

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Report To
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board
February 11, 2016
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USDA to Invest \$150 Million through Conservation Stewardship Program to Help Improve Working Lands

USDA Offers Renewal Options for Producers with Expiring Contracts

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that \$150 million in funding is available for agricultural producers through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), USDA's largest conservation program, by acres impacted, that helps producers voluntarily improve the health and productivity of private and Tribal working lands. NRCS plans to add an estimated 10 million acres to the rolls of CSP during fiscal 2016.

NRCS accepts applications for CSP throughout the year, but producers should submit applications by March 31 to a USDA service centers to ensure they are considered for enrollment in 2016.

Participants with existing CSP contracts that will expire on Dec.31, 2016 have the option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands. Applications to renew are also due by March 31.

Funding is available for more than 100 kinds of enhancements nationwide to help participants:

- Improve soil quality through use of cover crops, conservation crop rotations and other activities that increase soil productivity.
- Use water wisely and improve water quality through enhancements such as more efficient irrigation systems and weather monitoring.
- Restore habitat for wildlife and pollinators such as the greater sage-grouse, lesser prairie-chicken and monarch butterfly through the use of better grazing systems and improved plant management.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is compatible with their operation. As part of the application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land to determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.



NRCS TO BEGIN WRITING EQIP CONTRACTS WITH PRODUCERS

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that helps agricultural producers in a manner that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, agricultural producers receive financial and technical assistance to implement structural and management conservation practices that optimize environmental benefits on working agricultural land.

The Pappio-Missouri River NRD has been allocated \$315,118.00 to address local resource concerns. In addition to local funds, state funding is available for statewide initiatives.

There is a wide range of practices being considered for funding:

- Terrace Systems
- Pasture Management Systems
- Cover Crops
- High Tunnels
- Windbreak Renovation
- Forest Stand Improvement



USDA Sees Strong Demand for Conservation Reserve Program

Deadline to Submit Offers for Competitive Enrollment is Feb. 26

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is reminding farmers and ranchers that the competitive sign-up deadline for its most popular voluntary conservation program, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), is Feb. 26, 2016. This will be one of the most competitive general sign-up periods in history, in part due a statutory limit on the number of acres that can be enrolled in the program. The most competitive applications will be those that combine multiple conservation benefits, such as water quality and wildlife habitat.

As of January 2016, 23.6 million acres were enrolled in CRP, with contracts for more than 1.6 million acres set to expire this fall. The statutory cap on acres that can be enrolled is 24 million acres. Submissions will be ranked according to environmental benefits in comparison to all other offers nationwide.

Within the Papio-Missouri River NRD, we have seen an increased interest in continuous CRP. Since October 1, 2015 NRCS has received 46 applications from FSA to write contracts with producers.

For more information on Farm Service Agency (FSA) conservation programs, visit a local FSA office or www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.



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(866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.