



Conservation Stewardship Program

2017 Sign Up

INFORMATION ALERT

November 2016

Deadline for Filing Initial Application - February 3, 2017

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced a cut-off date for farmer applications to the **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** for enrollment in the program during Fiscal Year (FY) 2017.

Farmers and ranchers interested in enrolling in CSP for FY 2017 must complete the initial brief application form by February 3, 2017.

Important: Though you can apply for CSP at any time during the year, if you miss the cut-off you will need to wait a full year before your application is even considered. So get the initial application form in by February 3 to secure your chance to enroll in 2017!

This year is the first year when major **CSP "Reinvention"** changes are in place for the program. This Information Alert contains updates on what the reinvention means for the program.

Note, however, that some important information has not yet been released by NRCS. Applicants will have more time to consider what the additional information still to be released will mean for their application after filing the initial application, so do not let that stop you getting the application filed.

What's New in 2017?

This Information Alert includes key updates regarding program revisions that will be in place (for new contracts and renewals) in 2017. For more details on the specific impacts of the reinvention, refer to the following pages.

| | |
|--|---------|
| Eligibility Tool | Page 3 |
| Ranking Process | Page 5 |
| Minimum Contract Payment | Page 8 |
| Flexibility for Contract Changes | Page 9 |
| Restructured/ Expand Enhancement Options | Page 10 |
| New Payment Structure | Page 12 |

Special Note about Contract Renewals

For current CSP participants who initially enrolled in the program in 2013, you can now apply to renew your participation in CSP for an additional five years. NRCS has not yet released the deadline for participants to renew their expiring CSP contracts, but we expect this deadline will be in March or April 2017. NSAC will publish an additional Information Alert for renewals when this information becomes available.

Process and Timeline for Enrolling in CSP

Step 1: Applying to Participate is Simple

There are three simple actions to apply to enroll in CSP (before the February 3 deadline):

First, you must complete a short and simple application form, [NRCS Form CPA 1200](#). This is the same, generic three-page form that is used for all NRCS conservation programs that offer financial assistance to farms and ranchers, and it is available online or at your local NRCS office. It is fairly quick and easy to fill out, though take special note of the next two points, as these two wrinkles have been a barrier for some producers in the past.

Second, CSP contracts must include all agricultural or private forest land in your operation that you will have control of for the 5 year term of the CSP contract, and for all of this land you must have a **farm record number** established with USDA's **Farm Service Agency (FSA)**. If you do not currently have one, go to [your local FSA office](#) to first establish your farm record before submitting the CSP application.

Helpful Hint: Although not required, appointments with your local FSA office are strongly recommended when obtaining a farm record number. The process is fairly simple. Set up an appointment, provide your social security or EIN number, and bring your property deed(s) or lease agreement document(s) with you. You will be assigned a farm record number, and, at the same time, you can also discuss other services FSA provides, such as farm mapping or FSA loan program information.

Third, if you are applying as a business entity rather than an individual, you must also have a **Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number**, which is a unique number used to identify your farm business. In addition, you will need a current registration for the **System for Award Management (SAM)**. Both are easy to obtain, but they do take some time to get, so if you do not have a DUNS and a *current* SAM registration, you should get started right away.

How to Get DUNS and SAM: The process to apply for a DUNS takes about one business day, and when you apply you will need to be able to provide contact information, the number of employees, the legal structure of your operation, the year it was established, and the SIC code, which is a US Department of Labor business classification that can be [looked up online](#). When you have this information you can apply for a DUNS online at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>. It is no longer possible to apply over the phone, but if you can't apply online then you may contact

the commercial company Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) by phone at (806) 705-5711 and request that an application is sent in the mail.

Next, after obtaining a DUNS number, you must register with SAM, which is a government-wide registry for anyone doing business with the federal government. SAM centralizes information about federal financial assistance recipients, and it also provides an easy way for you to update any information. SAM replaced the Centralized Contractor Registration (CCR), so if you had an active record in the CCR, you automatically have an active record in SAM; however, everyone needs to renew SAM registration each year as long as you have an account with NRCS, and an expired account may impact your payment eligibility.

