



# Conservation Stewardship Program

## *2019 Sign Up*

### INFORMATION ALERT

*April 2019*

*The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is USDA's largest conservation program, offering whole farm, comprehensive conservation assistance to farmers and ranchers across the country. Each year the annual sign-up offers an opportunity for farmers to receive financial assistance for advanced conservation through five-year contracts on all types of land in agricultural production.*

#### **Deadline for Filing Initial Application - May 10, 2019**

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) 2019.

**Farmers and ranchers interested in enrolling in CSP for a five-year contract beginning in FY 2019 must complete the initial brief application form by May 10, 2019.**

**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 May 10 to secure your chance to enroll in 2019!

#### **How does CSP work in 2019?**

The FY 2019 CSP sign-up is the first CSP sign-up following the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill. For FY 2019, the farm bill gives NRCS the authority to utilize conservation program rules written under the previous farm bill, recognizing that it will take additional time to go through a formal rulemaking process, solicit feedback, and update the details of the program based on the changes made in the 2018 Farm Bill.

For CSP, this means that the 2019 sign-up will be nearly identical to last year's sign-up, but with a few important farm bill changes going into effect immediately. There are some changes that NRCS is required to make right away (including new renewal rules and total funding available) and others that are straightforward enough that they can be made right away (including increased payment rates for advanced conservation activities).

As a result of the expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill for several months late last year as well as government shutdown following the enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill, the 2019 CSP sign-up deadline is several months later than it has been in previous years ago. This delay makes it all the more important to ensure there is effective outreach and support for producers signing up for CSP before May 10.

Two years ago, in 2017, NRCS rolled out major changes to the program through an administrative “re invention” of the enrollment process, ranking criteria, available conservation activities, and payment schedules. These changes are still in place for FY 2019. In addition, NRCS is also in the process of making further updates to go into effect in FY 2019, including additional coordination with the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) sign-up process.

This Information Alert provides information on the CSP application process, including details on the changes that were incorporated as part of the 2017 reinvention process. Additionally, it includes information regarding the 2018 farm bill changes that NRCS is implementing immediately. For more details on the specific updates to CSP, please refer to the following pages.

*2017 [Reinvention Changes](#)*

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*2018 [Farm Bill Changes](#)*

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**Special Note about Contract Renewals**

The 2018 Farm Bill modified the process through which participants with existing CSP contracts renew their five-year CSP contracts for an additional contract. Previously, CSP participants with expiring contracts could opt to renew their contract for an additional five-year period and be guaranteed a new contract so long as they met the terms of the original contract and agreed to adopt additional conservation as part of the next contract.

The 2018 Farm Bill changed the renewal process such that participants can apply to renew, but they must compete for the same total pot of funding as new contracts. Previously, funding for renewals was guaranteed. While this does make it less of a guarantee that a renewal can be secured, conservation benefits achieved during an initial contract will be considered for those applying to renew, and those gains should make a renewal application extremely competitive within the total ranking pool.

NRCS is now in the process of transitioning over from the old renewals process to the changes made in the farm bill, and the farm bill provides the authority to make contract extensions during this period of transition. Participants who originally signed up for CSP in FY 2014 would have ordinarily had the chance to renew last year in order to sign a new contract that would begin in FY 2019. However, the expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill in September of last year without an extension of authority left NRCS unable to move forward with the renewals process for expiring contracts. In order to mitigate the impact of the program's lapse on producers, NRCS allowed farmers with expiring CSP contracts to extend their contracts through June of 2019. This did not provide the thousands of affected CSP contract holders with any additional payments, but did maintain their enrollment in CSP, which meant that producers also retained their eligibility for future renewals.

Recognizing that NRCS needed additional time to make the renewal updates, the new farm bill authorizes a yearlong extension, with an additional year of payments, for 2014 participants who took the extension option last year. This will give NRCS time to have the new renewals process in place, and those contract holders will be able to apply to renew in 2020, before their contracts expire. Accepted participants will still be able to reenroll without a gap in contract payments.

NRCS will notify all eligible participants about the one-year extension in early April. Participants who think they are eligible for a one-year extension should reach out their [local NRCS office](#) for more information. The same option for a one-year extension will also be made available for contracts that were originally signed in FY 2015 and are set to expire at the end of 2019.

### **Special Note about Grassland Conservation Initiative**

An additional program change made in the 2018 Farm Bill is the establishment of a new Grassland Conservation Initiative within CSP. This initiative provides payments for farms that had previously received commodity program payments for base acres that, using the planting flexibility provisions in the commodity title of the farm bill, had been converted entirely to grass-based agriculture for the past decade or longer. Congress decided as part of the new farm bill that these acres are no longer eligible for commodity payments. As a way to partially compensate these farmers, they can now opt to enroll in CSP for 5 years at a set rate of \$18 per acre. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will be reaching out directly to eligible landowners this year to inform them that they will no longer be eligible for commodity payments but instead have this one-time option to enroll in CSP.

