

CRP general signup

Written by Gothenburg Times
Thursday, 09 February 2012 15:11 -

Landowners, producers get 4-week window to enroll

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will conduct a four-week Conservation Reserve Program general signup, beginning on March 12 and ending on April 6.

CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

"It is USDA's goal to ensure that we use CRP to address our most critical resource issues," said Acting Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services Michael Scuse. "CRP is an important program for protecting our most environmentally sensitive lands from erosion and sedimentation, and for ensuring the sustainability of our groundwater, lakes, rivers, ponds and streams. As always, we expect strong competition to enroll acres into CRP, and we urge interested producers to maximize their environmental benefits and to make cost-effective offers."

CRP is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them use environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance.

Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. Producers with expiring contracts and producers with environmentally sensitive land are encouraged to evaluate their options under CRP. Producers also are encouraged to look into CRP's other enrollment opportunities offered on a continuous, non-competitive, signup basis.

Currently, about 30 million acres are enrolled in CRP; and contracts on an estimated 6.5 million acres will expire on Sept. 30, 2012.

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Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking. FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;

Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching;

On-farm benefits from reduced erosion;

Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;

Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and

Cost.

In 2011, USDA enrolled a record number of acres of private working lands in conservation programs, working with more than 500,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, and prevent soil erosion.