

Conservation Stewardship Program – 2009/2010 Application Process and Requirements

Step 1 - All interested producers are encouraged to complete the CSP Self Screening Tool. Based on the results of the tool, producers decide if they wish to pursue an application for the program.

Step 2 – Applicants must have farm records established with the Farm Service Agency. This includes filing of the following forms:

- CCC-901 - Members Information
- CCC-926 - Average Adjusted Gross Income Statement
- AD-1026 – Highly Erodible Lands Conservation (HELIC) and Wetlands Conservation (WC) Certification
- FSA will need some form of proof of ownership and there may be other document requirements depending on the individual situation. Contact FSA for additional information.

Step 3 – Applicants must supply to NRCS a map of their farm operation. This map must:

- Include all land operated by the applicant and match the farm records on file with FSA.
- Include Farm and Tract numbers.
- Show field and tract boundaries.
- Identify land use of each field as cropland, pasture, rangeland or forest.
- Show acres of each field.

Step 4 – Applicants must supply proof of control of land through 2014. Proof of control can be:

- Listed as owner on FSA farm records. Note that owner and operator must be the exact same individual or entity.
- Copy of a lease that indicates control through 2014.
- A signed document from the land owner indicating that the operator has control through 2014. NRCS provides a template that can be used for this purpose.

Step 5 – Applicants must provide signature authority for the person signing the application.

- Individuals signing on their own behalf require no other signature authority
- Individual signing on behalf of an entity can supply the CCC-901 – Members Information form.
- Individuals signing on behalf of another individual can use the FSA-211 – Power of Attorney form.
- Signature Authority documents must pre-date signature on application.

Step 6 – Applicant completes and signs the NRCS-CPA-1200 – CSP Conservation Program Application and appendix.

- This includes, if applicable, self-certification of their status as a Socially Disadvantage Farmer, Beginning Farmer or Limited Resource Farmer using the website indicated on the form.

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Step 7 – The completed application package (NRCS-CPA-1200, farm maps, signature authority and control of land) are submitted to applicant's local NRCS Field Office before the ranking cutoff date of September 30, 2009.

- All required information must be included in order for the application to be considered during this funding cycle.
- Applicants who wish to enroll both agricultural land (cropland, pasture, rangeland) and forest land must submit separate applications, one application would include all agricultural lands and one application would include just the forest land.

Step 8 – NRCS will review the application and determine basic eligibility. If basic eligibility is met, applicant will be contacted to schedule an appointment for completing the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT).

- Prior to their appointment, applicants are strongly encouraged to review the list of questions contained in the tool for the land use types they intend to enroll and also review the list of conservation activities (enhancements and practices) that are available for implementation under CSP. Decisions on implementation of these activities will be required at the time the CMT is completed.

Step 9 – Applicant and NRCS will complete the CMT. This includes:

- Answering questions about current management and conservation practices being applied on the land.
- Identifying additional resource concerns the applicant would like to address with conservation practices during the life span of the CSP contract and scheduling the implementation of these practices.
- Identifying and scheduling enhancements the applicant would like to implement during the life span of the CSP contract.
- Based on these inputs, environmental points and ranking points are established for the application.

Step 10 – NRCS will receive an allocation of CSP acres and will use the ranking points of each application to pre-approve applications for possible funding.

Step 11 – NRCS will conduct field verification with each pre-approved applicant. During the field verification process NRCS will review:

- Field conditions to the extent possible to verify the conditions and presence of conservation practices indicated by the applicant in answering the question on the CMT.
- Written records of the applicant to verify documentation as indicated by the applicant in answering the question on the CMT.
- Applicants and NRCS may update the CMT if needed to reflect results of field verification process. This may change the applicant's pre-approval status if ranking points are reduced.

Step 12 – NRCS will develop a Conservation Stewardship plan based on the applicant's decisions to implement new practices and enhancements. A complete CCC-1202 Conservation Program Contract, along with the appendix and Conservation Stewardship Plan will be presented to the applicant for their approval and signature.