

For Immediate Release

Date August 26, 2004

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Washington ag producers among first to participate in innovative conservation program.

SPOKANE, Wash. – Eight years ago, when Bill and Dean McLean switched from their traditional farming methods to a conservation-based approach, they believed their investment would pay off – someday.

Through the years, it has. They’ve seen their erosion rates reduced, their soil quality improved, and their operation become more consistent and sustainable – even through prolonged drought.

Today, that investment in conservation paid off again.

The McLeans, who farm near Coulee City, were recognized at a ceremonial signing event in Spokane as Washington’s first agricultural producers to participate in USDA’s Conservation Security Program (CSP).

Authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill, CSP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. The program supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources.

“While conservation incentive programs and technical assistance from USDA date back to the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s,” said Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Gus Hughbanks, “CSP represents the first time agricultural producers are being paid for ongoing stewardship.” Hughbanks’ agency administers the program.

The McLeans farm in the Moses Coulee Watershed, which was one of only 18 watersheds nationwide – and the only watershed in Washington – to be included in the program’s debut-year. Of the 83 applications in the watershed, 43 met the minimum requirements for water quality and soil quality, according to the NRCS. Of the 43 qualifying applications, 13 were approved for Tier

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Washington ag producers among first ... *continued*

I; 26 for Tier II; and four for Tier III.

“Those applicants who met the minimum requirements,” Hughbanks said, “will be participating in three different tiers reflecting both their documented historical conservation management as well as their agreement to do additional practices to further enhance the environment,” he said.

Hughbanks said that producers would receive annual payments between \$550 to \$12,135 for Tier I contracts; \$380 to \$30,625 for Tier II contracts; and \$2,366 to \$35,300 for Tier III contracts. The payments are for a broad range of conservation work that is protecting and enhancing natural resources including water quality, soil quality and wildlife habitat.

“All successful applicants have achieved high technical standards for protecting soil and water quality,” he said. “These are model conservationists who we can point to as our first line of defense in managing ecosystems like the Moses Coulee Watershed with both productivity and careful stewardship as twin goals.”

Nationally, the 2,188 farmers and ranchers who were awarded CSP contracts today represent 1.88 million acres. Work done by the producers in the 18 selected watersheds will significantly benefit both their own watersheds and the people and resources downstream.

Announcements regarding which Washington watersheds will be selected for the program next are expected later in the year, Hughbanks said. “Producers can look at the conservation activities of these successful CSP applicants now,” he said, “so they can ready their farms and ranches for the time when their watershed is selected.”

The NRCS offers technical assistance and a “portfolio” of other conservation programs to help producers implement conservation activities that can help them qualify for CSP, Hughbanks said. “The key,” he said, “is to begin early.”

Hughbanks said the McLeans represent the best of Washington’s conservation community. “They, like hundreds of other Washington producers, are doing what no single program or agency is capable of doing—they are protecting the natural resources upon which all future generations of Americans depend,” he said. “This is an historic day for Washington’s agricultural producers, and it’s a new day for conservation,” Hughbanks said.

-30-

Note to editors: jpeg file images of Bill and Dean McLean, and the McLean family at their farmstead, are available for transmission upon request. Contact Ron Nichols at 509/323-2912 to request the files.