

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Report To
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board
January 12, 2012
Neil Jensen, District Conservationist**



**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Extends Sign-Up Period for Conservation
Stewardship Program**

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White today announced that the cut-off date for the current Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) ranking period has been extended to January 27, 2012. Producers who maintain a high level of conservation on their land and agree to adopt higher levels of stewardship are eligible for CSP payments.

CSP is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones on their operations by providing financial incentives. It has been a successful program in Nebraska. In the last two years, over 1,600 contracts in 91 counties have been enrolled into CSP.

CSP is available statewide. The program provides many conservation benefits including improving water and soil quality, wildlife habitat enhancement and adopting conservation practices that address the effects of climate change.

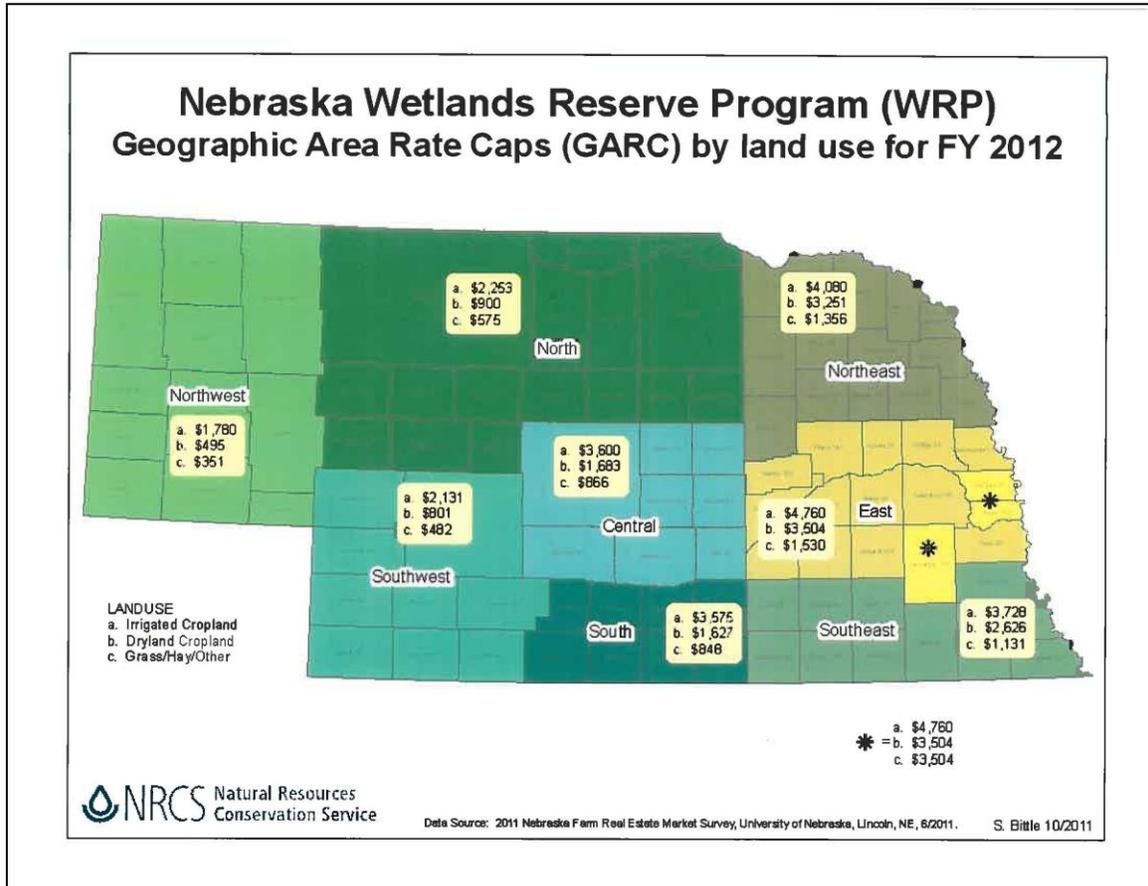
Producers are encouraged to apply for CSP at their local NRCS office. Eligible land includes cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe. Additional assistance is available to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if CSP is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, contracts obligations and potential payments. It is available from local NRCS offices and at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp>.



Nebraska Wetlands Reserve Program

The FY2012 Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC) for the Wetlands Reserve Program has been approved for Nebraska. These GARC rates are for WRP easement and 30 year contracts. Unless the landowner offer is less, these rates will be used for new enrollments in FY2012.



The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program to restore wetlands. Participating landowners can establish conservation easements of either permanent or 30-year duration, or can enter into restoration cost-share agreements where no easement is involved. Easements and restoration cost-share agreements establish wetland protection and restoration as the primary land use for the duration of the easement or agreement. In all instances, landowners continue to control access to their land.



Deadline for USDA Conservation Innovation Grant Pre-proposals January 31

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. Under CIG, program funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals. NRCS administers CIG. The deadline to submit pre-proposal applications is January 31, 2012.

This year's CIG projects focus on nutrient management, energy conservation, soil health, wildlife and CIG projects assessment. NRCS is especially interested in projects that demonstrate:

- Optimal combinations of nutrient source, application rate, placement and timing that improve nutrient recovery by crops.
- Procedures for refining the usefulness of the phosphorous index in reducing phosphorous losses.
- Suites of conservation practices that protect water quality.
- Renewable energy systems that reduce the use of fossil fuels and increase energy efficiency on farms.
- The impacts of cover crops, crop rotations, tillage and other conservation practices on soil health.
- Conservation practices that increase the water-holding capacity of soils.
- Decision tools that help producers assess their operations and conservation needs in order to improve wildlife habitat.
- Assess the technology transfer potential of completed CIG projects.

Results of successful projects will be included in NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides and references.

CIG funds will be awarded through a competitive grants process. At least 50 percent of the total cost of CIG projects must come from non-Federal matching funds, including cash and in-kind contributions provided by the grant recipient. To apply electronically, visit <http://www.grants.gov/> or contact a local NRCS office. To view the complete Announcement of Program Funding, visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/>.



Staffing Updates

Makenzie Crew has joined the staff at the Omaha Field Office as a survey aide. Makenzie is attending the University of NE - Omaha.

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces “Blueprint for Stronger Service” to Increase Efficiency in USDA Operations

- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Close 24 soil survey offices in 21 states; more than 2,800 NRCS offices remain throughout the United States.

No NRCS field offices in Nebraska will be closing; however, this will affect the Scottsbluff MLRA soil survey office.



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