



Massachusetts State Office

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service announces ranking cut-off date for Conservation Stewardship Program

Farmers encouraged to apply by January 13, 2012

AMHERST, Mass. (December 21, 2011) – USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that the ranking period cut-off date for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is **January 13, 2012**. Massachusetts farmers interested in CSP should submit applications to their local NRCS office by the deadline so that their applications can be considered during the first ranking period of 2012.

"CSP is an innovative conservation program, and we hope that Massachusetts farmers will consider applying," NRCS State Conservationist Christine Clarke said. "I encourage all local farmers who are interested in applying to contact their local NRCS office as soon as possible so they can meet the deadline."

Farmers should visit their local USDA service center to apply; locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

CSP is offered in all 50 states, and the Pacific and Caribbean areas through continuous sign-ups. The program provides many conservation benefits including improvement of water and soil quality, wildlife habitat enhancements and adoption of conservation activities that address the effects of climate change. Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help potential applicants determine if CSP is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, contract obligations and potential payments. It is available from local NRCS offices and on the CSP Web page <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp>.

As part of the CSP application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete the resource inventory using a Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT). The CMT determines the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

NRCS has offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham, which work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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NOTE TO EDITORS/REPORTERS: If you would like to include local contact information, please use the office below that serves your area.

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