You can begin the SAM process at <http://sam.gov/>, and should have the following information ready: your DUNS number, EIN number, general statistical information about your business, and information for electronic transfer of payments. You should plan ahead for the SAM application, because a newly assigned EIN number can take up to 2 to 5 weeks before it is active and valid for the SAM application. **This is the most common hold up on becoming eligible for to apply for CSP, so start early!**

The actual process of obtaining DUNS/SAM is easy, free, and can be completed entirely online, but make sure you plan ahead to be ready to submit your complete application. And remember, if you are applying as an individual, you do not need to go through this process; this piece is only for entities.

To recap, these are the only three things you need to apply to participate in CSP:

- **three-page NRCS-CPA-1200 form**
- **FSA farm record number, and**
- **if you are applying as a business entity rather than as an individual, the DUNS number and SAM registration.**

For more information and to start the application process, visit [your local NRCS service center](#).

Please note: NRCS is still in the process of developing a self-screening checklist to help farmers decide if the program is right for them. It will presumably go online on the NRCS website when it is ready, so check the website for that periodically, or talk it over with someone at your local NRCS service center.

Step 2: Completing the Conservation Evaluation Application Tool (CAET)

Once you have completed and submitted the short application form (see above; [NRCS-CPA-1200](#)) by the February 3, 2017 cut-off date, you will then have a period of approximately one to two months to sit down with your local NRCS staff person to complete the CSP Conservation Evaluation Application Tool (CAET), which will be used to evaluate your current management

system and the natural resources on your land. The overall purpose of the CAET is to determine if you are meeting the minimum stewardship threshold requirements to participate in CSP.

A signification component of the 2017 program “reinvention” is the shift away from the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT) to the CAET. Between 2009 and 2015, the CMT was the computer-based tool used to determine program eligibility, environmental benefits ranking score, and CSP contract payment amounts. It scored activities according to their projected environmental benefits, and calculated payments correlated to those expected outcomes.

The 2014 Farm Bill removed the specific requirement for a measurement tool like the Conservation Measurement Tool, and while the CMT was still used for the 2015 and 2016 sign-up periods, it will be eliminated for 2017 and beyond. Instead of replacing the CMT with only one new tool, however, NRCS has created a separate evaluation tool (through the CAET), a separate ranking tool – the Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (or AERT, described below in Step 4), and a separate payment schedule.

The CAET will identify eligible lands as well as the number of resource concerns that are currently meeting (and not meeting) the stewardship threshold at the time of application. Potential resource concerns include soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, animal health and wildlife habitat, plant health and biodiversity, air quality, and energy conservation.

The CAET uses planning criteria (if there is an existing NRCS conservation plan for the farm), evaluation tests (based on current management practices), or a combination of both to determine an applicant’s current level of stewardship and their eligibility for the program.

You can watch an **introductory video** on the CAET [online](#), and we expect that NRCS will soon make an online version of the tool publicly available for potential applicants.

To be eligible for CSP, you already must be meeting or exceeding the stewardship thresholds for at least two resource concerns on each land use (crop, pasture, range, forest) at the time of application. Additionally, at a minimum, you must also meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional resource concern on *each land use* by the end of the CSP contract. Resource concerns are considered met when all applicable resource concern “causes” have been addressed.

For example, within the resource concern of “Soil Quality Degradation,” the potential causes may include Organic Matter Depletion, Compaction, Subsidence, or Concentration of Salts and Other Chemicals. In order to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for this resource concern at the time of application, or to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract, you’ll need to successfully address all causes that fall within the resource concern.

Meeting the additional resource concern stewardship thresholds by the end of the contract period may be achieved by installing and adopting additional conservation activities, and by improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities across the entire operation in a way that increases or exceeds the conservation benefits in place at the time the contract application is accepted.

