Conservation Stewardship Program
2014 Act

Summary of Statutory changes made by the 2014 Farm Bill include:

- Limits eligible land to that in production for at least 4 of the 6 years preceding February 7, 2014, the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014.
- Requiring contract offers to meet stewardship threshold for at least two priority resource concerns and meet or exceed one additional priority resource concern by the end of the stewardship contract.
- Allowing enrollment of lands that are protected by an agricultural land easement under the newly authorized Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
- Allowing enrollment of lands that are in the last year of the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Allowing contracts to be renewed if the threshold for two additional priority resource concerns will be met or the stewardship threshold will be exceeded for two existing priority resource concerns.
- Requiring that at least five priority resource concerns be identified for each area or watershed.
- Emphasizing conservation activities to be implemented across the agricultural operation.
- Authorizing supplemental payment for improving a resource conserving crop rotation.
- Authorizing annual enrollment of 10,000,000 acres rather than enrollment of 12,769,000 acres authorized by the 2008 Act.
- Establishing CSP as a covered program authorized to accomplish the purposes of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPPP).
- Removing the acre cap for non-industrial private forestland (NIPF).
- Authorizing Veteran preference.

Summary of programmatic changes made by the Interim Rule or in policy:

- Clarifies how CSP contract limits will be applied when there is a change of the legal framework for an agricultural operation. Contract amounts will be limited to the payment limitation applied at the time of enrollment, regardless of successor –in- interest. This is not a change in policy but it is a change on how the policy will be implemented starting with contracts obligated in 2014.
- Allows voluntary loss of land which results in performance level decreases within specified parameters, including land sales and taking land out of production.
- Allows land use conversion within specified parameters to accommodate agricultural operation fluxes. The comparative effect of the changes must result in equivalent or greater conservation eligibility and ranking measures than overall current levels on the agricultural operation, and the producer must implement conservation practices and enhancements on the acres being converted to a different land use to mitigate the negative effect on applicable acres. Payments will not be allowed to increase.
- Allows practices to be scheduled any year of the contract. Previously, policy did not allow participants to schedule practices in the first year of the contract.
- Establishes a maximum number of applicable priority resource concerns (APRC) selected by the State. The maximum number of APRC must equal to the minimum requirements from the 2014 Act. States will select 5 APRC for a geographic area.
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- Prioritizes veterans meeting the beginning farmer or rancher or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher requirements competing in these designated funding pools. Eligible veteran applications in these pools will be set to high priority and funded first.
- Clarify applicant eligibility requirements to enforce all applicants in a contract application must meet all eligibility requirements.
- Remove the requirement for State Conservationists to obtain NHQ concurrence to approve modifications greater than 5,000. The State Conservationist will approve legitimate contract increases to implement an appeal determination or correct an error.
- Delegates to the Deputy Chief for Programs the requirement for State Conservationist to obtain an annual payment limitation waiver previously approved by the Chief when a payment was not made in the year it was scheduled for reasons beyond the participant control.
- Integrate Landscape Conservation Initiatives (LCI) in CSP. A pilot will be conducted in 2015-1 to target conservation objectives that have regional or national significance at the landscape scale. The pilot will include the Sage Grouse Initiative, Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative, MRBI, Ogallala Aquifer Initiative, and Longleaf Pine Initiative.
- Requires reporting for conservation activities and incorporated same into the State Conservationist’s performance plan. The intent is to require States that have low participation to promote the program to have a more equitable distribution of funds and acres across the country. In addition, to collect implementation data of activities applied on the landscape.
- Incorporate interim guidance provided via National Bulletins, including renewal guidance and memorandum regarding land eligibility and documentation requirements for conservation activity continuation.