



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Pennsylvania

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency and the State of Pennsylvania have expanded on a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) partnership to improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay.

The program, first announced in April 2000, was originally funded at \$210 million and included 20 counties in the lower Susquehanna and Potomac River basins. The project is now expanded to an additional 100,000 acres and an additional \$200 million for 23 northern tier counties.

CREP is a federal-state natural resource conservation program targeted to address state and nationally significant agricultural related environmental problems. Through CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from USDA to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for contracts of 10- to 15-years. Participants remove cropland or marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

Benefits

The Pennsylvania CREP will help farmers improve the water quality of

the upper and lower Susquehanna and lower Potomac River basins by reducing sediment, livestock and other nutrient runoff to the Chesapeake Bay. Through CREP, Pennsylvania farmers will be able to join with other farmers and states in protecting the environmental resources of the Chesapeake Bay. This will help lower water temperatures, increase dissolved oxygen and provide additional wildlife habitat.

Goals

The goals of the Pennsylvania CREP are to:

- Provide financial and technical assistance for Pennsylvania farmers to voluntarily restore wetlands, riparian areas and grasslands by enrolling up to 200,000 acres of farmland in CREP;
- Reduce erosion in the Chesapeake Bay by 14,400,000 tons;
- Prevent 193,000 tons of sediment, 26,000,000 pounds of nitrogen and 418,000 pounds of phosphorus from reaching the Chesapeake Bay;
- Restore and enhance riparian habitat corridors next to streams, estuaries, wetlands and other watercourses by enrolling at least 35,000 acres of buffers, grass filter strips and wetlands;
- Restore and enhance grassland habitats for declining grassland-

dependent wildlife and improve water quality by enrolling 165,000 acres of highly erodible cropland in conservation cover plantings; and

- Improve water quality and restore damaged riparian areas of the Susquehanna and Potomac Watersheds to facilitate the health of fish, game and other wildlife populations.

Program Cost

The additional 100,000 acres enrolled in the Pennsylvania CREP, made up of combined financial federal and state obligations, will cost approximately \$200 million. Of that amount, approximately \$129 million will come from USDA and \$71 million of payments and in-kind services from the state and private sources. This does not include costs that may be assumed by producers. USDA's share of the total program cost is approximately 65 percent and Pennsylvania's share is approximately 35 percent.

Eligible Areas

Producers can offer eligible cropland and marginal pastureland in the watersheds of the Chesapeake Bay. With the signing of this agreement, an additional 100,000 acres and 23 counties in the northern tier counties of Pennsylvania are added. This revises the original agreement of 100,000 acres and 20 counties in South Central Pennsylvania.

Fact Sheet

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Pennsylvania

For the original 100,000 acres, the Pennsylvania CREP included the following 20 counties:

Adam	Lancaster
Bedford	Lebanon
Berks	Montour
Chester	Northumberland
Columbia	Perry
Cumberland	Schuylkill
Dauphin	Snyder
Franklin	Somerset
Fulton	Union
Juniata	York

The additional 100,000 acres include the following 23 counties:

Blair	Lackawanna
Bradford	Luzerne
Cambria	Lycoming
Cameron	McKean
Carbon	Mifflin
Centre	Potter
Clearfield	Sullivan
Clinton	Susquehanna
Elk	Tioga
Huntingdon	Wayne
Indiana	Wyoming
Jefferson	

Interested producers should contact their county Farm Service Agency office for specific information regarding their eligibility for CREP.

Conservation Practices

To better serve program goals, specific CRP conservation practices have been identified for inclusion in the program. For land enrolled in the 20 counties under the original agreement, the following practices are offered:

- CP1, Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes;
- CP2, Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP3A, Hardwood Tree Planting;
- CP4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement; and
- CP10, Vegetative Cover - Grass - Already Established.

For land enrolled under the additional 100,000 acres in the additional 23 counties, the following practices are offered:

- CP8A, Grass Waterways;
- CP9, Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife;
- CP15A, Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips), Noneasement;
- CP21, Filter Strips;
- CP22, Riparian Buffer;
- CP23, Wetland Restoration;
- CP29, Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer; and
- CP30, Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer.

Sign-up and Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment will be on a continuous basis beginning Sep. 2, 2003. Cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as a buffer practice. Persons who have an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

CREP Payments

Pennsylvania CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for land enrolled in a grass waterway, riparian buffer or filter strip practice. This payment is made soon after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time payment equal to about 40 percent of the eligible cost for certain practices. This payment is in addition to up to 50 percent cost-share assistance that USDA will provide for installing eligible practices.
- 25 Percent Incentive Payment: A one-time payment equal to 25 percent of the eligible cost of hydrologic restoration for installing a wetland restoration practice.
- Annual Rental Payment (includes an incentive) for the life of the contract: For land enrolled in the first 20 counties under the original agreement, producers are eligible for an incentive of 75 percent of the calculated rate for the base soil rental rate enrolled as Highly Erodible Land (HEL) practices CP1, CP2, CP3A, CP4D, CP10 and CP12; and 100 percent of the established base soil rental rate for dry land enrolled as riparian protection and other special conservation practices CP8A, CP9, CP15A, CP21,

Fact Sheet

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Pennsylvania

CP22, CP23, CP29 and CP30. For land enrolled in the additional agreement of 100,000 acres and 23 counties enrolled as HEL practices CP1, CP2, CP4D, CP10 and CP12, producers are eligible for an incentive of:

- 75 percent of the established base soil rental rate for land with an Erodibility Index (EI) of $8 \leq EI \leq 12$;
 - 150 percent of the established base soil rental rate for land with an EI of $12 < EI \leq 20$;
 - 175 percent of the established base soil rental rate for land with an EI of $20 < EI \leq 25$;
 - 200 percent of the established base soil rental rate for land with an EI of $25 < EI \leq 30$; and
 - 225 percent of the established base soil rental rate for land with an EI of > 30 .
- Cost-Share Assistance: up to 50 percent for the installation of the eligible conservation practices on enrolled land.
- Annual Maintenance Payment: in accordance with Handbook 2-CRP procedure.

In addition, Pennsylvania will offer the following payments:

- A variable state cost-share payment up to 50 percent for certain eligible practice costs.

Enrollment in CRP

Producers enrolled in the Pennsylvania CREP may also enroll in

general and continuous sign-up CRP. CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land. CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous sign-up. The CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are at a higher effective rate.

How to Participate

Interested parties should contact their FSA office or their local Soil or the Water Conservation District office. Additional information is also available on FSA's Web site: www.fsa.usda.gov

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