### **Special Note about Cover Crops and Resource Conserving Crop Rotations**

One of the major wins in the 2018 Farm Bill was the increasing of payments authorized for conservation activities like cover crops, resource conserving crop rotations, and advanced grazing management. We are pleased that NRCS will be able to offer the increased payment rates for cover crops and resource-conserving crop rotations, beginning with the FY 2019 sign-up. For cover crop based activities, this means that the payment rate will be 125 percent of the otherwise determined payment, and for resource-conserving crop rotations, it will be 150 percent of that rate. This is a major improvement to ensure that the program supports the most effective conservation activities that benefit soil health, water quality, and other critical resource concerns.

The farm bill also authorized an increased rate of 150 percent for advance grazing management conservation activities, including management-intensive rotational grazing. NRCS will need to do additional work before they are able to offer the increased rate for this set of activities, and this will

be made available beginning with the FY 2020 CSP sign-up. More details about the overall payment structure in CSP are available on page 14.

## **Total Funding Available**

The farm bill changed CSP from an acreage-based to dollar-based program, and in doing so also eliminated the instruction to NRCS to keep the program within a per acre funding constraint. Since 2008, NRCS was directed to manage the program so that, on a national average basis, CSP payments would work out to not more than \$18 per acre on a national basis. Cropland acres were generally paid at rates higher than the national average, while rangeland and forested land generally came in well below the national average, with pasture close to the national average.

While there is no longer statutory direction as to the average payment rate or total acres enrolled in the new farm bill, there are several new provisions to ensure that available funding is directed toward the most effective practices. These provisions include increased payment rates for key practices that benefit soil health (see page 16 for more details on this change), as well as direction for NRCS to produce a report analyzing the most expensive practices to determine if payments can be reduced for expensive practices with low conservation benefits.

For FY 2019, the farm bill authorized \$700 million in funding for *new* CSP contracts, exclusive of the ongoing funding for the more than 50,000 contracts that are currently enrolled in the program. Additionally, there is unused “carryover” funding available from previous years, which the farm bill authorizes to be used to cover the transitional payments for the contracts described in the renewals section above. The exact amount of funding available for new contracts in FY 2019 will be dependent on how much funding is obligated for the Grassland Conservation Initiative, which will be subtracted from the \$700 million, as well as how much carryover funding is leftover, which will be added to the \$700 million.

In addition, funding set-aside for existing CSP contracts as part of Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects will now be converted to dollars from acres, adding to total CSP acres nationwide.

## **Process and Timeline for Enrolling in CSP**

### **Step 1: Applying to Participate is Simple**

There are two simple actions to apply to enroll in CSP in 2019 (before the May 10 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 second point below, as it has 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 five-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.

**Special Note:** Previously, if you were applying as a business entity rather than an individual, you also needed to have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number, which is a unique number used to identify your farm business, as well as a current registration for the System for Award Management (SAM). This requirement was removed in the FY 2018 agriculture appropriations bill, thereby simplifying the contracting process for participants and staff.

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

- **Three-page [NRCS-CPA-1200 form](#)**
- **Farm record number from USDA's Farm Service Agency**

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

You can learn more about the CSP application process and which priority resource concerns are relevant for your application by visiting your [state's CSP page](#).

## **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 May 10, 2019 cut-off date, you will then have a period 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 significant component of the 2017 program “reinvention” was 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 was 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 for conservation activities.

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](#). States customize the evaluation templates to fit their states, and may have unique templates for any of the ranking pool in order to address any significant differences in resource concern or applicable evaluations.

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 a 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 2019 CSP sign-up period.

### **SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT CAET AND CART**

NRCS is currently in the process of developing a new tool, the Conservation Assessment

Ranking Tool (CART), which will replace CAET, beginning with the FY 2020 sign-up period. CART will provide increased streamlining and coordination across NRCS programs and planning processes, in order to assess applicants' resource concerns, planned practices, and site vulnerability as part of the planning process to rank applications for funding. These changes will not go into effect for the FY 2019 sign-up, but for future enrollment periods, stay tuned for more details on CART later this year.

#### **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. Prior to the 2017 reinvention they were 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 2018 sign-up, NRCS headquarters set both the national and state ranking questions for the ranking process, and the AERT allows states to tailor the local issue questions to more effectively address locally significant issues. In order to determine how your state has allocated the remaining 150 points that are available for the local issue questions, visit your state's CSP page for their revised AERT. States should be posting these updated ranking tools in the coming weeks with the additional information.

You can access the national and state ranking questions for FY 2019 [here](#).

### **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, 2019, 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 2017 reinvention. Prior to the reinvention, the annual payment rate was equalized. You can view and download the payment schedules for your state [here](#).

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 apply to 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 for at least two additional targeted priority resource concerns, *or* exceed the stewardship threshold for two existing priority resource concerns from your initial contract.

