

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Stewardship Program Success for South Dakota

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. Administered by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

The CSP has been very successful for farmers and ranchers across South Dakota—the top state in the nation for participation for Fiscal Year 2014.

- For the 2014 application year, South Dakota was the highest acreage allocation in the Nation with over 1.2 million acres allocated (*next closest was New Mexico with just over 900,000 acres*).
- As of the Fall of 2014, the NRCS has contracted with over 2,100 producers across South Dakota for conservation enhancements on just under 5.2 million acres.
- Of the 497 original contracts signed in 2010, 408 applications are being processed for the 2015 renewals – an 82 percent renewal rate! This shows that 2010 contract holders are pleased with the CSP, willing to renew, and are committed to continuing their conservation activities and try new enhancements.

What South Dakota Farmers and Ranchers are Saying



The “Four Producers Speak Out on CSP in South Dakota” video is on the NRCS SD YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/NRCSSouthDakota.



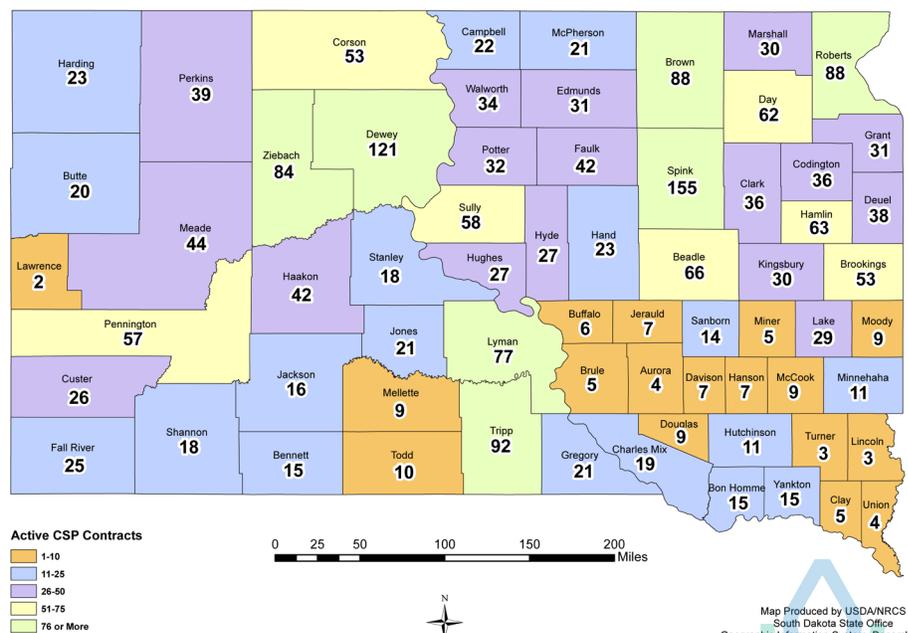
“It’s a win, win, right across the board. CSP gives you a little bit more financial freedom to do things you dream of. Yes, you have to do other practices that take time, but for the benefits you get back, it’s well worth it. It benefits your whole operation, your land, the species of animals on your land, your cattle and if you’re into farming—your crops. It’s all designed to benefit you as a producer. I would recommend it to anybody.” —Fanny and Jess Brewer, Ziebach County, SD

There are close to 80 enhancement choices in the CSP. “Once producers figure out what would work for them, it’s pretty easy to find one that fits the producer’s operation and move forward.” —Jessica Michalski, CSP Manager, NRCS, Huron, SD

Getting Started

As they consider applying for the CSP, producers should plan ahead to meet the minimum thresholds—diversity of crop rotations, reduced tillage, addressing wildlife needs, improving forage management, etc. The Conservation Measurement Tool will help determine eligibility and assist in selecting appropriate enhancements. To learn more, see your local NRCS office or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Active Conservation Stewardship Program Contracts (as of 10/15/2014)



Conservation Stewardship Program Benefits to South Dakota's Natural Resources

Since 2010, over 2,100 SD farmers and ranchers have enrolled about 5.2 million acres of working cropland, pastureland and rangeland in CSP.

Cropland

Considering the enhancements that SD producers are implementing in their current CSP contracts on cropland, many positive outcomes can be expected:

- Over 390,000 acres of cover crops have been or are scheduled to be applied.
- Over 67,000 acres will be planted using no-till or strip till methods.

These enhancements are key steps that will begin to:

- Increase organic matter levels in the soil.
- Improve soil structure and protect the soil from erosion.
- Improve rainfall infiltration.

All of these items improve overall soil health and lead to cropping systems that are more resilient to weather extremes and provide the potential for yield improvements.

While we expect to see improvements on individual fields themselves, we also expect offsite benefits from reduced runoff from the field, both in water and sediment.



"No one ever said farming was easy and one of the hardest aspects in any profession is change. In my 2010 contract, I signed up for five enhancements with the biggest being no till and strip tillage. The other one that changed my management quite a bit was split applications—half my nitrogen in the spring and half side-dressed as 28 percent.

I also used a few smaller enhancements: stalk nitrate tests and sprayer enhancements. The results of the CSP are paying off for me. The biggest benefit has been from the no till and strip till. Especially after a couple of years of building soil structure, we're seeing better infiltration of water, and then more importantly due to that system, is less erosion. This spring right after planting, we had some enormous rains and for the most part everything stayed put very well."

—Erik Schlimmer, Volga, Brookings County, SD

Grassland

In current CSP contracts on South Dakota rangeland, over 2.5 million acres have enhancements scheduled that will improve the management of the grassland resource. These enhancements improve rangeland health, including the health of the soil.

When the overall rangeland health is improved, increased rainfall infiltration occurs, which leads to increased grass production potential.

If these acres would be able to infiltrate just one additional inch of rainfall instead of it running off, we would expect the additional production of

75,000 tons of forage. That not only provides additional Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of grazing but also provides additional organic matter that can be returned to the soil and continuing the improvement of soil health.



Chad Schooley decided to enroll in the CSP because he was already headed toward making similar changes. "We started out with doing variable rate fertilizer and setting up zones and it's just kind of snowballed from there. The cover crops work great for secondary grazing and have really benefited the cattle and our operation by helping stretch feed. I don't know if we can see the benefits to the grassland yet, but there are definitely benefits going into the soil. And, that's important for my family and future generations."

— Chad Schooley, Castlewood, Hamlin County, SD

Dave Steffen enrolled in CSP with ideas for changing his operation for long-term sustainability, but was skeptical about implementing changes that included adding controlled burning. The second thing Steffen did was deferred 30 percent of his pastureland each year. "Two years ago, we had a very extreme dry period, that CSP support is what carried me through with my yearlings. They performed outstanding and I had plenty of grass and production for them."

—Dave Steffen, Burke, Gregory County, SD



Dave Steffen and his granddaughter, Brittany.