Step 3: Select the Conservation Activities to be Included in Your Contract

If your operation is found eligible for CSP using the CAET, you will then work with the NRCS conservation planner to select the conservation activities (conservation practices, conservation enhancements, or bundles of conservation enhancements) that will help you meet or exceed additional resource stewardship thresholds as part of your contract.

You can preview and browse the variety of CSP enhancements available [online](#), where they can be sorted by land use type and resource concern, to help you determine the activities that are best suited for your operation. See page 10 for more details on the conservation enhancements, practices, and bundles available as part of the 2017 CSP sign-up period.

Step 4: Your Application is Ranked Based on National, State, and Local Priorities

Once your application has been evaluated, is found eligible for CSP, and you have selected the conservation activities you will adopt as part of your contract, your application will be ranked to determine how well your current and future management system will address national, state, and local natural resource priorities.

While the ranking process previously was done within the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT), the reinvented CSP uses the Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT), which is a variation on the AERT that is already used for ranking applications within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). For CSP, NRCS is required to rank applications based on the following statutory ranking factors:

1. Level of conservation treatment on all targeted resource concerns** at the time of application.
2. Degree to which the proposed conservation activities effectively increase conservation performance
3. Number of targeted resource concerns proposed to be treated to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract.
4. Extent to which non-targeted resource concerns will be addressed to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract period.
5. Extent to which resource concerns will be addressed when transitioning from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to agricultural production.

***Targeted resource concerns is the new term for resource concerns identified by the State as a priority for a particular area of a State or region. Previously they have been referred to as “applicable resource concerns.” The term “other priority resource concern” was previously used to refer to a resource concern identified at the National Level – those are now referred to as “non-targeted resource concern.”*

Your application will be ranked against other eligible applications in the same local ranking pool, with the highest scoring applications receiving contract offers first.

National, state, and local ranking questions are included in AERT, according to the following

breakdown of points:

1. National = 500 points (50 percent of total ranking points)
2. State = 300 points (30 percent of the total ranking points)
3. Local = 150 points (15 percent of the total ranking points)
4. Efficiency score = 50 points (5 percent of the total ranking points)**

***The efficiency score evaluates each application based upon broad averages of the cost and expected environmental benefits of each practice.*

For the 2017 sign-up, NRCS headquarters has set both the national and state ranking questions for the ranking process, but in future years the states will be responsible for setting the state and local ranking questions.

You can view the national and state ranking questions for FY 2017 [here](#).

Please Note: While this version of AERT does not include the breakdown of how the 500 national points and 300 state points are assigned to each question, we hope that NRCS will make this information publically available in the near future in order to ensure that applicants understand exactly how points are awarded in the ranking process. Check back on the NRCS website to see if and when this information is provided.

Step 5: Farm Site Visit, Contract Preparation, and Payment Obligation

Prior to approving your contract and obligating funds, NRCS will complete an on-farm verification visit to each farm that ranks high enough to be enrolled in the program this year. After the farm site visit, you will work with NRCS staff to develop a CSP plan and contract, which includes a schedule for new enhancement implementation and a payment schedule. The first annual payment for a five-year contract awarded in this round will be made on or after October 1, 2017, and then every October 1 thereafter for the five years of the CSP contract.

In considering how your annual payments will pay out, it is important to recognize that contract payments will likely vary from year to year, as they are dependent upon the additional conservation activities (practices, enhancements, or bundles) that are scheduled for a given year. This is different than how the payment system worked before the reinvention. Until now, the annual payment rate was equalized.

Payments for your baseline level of conservation will be determined by the number of resource concerns met at the time of application, a standard rate per resource concerns, the acres in each land use, and a standard rate that is determined for each land use. See page 12 for more information on how CSP payments will be determined under the reinvented CSP.

Step 6: CSP Contract Renewal

CSP contracts last for five years. Additionally, you may re-enroll in CSP for additional five-year

contract terms as your current contract expires. To be eligible for a contract renewal, you must demonstrate that you are in compliance with your initial five-year contract, adopt at least one new enhancement, and be able to demonstrate that during the new contract term, you will meet or exceed the stewardship threshold on at least five priority resource concerns, which is two more than was required during the initial contract.

