



Professor & Ext. Economist-Mgmt.
March 30, 2011

AG-ECO NEWS

Vol. 27, Issue 8

Sign-Up For The Conservation Reserve Program Ends On April 15, 2011

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USDA recently reminded landowners and producers that the 41st general sign-up period to participate in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which began on March 14, 2011, will end on April 15, 2011. During the sign-up period, farmers and ranchers may apply at their county Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to offer eligible land to participate in the CRP program. The 2008 Farm Bill authorized USDA to maintain CRP enrollment up to 32 million acres.

According to a recent USDA-FSA Fact Sheet, the CRP is a voluntary program that helps agricultural producers use environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to control soil erosion, improve water and air quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, the FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 to 15 years. Accepted contracts for current sign-up will begin on Oct. 1, 2011.

The FSA will evaluate and rank eligible CRP offers using an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) for environmental benefits to be gained from enrolling the land in CRP. The EBI consists of five environmental factors (wildlife, water, soil, air and enduring benefits) and cost. Decisions on the EBI cutoff will be made after the sign-up ends April 15 and after analyzing the EBI data of all the offers.

The FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent using data provided by the National Agricultural Statistical Service or cash-rent equivalent as guidelines. The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of

enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or offer a lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted. The local FSA will provide assistance to estimate a bid offer.

While land that is not currently enrolled in CRP may be offered for enrollment during this enrollment period, current CRP participants with contracts expiring this fall may make new contract offers. Nationally, there are about 4.4 million acres with contracts scheduled to expire this fall.

Landowners and producers with potentially eligible land are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to obtain specific CRP eligibility and participation details.

Other Cost Share Programs

The NRCS has fact sheets on various cost share and other programs to assist landowners/operators, such as Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Sincere appreciation is expressed to Dr. Jackie Smith, Extension Economist and Ms. Nancy Condit, FSA, Uvalde County for their contribution to and review of this article.