



SEP 02 2015

SUBJECT: NRCS Assistance to the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for the Conservation Reserve Program – Grasslands (CRP-Grasslands) Initiative

TO: State Conservationists and Directors

File Code: 300-11

This memorandum provides guidance to State Conservationists concerning NRCS support for the Conservation Reserve Program - Grasslands (CRP-Grasslands) initiative, which was announced on July, 15, 2015 by Secretary Tom Vilsack at (<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=2015/07/0204.xml>).

The CRP-Grasslands initiative is a new component of CRP authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill, and will provide participants who establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetation with annual rental payments up to 75 percent of the grazing value of the land. Cost-share assistance at up to 50 percent is also available for conservation practice implementation. Participants may still conduct common grazing practices, produce hay, mow, harvest for seed production, conduct fire rehabilitation, and construct firebreaks and fences.

FSA will accept applications on an ongoing basis beginning September 1, 2015, with those applications scored against published ranking criteria. The end of the first ranking period will be November 20, 2015.

NRCS has agreed to continue to provide technical support for the implementation of the CRP including the CRP-Grasslands initiative.

NRCS will work with the CRP-Grasslands applicants to develop a conservation plan that includes the needed grassland conservation practices, schedule of operations for the implementation and maintenance of the conservation practices, and a description of the grazing management system. NRCS will also provide technical assistance to applicants that received ranking points in their offer for committing to implement a wildlife-focused CRP-Grasslands conservation plan of operations.

For wildlife-focused applications, the conservation planner will use the appropriate Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) to evaluate the conservation plan. In addition, the planner will inform the applicant and the FSA when the conservation plan meets the WHEG quality criteria.

On August 18, 2015, FSA released Notice [CRP-790](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_Notice/crp_790.pdf) (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_Notice/crp_790.pdf), which provides guidance to FSA staff on how to create grassland zones to target CRP-Grasslands enrollments. While the creation of the grassland zones is an FSA responsibility, FSA may consult with the State Conservationists and State Technical Committee in the process of creating the grassland zones.

It is anticipated that no additional CRP technical assistance (TA) fund allocations will be needed for fiscal year (FY) 2015. However, request for additional CRP TA will be considered and should be submitted to the Allowance Change Tool.

If you have questions or need further clarification please contact Sharif Branham, Director of Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division (CPTAD), at (202) 720-0673 or at sharif.branham@wdc.usda.gov.



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