Farmers and ranchers whose initial contracts were for 2013 through 2017 will soon have the opportunity to renew. This year the deadline for renewals to apply to renew will be later than the sign-up deadline for new contracts, and we expect renewals to have to submit applications in Spring 2017. We will provide an updated Information Alert when this deadline becomes available.

After submitting your initial application to renew, you will then go through the same process using CAET and AERT to re-enroll for an additional five-year contract.

CSP Background in Brief

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a [working lands conservation program](#) administered by NRCS and available on a nationwide basis. CSP offers technical and financial assistance to farmers adopting and maintaining high standards of resource conservation and environmental stewardship on eligible lands. Assistance is geared toward both the active management of existing conservation systems and the implementation of new conservation activities on land in agricultural production.

Please Note: NSAC regularly analyzes and reports on CSP participation data. Visit our website for recently published information on trends in [CSP enrollment](#), [conservation activities](#) supported through CSP, [production trends](#), and program use by [beginning and socially disadvantaged producers](#).

CSP is the largest conservation program in the United States. It was started in 2002 as the Conservation Security Program, and has evolved into a nationwide program that has enrolled more than 70 million acres since 2009.

In 2014 NRCS began the internal process of revising CSP, with the intention of making the program more flexible, transparent, and farmer friendly. After two years of reworking the ranking process, eligible tools, and available enhancements, NRCS is releasing the “reinvented” program as part of the 2017 sign-up period.

Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forestlands, and agricultural land under tribal jurisdiction.

Cropped woodlands, marshes, land being used for livestock production, and other private lands on which resource concerns can be addressed are also eligible. Applicants must demonstrate they have effective control over these lands to be eligible, either through ownership or reasonably secure leases.

CSP eligibility, ranking, and payment levels are tied to how well a farmer is addressing priority

resource concerns on their farm. Beginning in 2017, there are additional flexibilities to establish targeted resource concern specific to the state as well as targeted resource concern conservation activities in local areas.

Targeted resource concerns can include, soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, animal health and wildlife habitat, plant health and biodiversity, air quality, and energy conservation. Each state selects and assigns at least five priority resource concerns at either the state and/or a more localized level to be the targeted resource concerns for that region.

You can find out the targeted resource concerns in your state by visiting [your state's NRCS website](#), going to the "Programs" tab, and then to the CSP page to look for "targeted resource concerns" for your state or area of the state.

Be forewarned: Not all state offices make this information easy to find. If you cannot find your state's targeted resource concerns on the state CSP webpage, or if you are instead redirected to the national CSP page, try searching for "targeted resource concerns" on your state's NRCS website. If you still cannot find it on the website, call your local NRCS office for the information.

For each targeted resource concern, NRCS has determined a "stewardship threshold" level for superior conservation. To enroll in CSP, an applicant must already be addressing at least two targeted resource concerns to at least the stewardship threshold level and be willing to reach or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional resource concern during the contract period. For those renewing existing contracts, at least five targeted resource concerns must be meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the second contract term.

Farmers and ranchers who do not meet the eligibility threshold may alternatively seek assistance for conservation improvements through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#), using EQIP funding to help them reach the higher eligibility standard for CSP, and then re-apply for CSP in a future year.

Please Note: You can be enrolled in both CSP and EQIP at the same time, provided that the contracts are not paying for the same conservation practice.

The national average payment to participants is \$18 per acre; however, the actual payment received varies widely depending on the type of land enrolled, the existing level of conservation, and the number and type of new enhancements and practices to be adopted.

Cropland generally receives the highest payment rate, generally well above the \$18 per acre national average, with range and forestland at the lower end, and pasture in the middle, close to the average. Pastured cropland receives payment rates in between cropland and pasture rates.

