

MARYLAND GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)

FY05 PROGRAM SUMMARY

OVERVIEW	<p>GRP provides annual rental payments, typically in the range of \$9 to \$14 per acre, for a period of 10, 15, 20 or 30 years. Easements and cost-share are not currently offered in GRP in Maryland.</p> <p>Offers for participation in GRP must include 40 or more acres of eligible land. Enrolled land must be maintained in at least the same level of grassland quality as now exists, and cannot be used for production of annually planted crops.</p> <p>All participants are required to implement a conservation plan that protects the integrity of the grassland enrolled in the program, and meets identified basic resource management criteria for pasture and hayland, as applicable.</p> <p>Grasslands eligible for enrollment in this program include pasture and permanent hayland. Other acreage which may qualify for enrollment includes incidental areas such as land containing shrubs, or land located in an area historically dominated by grassland.</p> <p>GRP is administered jointly by FSA and NRCS. NRCS provides assistance for site assessment, ranking of applications, and development of a conservation plan. FSA administers the contract and makes annual rental payments.</p>
PROGRAM OBJECTIVES	<p>Conserve and restore eligible grassland and permanent hayland to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help reduce the threat of conversion of grassland to other uses; • Support grazing operations; • Protect water quality; • Increase and maintain plant and animal diversity.
PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY	<p>GRP participants must be able to demonstrate to USDA that they own the land or will have control of the land for the duration of the cost-share agreement.</p> <p>The Adjusted Gross Income provision of the 2002 Farm Bill affects eligibility for GRP and several other 2002 Farm Bill programs. Individuals or entities that have an average adjusted gross income exceeding \$2.5 million for the three tax years immediately preceding the year the GRP agreement is approved are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 75 percent of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations.</p>
FARM BILL COMPLIANCE	<p>GRP participants are required to be in compliance with the Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. GRP participants who are not already enrolled in other USDA programs will be referred to the local FSA office to complete an AD-1026.</p>

ELIGIBLE LANDS	<p>Minimum acreage for enrollment in GRP is 40 acres per tract. Enrolled land must be maintained in at least the same level of grassland quality as now exists, and cannot be used for production of annually planted crops.</p> <p><u>Land ownership is limited to:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privately-owned lands. • Lands owned by non-governmental organizations (NGO's). <p>Lands owned by federal, state, county, or local governments are <u>not</u> eligible for GRP.</p> <p><u>Eligible land uses include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pasture; • Permanent hayland; • Cropland in a rotation with hayland, provided that no annual crops will be planted and produced while under GRP contract; • Incidental areas, not to exceed 10% of the contract acreage, may be included to allow for efficient land management and administration of the contract. These areas can include shrubby or wooded odd areas, and existing barns, pens, etc. necessary for management of a grazing operation. Incidental areas must be maintained in their current condition or better for the life of the contract.
INELIGIBLE LANDS	<p>Lands that are <u>not</u> eligible for GRP include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lands owned by federal, state, county, or local governments. • Turf areas such as lawns, golf courses, turf farms, etc. • Land currently enrolled in federal programs such as CSP, CRP/CREP, or WRP. GRP contracts may be approved on lands where cost-share contracts exist for other programs, provided the cost-share contract does not specifically require that the area be maintained in its current cover. For example, it is acceptable to apply for GRP on the same field where an existing EQIP contract has installed (or will be used to install) cross fencing or a watering facility. However, if the existing EQIP contract contains funding for pasture planting or prescribed grazing, then the field is not eligible for GRP until the EQIP contract expires. Similarly, land already in a program that "reserves" its use, such as CRP/CREP or WRP, is not eligible for GRP until the contract expires. • Land where the potential for restoration or protection is not adequate to meet the objectives of the program. • Applications that do not sufficiently meet program requirements.

<p>CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS & LIMITATIONS</p>	<p><u>Duration:</u> GRP cost-share agreements (FSA-920) shall be in effect for a minimum of 10, 15, 20, or 30 years, from the date the contract is signed by FSA.</p> <p><u>Conservation plan:</u> All participants are required to implement a conservation plan that protects the integrity of the grassland enrolled in the program, and meets identified basic resource management criteria for pasture and hayland, as applicable.</p> <p>The conservation plan will provide information about minimum grazing or cutting heights, and also information about timing of first and last cuttings. This information can be found in the NRCS conservation practice standards for Prescribed Grazing (Code 528) and Forage Harvest Management (Code 511), and related worksheets. Supporting practices will include Pest Management and Nutrient Management.</p> <p>Documentation of the existing grassland quality is important, both to ensure a fair ranking process as well as establishing the baseline from which future management decisions are made. NRCS will assess the condition of all offered acres and document a baseline condition. For lands used for pasture, the Northeast Pasture Condition Scoresheet will be used. For lands maintained in permanent hayland, the species composition will be estimated and documented in accordance with the NRCS conservation practice standard for Forage Harvest Management.</p> <p>For both Pasture and Permanent Hayland, enrolled acres are expected to be maintained in at least the same level of grassland quality as now exists. Acreage that does not currently meet NRCS minimum standards for Prescribed Grazing (Code 528) and Forage Harvest Management (Code 511), as applicable, must be planned to meet those standards. In no case can the current condition of the grassland be allowed to decline during the contract period.</p> <p><u>Contract minimums.</u> Offered acreage must include a minimum of 40 acres of eligible land per tract.</p> <p><u>Funding limitation:</u> There is no contract maximum for GRP. The only limitation is based on the availability of funding at the state level.</p> <p><u>Rental payments:</u> Per acre rental payments are established for each county by FSA, based on 75% of the grazing value of the land. A participant will receive his/her rental payment from FSA on the anniversary date of the signed contract.</p>
<p>COST-SHARE</p>	<p>Cost-share is not currently offered in GRP in Maryland. Cost-share for some practices may be available through MACS, EQIP, or other programs.</p>

<p>OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS</p>	<p>Any future renovations or interseeding must be done using the least disruptive tillage as possible. Under no circumstances can the ground be rotated, even temporarily, into other crops. Clean tillage is not acceptable.</p> <p>In the event of a significant or total loss of the grassland cover (due to drought or disease), a re-seeding or re-establishment plan, approved by NRCS, will be needed.</p> <p>GRP does not require that participants restrict mowing or haying during the nesting season, unless they voluntarily agree to do so in order to enhance their score for ranking purposes. An applicant can gain 10 points if he/she agrees to no mowing, haying, or other significant disturbance (except prescribed grazing, with a minimum grazing height of 6 inches), from April 15 - August 15. Grassland nesting habitat areas will be at least 35 feet wide, and located adjacent to woody or shrubby protective cover, such as along field borders.</p> <p>If there are any "incidental areas" included in the offered acreage, they must be maintained in their current condition or better for the life of the contract.</p>
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