



Fact Sheet

Conservation Reserve Program California Enhancement Program

The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and the State of California have agreed on a plan to implement a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat of California's North Central Valley.

CREP combines an existing Federal program, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), with State programs to provide a framework for USDA to work in partnership with State and local interests to meet state-specific environmental objectives. CRP is a CCC program implemented through the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Under CREP, the North Central Valley producers can enter into 10- to 15-year contracts with CCC to convert cropland to native grasses, trees, and other conservation practices. In return, producers receive annual rental payments, incentive payments for certain activities, and cost-share assistance to establish the conservation practices.

Goals

The California CREP has been designed to:

- enhance vital wildlife habitat. This habitat restoration may result in the hatching of 27,000 ducklings and 20,000 pheasants;
- significantly enhance habitat for riparian and grassland bird species;
- reduce soil erosion;
- improve surface and groundwater quality;
- improve air quality.

Areas Included

The program area is comprised of the North Central Valley Area.

Program Benefits

CREP will provide several significant environmental benefits to North Central Valley. Critical wildlife habitat will be restored and protected. The North Central Valley has seen conversion of over 90 percent of the native vegetation to cropland. This is vital habitat on the Pacific Flyway.

CREP will provide critical brooding habitat for waterfowl and many other bird species. The pheasant population is expected to rise due to the project. In addition, filter strips and riparian buffers will be planted next to streams, rivers, and drainage ditches in order to stop sediment

and pollutants from entering the water bodies. Improved water quality will result from reduced nutrient loading, sediment loading, and pesticide runoff. Forested buffers will also help lower water temperatures and enhance wildlife habitat. Wetlands will be restored and protected.

Eligible Conservation Practices

The following practices are eligible for the program:

- introduced grass;
- native grass;
- wildlife habitat improvement;
- shallow areas for wildlife;
- wildlife food plots;
- existing vegetative cover;
- filter strips;
- riparian buffers;
- wildlife habitat improvement.

Eligibility Requirements and Signup Date

Enrollment for the California CREP will be on a continuous basis beginning in early spring 2001. Eligible land must be within the project area, meet the basic eligibility criteria for CRP, and be suitable to be devoted to an eligible practice. Land must be either cropland or marginal pastureland. Cropland must have been planted to crops 2 of the past

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5 years and be physically and legally capable of being cropped. Marginal pastureland can be enrolled provided it is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees. Lands that have an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

Payments Under CREP

CREP participants are eligible for five types of payments: annual rental payments, incentive payments, maintenance payments, cost-share assistance payments, and one-time State payments. Annual rental payments will be based on the soil rental rate. The first three of these will be combined into a consolidated annual CRP rental payment.

In addition to the normal rental payment, CCC will make a special incentive payment:

- for land devoted to irrigated riceland - \$160 per acre;
- for all other irrigated land - \$100 per acre;
- for dryland - posted county rates by soil type.

Producers will also receive an annual maintenance payment of \$5 per acre.

The CCC pays up to 50 percent of the establishment cost of conservation practices.

The State and private groups may also provide cost-share assistance. The State also provides a one-time lump-sum payment of \$200 per acre. The State will also seek to purchase conservation easements from producers. This is a voluntary program.

Program Cost

The estimated cost of the program is \$24 million. The Federal share is \$19 million and the State share is \$5 million.

Enrollment Option

CREP is another option that farmers and ranchers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll in general CRP or continuous signup CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous signup. Under CREP, applicants have flexibility to extend the duration of their conservation contracts and thus increase the sum total of rental payments. The enrollment process is on a continuous basis, and payments are at a higher rate.

Haying and Grazing

Haying and grazing is not permitted during the CRP contract period unless the Secretary of Agriculture permits it for emergency purposes.

Additional Information

For further information, contact FSA or the Natural Resources Conservation Service within the local USDA Service Center, or the local Soil and Water Conservation District office.

Information may also be obtained from the FSA website at: www.fsa.usda.gov

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