A person or business entity may not receive more than \$40,000 per year in CSP payments. Joint or multi-family operations are limited to not more than \$80,000 per year. The cap does not apply to tribal land applications.

Minimum Contract Payment

Beginning in FY 2016, USDA has set the minimum contract payment for all successful applicants at \$1,500 per year. NSAC long advocated for this change in order not to prejudice CSP against small acreage, high value operations and to help reap the added conservation benefits. For instance, a 75-acre farm with a \$20 per acre CSP payment would yield a \$1,500 annual payment. Hence, in this example, a farm with less than 75 acres at the same per acre rate would otherwise receive less than \$1,500, but due to the minimum contract rate will nonetheless receive \$1,500 per year.

The \$1,500 minimum represented an increase of \$500 over the previous \$1,000 annual minimum. And while the \$1,000 annual minimum floor was only available for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, the new \$1,500 is now available to all farmers. The minimum payment limit applies to all new contracts enrolled in 2017, as well as expiring contracts that will renew in 2017.

NSAC applauds NRCS for making this change to more appropriately reward superior environmental performance for all operations, regardless of their size. We urge farmers, advocates, and state offices to ensure that potential applicants are well aware of this opportunity when they are in the process of considering the program.

Beginning and Minority Farmer Provisions

Five percent of all CSP acres each year are reserved for separate competitions among beginning farmers only and among socially disadvantaged (minority) farmers only. Veterans that are also beginning, socially disadvantaged, or limited resource farmers are given preference within these categories.

If you are not sure whether you qualify as a beginning, socially disadvantaged, or limited resource farmer, [you can learn more here](#). If you qualify, it is generally advantageous to compete within the smaller pool rather than against all other producers applying to enroll in the program.

Additional Flexibility

Beginning this year, NRCS will be providing added flexibility for mid-contract modifications, both in terms of conservation practice or enhancement changes that might occur due to changing markets or to reflect how the land responds to newly added conservation, as well as in circumstances wherein a producer loses a lease and must subtract land from their CSP contract. Contract changes for farm and ranch operations will now be similar to the processes used for other conservation programs.

Please Note: Once you define your farm at the time of application, no acres can be added to the contract during the five-year period, except by competing the new land during the next CSP enrollment period and, if successful, taking on a second CSP contract. Newly purchased or rented land also can be added to the CSP contract at the time of renewal of the five-year contract. If you lose a lease during the CSP

contract period, that land can be subtracted from the contract, with payments being reduced accordingly.

CSP Conservation Enhancements, Practices, and Bundles

Conservation Practices and Enhancements

Financial assistance for the adoption of new conservation activities through CSP is divided into two categories – regular conservation practices and conservation enhancements. Enhancements are conservation activities that go above and beyond the requirements of regular conservation practices.

The crux of CSP new conservation activity rests upon these advanced conservation enhancements; however, farmers can also use regular conservation practices to help them meet stewardship thresholds for additional priority resource concerns during the life of the contract.

The list of conservation activities for 2017 includes a total of 223 individual conservation enhancements and 74 conservation practices that are eligible for CSP. The 2017 redesign of the program includes a direct linkage between conservation practices and enhancements, assigning new enhancement codes that link the base practice to the purpose being addressed.

The main driver behind the increased number of available enhancements through CSP this year is the “propagation” of existing enhancements, splitting previous versions of the enhancements into separate, multiple enhancements to be linked to a specific micro resource concern (“cause”). In addition to this splitting of existing enhancements, however, NRCS did add more than 60 entirely new enhancements to the list.

Deciphering Enhancement Codes

Previously, CSP enhancements had a code that was comprised of a three letters to identify the resource concern being addressed (i.e. SQL for soil quality) plus two numbers. For example, SQL18 was the code for Soil Health Crop Rotation.

