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# News Release

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## **USDA to Invest Millions in Georgia to Help Improve Working Lands through Conservation Stewardship Program**

*USDA Offers Renewal Options for Producers with Expiring Contracts*

**ATHENS, GA**, February 8, 2016 —, State Conservationist Terrance O. Rudolph, announced that as a result of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack’s [announcement last week](#) that \$4.8 million in funding is available for agricultural producers in Georgia through the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP). USDA’s largest conservation program, CSP helps producers voluntarily improve the health and productivity of private and Tribal working lands. USDA’s [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) plans to add an estimated 10 million acres nationwide to the rolls of CSP during fiscal 2016.

“As Secretary Vilsack said, CSP has become one of our most popular programs with producers because of its ability to get real results for those who are looking to take their conservation efforts to the next level,” said Rudolph. “So whether a producer is focusing on improving their soil health, improving their water resources for them, the wildlife, or just being a good neighbor, CSP is helping to provide benefits for all through innovative management and technologies. We hope our producers will seize this opportunity.”

NRCS accepts applications for CSP throughout the year, but producers should submit applications by March 31 to [USDA service centers](#) to ensure they are considered for enrollment in 2016.

Participants with existing CSP contracts that will expire Dec. 31, 2016 have the option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands. Applications to renew are also due by March 31.

NRCS also makes CSP available to producers as an additional opportunity to participate in regional landscape-level conservation efforts including the [Longleaf Pine Initiative](#). Funding is available for more than 100 kinds of enhancements in Georgia to help participants:

- Improve soil quality through use of cover crops, conservation crop rotations and other activities that increase soil productivity.
- Use water wisely and improve water quality through enhancements such as more efficient irrigation systems and weather monitoring.

- Restore habitat for wildlife and pollinators through the use of better grazing systems and improved plant management.

A [CSP self-screening checklist](#) is available to help producers determine if the program is compatible with their operation. As part of the application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land to determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments. Through CSP, USDA has provided more than \$4 billion since 2009 in assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest managers to enhance conservation on more than 70 million acres, over 1.5 million in Georgia alone. For more on technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted).

Since 2009, USDA has invested more than \$29 billion to help producers make conservation improvements, working with as many as 500,000 farmers, ranchers and landowners to protect over 400 million acres nationwide, boosting soil and air quality, cleaning and conserving water and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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