

# Conservation Security Program (CSP)

**CSP** is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. CSP identifies and rewards those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

In addition, CSP creates powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance. In short, CSP rewards the best and motivates the rest. Through these rewards and incentives, CSP builds a foundation of natural resource conservation that will provide benefits to the public for generations to come.

## Benefits

Through CSP, the conservation benefits gained will help farms and ranches be more economically and environmentally sustainable and will increase the natural resource benefits for all Americans.

## How CSP Works

1. The CSP sign-up will be offered in selected priority watersheds across the Nation.
2. Producers complete a self-assessment to determine eligibility.
3. Eligible producers within these watersheds submit an application.

4. Based on the application, description of conservation activities, and a follow-up interview, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will determine which program tier and enrollment category are available for the applicant.

NRCS will provide the necessary materials for producers to complete the benchmark inventory.

## Basic Eligibility

Both the producer and the producer's operation must first meet these basic eligibility criteria:

- The land must be privately owned or tribal land with the majority of the land located within a selected priority watershed.
- The applicant must be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, have an active interest in the agricultural operation, and show control of the land for the life of the contract.
- The applicant must share in the risk of producing any crop or livestock and be entitled to a share in the crop or livestock marketed from the operation.

All applicants must meet the following minimum tier eligibility and contract requirements, plus any additional requirements in the sign-up announcement.

- For Tier I, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to meet the minimum treatment requirements on part of the agricultural operation prior to acceptance into CSP.
- For Tier II, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to meet the minimum treatment requirements on the entire agricultural operation prior to acceptance and agree to address one additional resource by the end of the contract period.
- For Tier III, the producer must have addressed all resource concerns to a resource management system level that meets the Field Office Technical Guide standards on the entire agricultural

operation before acceptance into the program and agree to additional enhancement activities outlined in the sign-up announcement.

Soil quality practices might include crop rotation, cover crops, conservation tillage, prescribed grazing, and adequate wind barriers.

Water quality practices might include filter strips, grassed waterways, managed access to streams, nutrient and pest management, prescribed grazing, and irrigation water management.

## Contract Payments

CSP contract payments include one or more of the following:

- An annual stewardship component for the existing base level conservation treatment.
- An annual existing practice component for maintaining existing conservation practices.
- A one-time new practice component for additional needed practices.
- An enhancement component for exceptional conservation effort and additional conservation practices or activities that provide increased resource benefits beyond the prescribed level. The five enhancement activities are: improving a significant resource concern; improving a priority local resource condition as determined by NRCS; participating in on-farm conservation research, demonstration, or pilot projects; cooperating with other producers to implement watershed or regional resource conservation plans; and conducting assessment and evaluation activities.

Total payments are determined by the tier of participation:

- For Tier I, contracts are for 5 years; maximum payment is \$20,000 annually.
- For Tier II, contracts are for 5-10 years; maximum payment is \$35,000 annually.

- For Tier III, contracts are for 5-10 years; maximum payment is \$45,000 annually.

### For More Information

If you need more information about CSP, contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the Internet at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>

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