As part of the 2017 CSP reinvention, NRCS has assigned new codes to the enhancements, in order to indicate the practice that the enhancement is based upon, as well as the resource concern that is being addressed. The components of the enhancement codes include the following:

- E = Enhancement
- Code Number = Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) code
- Resource Concern/ Cause (Micro Resource Concern) Number = 101 – 144 (see list of resource concerns at the end of this information alert)
- Alpha digit = one of four options:
 - Z = from CPS Additional Criteria
 - X = from CPS Additional Consideration
 - R = enhancement is a resource conserving crop rotation (RCCR) for a supplemental payment

- I = enhancement is an improved resource conserving crop rotation (RCCR) for a supplemental payment
- Sequence number (if necessary) is used when more than one enhancement option is presented for the same CPS, resource concern/cause number, and alpha digit

***For example, the enhancement code “E328106Z” indicates that the enhancement is based on conservation practice standard 328 (Conservation Crop Rotation), and a participant would be adopting to it address soil quality degradation on their operation, specifically in terms of organic matter depletion. Organic matter depletion is addressed through one of the additional criteria in CPS 328 (Additional Criteria to Maintain or Increase Soil Health and Organic Matter Content).*

Each enhancement is described in detail in an enhancement job sheet that includes the following information:

- a) Enhancement name
- b) Base practice
- c) Applicable land use
- d) Resource concern addressed
- e) Practice lifespan
- f) Enhancement description
- g) Criteria
- h) Documentation requirements

You can view and browse all available enhancements by land use online [here](#).

Enhancement Bundles

Beyond individual enhancements and conservation practices, the 2017 list of activities includes 32 **enhancement bundles**. Bundles are groupings of conservation enhancements that the agency feels may work well together to provide increased benefits when they are implemented as a group on particular types of farms. Participants who include bundles as part of their CSP contract receive a higher level of financial assistance to encourage the holistic approach to generate additional conservation benefits.

Each bundle has 3 or more required enhancements, and for some bundles, you also have the option to pick additional enhancements from a “select” list that addresses specific resource concerns.

For the 2017 sign-up, bundles have enhancements that are groups according to land use – crop, pasture, range, and forest, as well as agency initiatives – Ogalla Aquifer, Buffers, Long Leaf Pine, Mississippi River Basin Initiative, and Working Lands for Wildlife. There are also several bundles available this year that are specifically targeted to **organic farms**.

You can view and download details on all available bundles [here](#).

CSP Payments

A major component of the 2017 program reinvention is the restructuring of how CSP payments are determining, including annual payments for improving, maintaining, and managing existing operations *and* installing and adopting additional conservation activities. The redesigned system differs from previous years in the process used to calculate annual payments, and it is important to note that beginning this year, annual payments may vary from year to year depending on the conservation activities completed each year. The annual payment will not include an additional activity component in years where you do not implement new conservation activities.

Your annual payments will be determined each year by the following components: maintenance (existing activity) payments, additional activity payments, and supplemental payments for resource conserving crop rotations:

1. Maintenance (Existing Activity) Payments

Existing activity payments are made to support your existing conservation based on the land uses included in your operation and the number of resource concerns that are meeting the stewardship threshold level at the time of application. **This portion of your annual payment will remain the same for each year of the CSP contract, provided there are no changes to the total acres enrolled in the program.**

This component of your annual payment has two parts:

(a) A payment of \$350 for each resource concern that you are meeting on each land use. This payment will be calculated for each land use using the following formula: the number of resource concerns met at the time of application multiplied by a standard rate of \$350 per resource concern.

(b) A per acre payment based on the land use. The per acre rate varies by land use due to the variation in expense for conservation maintenance as follows:

- Crop, Pastured Cropland, and Farmstead: \$7.50 per acre
- Pasture: \$3.00 per acre
- Rangeland: \$1.00 per acre
- Forest and Associated Agricultural Land: \$.50 per acre

Remember: The \$1,500 minimum payment means that even if your overall payment, including existing and additional conservation activities, comes out to less than \$1,500 annually, you will receive the minimum payment of \$1,500 year. This is particularly important to consider when factoring in the acreage component of your overall annual payment.