As detailed above on page 2, the 2018 Farm Bill included significant reforms to the renewals process, transitioning from a process of automatic eligibility if you met the renewal requirements, to a new process through which renewals will have to compete for an additional contract. If successful, renewals will still be able to take on their next contract prior to expiration of the initial contract, without a gap in CSP payments.

## **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. NSAC published a *CSP Special Report* on the 2017 sign-up, which is available for download [online](#).

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 87 million acres since 2009. Currently, following the 2018 sign-up, there are more than 70 million acres actively enrolled in CSP contracts across the country.

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 met 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.

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 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 such farms can provide. 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. 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 or socially disadvantaged 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.

Under the 2018 sign-up, these set asides were a critical tool in supporting participation from beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers – in 2018, 11 percent of total CSP contracts acres were enrolled by beginning farmers and ranchers, and 8 percent of acres were enrolled by socially disadvantaged producers.

## **Additional Flexibility**

Beginning in 2017, NRCS began 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 are now 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, accepting a second CSP contract. Newly purchased or rented land can also 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, individual 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 2019 includes a total of 223 individual conservation enhancements and 78 conservation practices that are eligible for CSP. The 2017 redesign of the program included a direct linkage between conservation practices and enhancements, assigning new enhancement codes that link the base practice to the purpose being addressed.

To download and view the complete list of enhancements, bundles, and practices, you can access the full activity list for FY 2019 [here](#). Read on to learn more about the revised structure for activities available through CSP.

## 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 it to 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 brose all available enhancements by land use online [here](#).

## Enhancement Bundles

Beyond individual enhancements and conservation practices, the 2019 list of activities includes 35 **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 2019 sign-up, bundles have enhancements that are grouped 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**.

Bundles follow a similar coding system to identify the bundles and their applicable land uses or landscape conservation initiative as follows:

### Bundle Tracking Code Arrangement/Key

#### **Bundles: B - 000 – Applicable Land Use or LCI – Sequence Number**

Where—

- B = Bundle
- Code number = 000 to indicate multiple enhancements with differing base practices
- Applicable Land use or LCI
  - BFF = Buffers
  - CPL = Cropland
  - FST = Forest
  - PST = Pasture
  - RNG = Range
  - LLP = Longleaf Pine Initiative
  - MRBI = Mississippi River Basin Initiative
  - OGL = Ogallala Aquifer Initiative
  - WLW = Working Lands for Wildlife
- Sequence Number (if necessary) is used when more than one bundle option is present for the same land use or LCI.

#### **Examples:**

- **B000CPL3 – Crop Bundle #3 - Soil Health Rotation, No-Till**
- **B000LLP2 - Longleaf Pine Bundle #2**

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

## CSP Payments

A major component of the program's reinvention was the restructuring of how CSP payments are determined, 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 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. Thus a farm with cropland, pasture, and some forested acreage that is meeting or exceeding the stewardship threshold for two resource concerns would receive \$2,300 for this component of the payment scheme.

**(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 560 acres of cropland and 80 acres of pasture:

- Meeting/ exceeding stewardship threshold for 3 resource concerns on cropland
  - 3 RCs:  $3 \times \$350 = \$1,050$
  - 560 acres:  $560 \times \$7.50 = \$4,200$
  - Total = \$5,250
- Meeting/exceeding stewardship threshold for 5 resource concerns on rangeland
  - 5 RCs:  $5 \times \$350 = \$1,750$
  - 80 acres:  $80 \times \$3 = \$240$
  - Total = \$1,990
- Total Maintenance Payment =  $\$5,250 + \$1,990 = \$7,240$

## 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.

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 forgone income.

For the 78 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 based on localized factors. Each year, NRCS evaluates and considers the current costs for material and labor within the state as well as the necessary compensation for opportunity costs that may arise.

NRCS has now made these payment rates easily accessible by state, ensuring that applicants can view and consider the potential payments they would receive under CSP. To view the payment rates in your area, visit the [State Payment Schedules website](#) and follow the link to your state.

### 3. Supplemental Payments in FY 2019

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. More details about the increased payments for RCCRS in FY 2019 are available on page 3.

### **COMING SOON: Updated Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program**

NSAC has regularly published our *Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program*, including a detailed overview of the program's structure, utilization, and application process. 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.

**It has not yet been updated for the 2019 sign-up, but will be made available with further updates in the weeks ahead.**

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

## 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	Inadquate Habitat - Cover/Shelter
138	FISH AND WILDLIFE - INADEQUATE HABITAT	Inadquate Habitat - Water
139	FISH AND WILDLIFE - INADEQUATE HABITAT	Inadquate Habitat - Habitat Community (Space)
140	LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION	Inadquate Feed and Forage
141	LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION	Inadquate Shelter
142	LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION	Inadquate Water
143	INSUFFICIENT ENERGY USE	Equipment and Facilities
144	INSUFFICIENT ENERGY USE	Farming/Ranching Practices and Field Operations