operations; enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity; and protection of grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under threat of conversion.

In the last 5 years, GRP has closed on over 250 easements covering more than 115,000 acres in 38 states.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) jointly administer this program. Funding for GRP comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

Legislative Changes

- The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) increases the acreage that may be enrolled in the program by 1.2 million acres during the years 2009 through 2012.
- The 2008 Farm Bill provides priority for enrollment of expiring acreage from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), limited to 10 percent of the total acres enrolled in any year. Eligible lands can be enrolled into either a permanent easement (or maximum allowed under State law); or a 10-, 15-, or 20-year rental contract. Restoration agreements, based on a 50 percent cost-share, may be placed on land enrolled under a rental contract or easement.

- The definition of eligible land has also been expanded to include land that contains historical or archeological resources and land that addresses State, regional, or national conservation priorities.
- The Bill requires a grazing management plan for participants.
- Valuation of an easement is required to be at the lowest of either an appraisal or market survey; a rate set by the Secretary of Agriculture; or the landowner's offer.

Easements may now be acquired by eligible entities based on a 50 percent cost-share with the Federal government. Eligible entities are defined as units of State, local or Tribal government or nongovernmental organizations that have a charter describing a commitment to conserving ranchland, agricultural land, or grassland for grazing and conservation purposes.

Enforcement of the easement is the responsibility of the eligible entity; failure to do so will result in Federal enforcement, as mandated by the 2008 Farm Bill.

The 2008 Farm Bill establishes an annual payment limitation of \$50,000 for both rental and restoration agreements.

More Information

For more information and updates about the GRP and other Farm Bill topics, please refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill> or the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web site <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grp>.