Maintenance Payment Example:

Participant has 400 acres of cropland and 1,000 acres of rangeland:

- Meeting/ exceeding stewardship threshold for 3 resource concerns on cropland
 - 3 RCs: $3 \times \$350 = \$1,050$
 - 400 acres: $400 \times \$7.50 = \$3,000$
 - Total = \$4,050
- Meeting/exceeding stewardship threshold for 5 resource concerns on rangeland
 - 5 RCs: $5 \times \$350 = \$1,750$
 - 1,000 acres: $1,000 \times \$1 = \$1,000$
 - Total = \$2,750
- Total Maintenance Payment = $\$4,050 + 2,750 = \$6,800$

2. Additional Activity Payments

The second component of your annual CSP payment will be based on the financial assistance payment rate for the individual enhancements, practices, or bundles implemented to help you meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional resource concern by the end of your contract.

New this year, payments for additional conservation activities will be based on payment schedules, as have been used for cost share payments within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS determines the payment rates for enhancements by calculating the difference in cost between maintaining the base practice requirements associated with each enhancement, and the cost of applying the additional criteria or condition that comprises the enhancement. As is the case with EQIP conservation practices, for some CSP enhancements, foregone income also will be included in the calculation. However, unlike CSP prior to this new reinvention for 2017, payments will not be based on expected conservation or environmental benefits, just cost and in some cases foregone income.

For the 74 practices that are available for inclusion within your CSP contract, the scenario practice rate is 10 percent the estimated cost for the typical scenario (i.e., 10 percent of what would normally be paid for the same practice under an EQIP contract).

The payment rate tables for CSP enhancements, practices, and bundles display the payment rate by unit such as per acre, per foot, or each. Payments for enhancements, practices, or bundles will be based on the actual amount installed or applied. This portion of your annual payment will vary each year based on the conservation activities applied during the year.

Payment rates vary by state. To view the payment rates in your area, visit the state [CSP website](#) and follow the link to your state's page.

Important Note: While NRCS is required to post the payment rates (as well as other relevant information for the sign-up process), this information is not yet publically available. NRCS still needs to publish payment schedules for all available enhancements, practices, and bundles.

If this information is not yet publicly available as you are preparing to submit an initial application to enroll, contact your NRCS office and request it directly.

3. Supplemental Payments

A substantial supplemental payment is available for adopting or improving a resource-conserving crop rotation, in recognition of the very important multiple resource benefits that longer, more diverse rotations provide. Supplemental payment rates will be included in the payment rate tables on your state's website. Two supplemental payment options exist for participants: 1) adopting a new rotation, or 2) improving an existing rotation.

Resource-conserving crop rotations (RCCRs) can include cover crops, forages, or green manures, with the goal of reducing erosion, improving soil fertility and tilth, interrupting pest cycles, and when applicable, reducing the depletion of soil moisture or otherwise reducing the need for irrigation. The rotation must include at least one "resource-conserving crop," which can be a perennial grass, a legume, a legume-grass mixture, or a small grain grown in combination with a grass or legume that is used as a green manure.

Supplemental payments are also available for *Improved* Resource Conserving Crop Rotations. To improve an RCCR, you must incorporate at least one of the following into your existing RCCR: an additional growing year for perennial crops; a perennial (grass or grass/legume) crop substituted for a row crop; or if your current perennial crop is a legume, change to a perennial grass or grass/legume mixture.

State Conservations will identify resource-conserving crops for your state and should make the list available to the public before the ranking period starts.

The payment rates for RCCRs and Improved RCCRs will be included in the payment schedule documents to be posted through NRCS state offices. In 2016 the rate for RCCRs was \$15 per acre, and for Improved RCCRs was \$5 per acre. We hope that the revised structure will continue, if not increase, the payment for this important advanced conservation activity.

Also Available: Updated Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program

NSAC has published an updated 2016/2017 version of our *Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program*. **The Farmer's Guide goes into even more detail about the program than what is provided in this Information Alert.**

[Download the comprehensive guide from our website.](#)

The Farmers' Guide is intended to help family farmers, ranchers, and foresters understand the CSP enrollment process. In addition, it provides clear information on conservation activities eligible for CSP payments to improve conservation performance and environmental benefits.

The new *Farmers' Guide* includes step-by-step enrollment guidance (including updates on the changes included as part of the 2017 Reintervention), key definitions, producer profiles, and helpful hints for accessing the program now that it has been revised by the 2014 Farm Bill. It also includes a detailed look at the program's use under the 2008 Farm Bill (from 2009 through 2013). This data section includes analysis of program participation by geographic region, land use type, commodity type, and

the top conservation practices and enhancements chosen by farmers and ranchers who have enrolled in the program.

The Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program is available for download on our website on our publications page at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications>.

Resource Concerns and Causes (Micro Resource Concerns)

| # | Resource Concern | Cause |
|-----|--|--|
| 101 | SOIL EROSION | Sheet and Rill Erosion |
| 102 | SOIL EROSION | Wind Erosion |
| 103 | SOIL EROSION | Ephemeral Gully Erosion |
| 104 | SOIL EROSION | Classic Gully Erosion |
| 105 | SOIL EROSION | Streambank Shoreline, Water Conveyance Channels |
| 106 | SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION | Organic Matter Depletion |
| 107 | SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION | Compaction |
| 108 | SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION | Subsidence |
| 109 | SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION | Concentration of Salts and Other Chemicals |
| 110 | EXCESS WATER | Seeps |
| 111 | EXCESS WATER | Runoff, Flooding, or Ponding |
| 112 | EXCESS WATER | Seasonal High Water Table |
| 113 | EXCESS WATER | Drifted Snow |
| 114 | INSUFFICIENT WATER | Inefficient Use of Irrigation |
| 115 | INSUFFICIENT WATER | Inefficient Moisture Management |
| 116 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Pesticides in Surface Water |
| 117 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Pesticides in Ground Water |
| 118 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Nutrients in Surface Water |
| 119 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Nutrients in Ground Water |
| 120 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Salts in Surface Water |
| 121 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Salts in Ground Water |
| 122 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-Solids and other Pollutants transported to Surface Water |
| 123 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-Solids and other Pollutants transported to Ground Water |
| 124 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Petroleum, Heavy Metal and Other Pollutants Transported to Surface Water |
| 125 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Petroleum, Heavy Metal and Other Pollutants Transported to Ground Water |
| 126 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Excessive Sediement in Surface Water |
| 127 | WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION | Elevated Water Temperature |
| 128 | AIR QUALITY IMPACTS | Emissions of Particulate Matter (PM) and PM Precursors |
| 129 | AIR QUALITY IMPACTS | Emissions of Ozone Precursors |
| 130 | AIR QUALITY IMPACTS | Emissions of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) |
| 131 | AIR QUALITY IMPACTS | Objectionable Odors |
| 132 | DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION | Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health |
| 133 | DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION | Inadequate Structure and Composition |
| 134 | DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION | Excessive Plant Pressure |
| 135 | DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION | Wildfire Hazard, Excessive Biomass Accumulation |
| 136 | FISH AND WILDLIFE - INADEQUATE HABITAT | Inadquate Habitat - Food |
| 137 | FISH AND WILDLIFE - INADEQUATE HABITAT | Inadequate Habitat - Cover/Shelter |
| 138 | FISH AND WILDLIFE - INADEQUATE HABITAT | Inadequate Habitat - Water |
| 139 | FISH AND WILDLIFE - INADEQUATE HABITAT | Inadequate Habitat - Habitat Community (Space) |
| 140 | LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION | Inadequate Feed and Forage |
| 141 | LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION | Inadequate Shelter |
| 142 | LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION | Inadequate Water |
| 143 | INSUFFICIENT ENERGY USE | Equipment and Facilities |
| 144 | INSUFFICIENT ENERGY USE | Farming/Ranching Practices and Field Operations |