



Conservation Stewardship Program

2020 Renewals and New Sign-ups

INFORMATION ALERT

March 2020

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is USDA's largest working lands 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, as well as contract renewal opportunities for those nearing the end of their previous five-year contract.

➔ TWO NATIONWIDE DEADLINES TO RENEW EXPIRING CSP CONTRACTS ←

For CSP Contracts that began in 2014, 2015, or 2016, there are two rapidly approaching dates:

To extend a current 2015 contract (does not apply to 2014 or 2016 contracts) for one more year: apply by March 13, 2020

For all three years, to compete for a new 5-year renewal contract: apply by March 20, 2020

➔ MULTIPLE STATE DEADLINES FOR NEW ENROLLMENTS IN 2020 ←

Rather than a single national deadline, each state will establish their own deadlines, beginning anytime after May 29, 2020

We expect most deadlines will be sometime during the month of June.
Check with your State NRCS Office for your state-specific details!

Important: Though you can apply for CSP at any time during the year, if you miss the cut-off you may need to wait a full year before your application is considered. So get the initial application form in by the dates listed above to secure your chance to enroll in 2020!

CSP Background in Brief

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a [working lands conservation program](#) administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (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.

CSP is the largest working lands conservation program in the U.S. It was started in 2003 as the Conservation Security Program and has evolved into the Conservation Stewardship Program that has enrolled more than 90 million acres since 2009, with over 70 million acres currently in active contracts. For some recent data on the program, read this [NSAC Special Report](#).

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. Priority 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 priority 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 "priority resource concerns" for your state or area of the state. 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 "priority 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 priority 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 priority 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, there is an option to either meet or exceed the stewardship threshold on at least two additional (total of five) priority resource concerns by the end of the second contract term, or to increase the level of performance on at least two priority resource concerns in the initial contract.

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 per acre, with range and forestland at the lower end, and pasture in the middle, close to the average. Participants may not receive more than \$200,000 under all CSP contracts entered into during fiscal years 2019 through 2023. The payment limitation does not apply to Indian Tribes.

CSP CONTRACT RENEWALS

This will be an unusual year with respect to CSP renewals, as there are three years' worth of renewals happening all in one year rather than the usual one year's worth, due to delays prior to and following passage of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Also starting this year and following, per the 2018 Farm Bill, renewals will now be competitive, not automatic for those who qualify. Please note, however, that while this change does make it less of a guarantee that a renewal can be secured, conservation benefits achieved during previous contracts will be considered for those applying to renew, and those gains should make many if not most renewal applications quite competitive.

Important: Please also note that renewal applications that are not selected in the competitive process will still have an opportunity to enroll in this year's new application process. In other words, if your renewal contract bid is not accepted this spring, you can submit a new CSP application and compete in the new application round later this spring (see New Contract Application section immediately below).

In addition, the 2018 Farm Bill allows those CSP participants with contracts that started in 2015 an opportunity to request a one-year extension to their existing contract (and subsequently compete for a new five-year renewal contract in 2021), or jump right in and compete for a new five-year renewal contract now, in 2020.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced **March 13, 2020** as the cut-off date for farmer applications to extend for one year expiring CSP contracts that were originally enrolled in 2015.

NRCS has also announced **March 20, 2020** as the cut-off date for 2014, 2015, and 2016 contract holders who wish to apply for a full five-year renewal contract.

Important: In previous years, the deadline for both new CSP applications and for contract renewals has been the same date. This will no longer be the case. The competition for renewal contracts will occur first, followed by new applicants, beginning in 2020 and for all future years.

While the overall application process outlined below refers to new contracts, the information is relevant for renewals as well. But for detailed information specific to the renewal process, please see Step 6 on page 7 of this information alert.

NEW CSP CONTRACT APPLICATIONS

Unlike all previous CSP enrollment periods, each state NRCS office, beginning this year, is being given the flexibility to establish their own deadlines. However, no state may have a cutoff prior to May 29, and all states must obligate their funding by July 31. Hence, it is reasonable to assume most states will have deadlines during the month of June. Please check with your State NRCS office for the information specific to your State. All of the process and timeline sections below, other than Step 6 (renewals), are directly relevant to new applications to participate in CSP.

WHAT'S NEW IN 2020?

This Information Alert includes key updates regarding program basics, including some revisions, that will be in place in 2020. For more details, refer to the following pages.

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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, whether for renewals before the March deadlines or for new applications later this spring:

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 farmers 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. In addition to the farm record number, it is also a good idea to make sure all your FSA farm records are established and up to date.

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, all applicants must provide a map of their agricultural operation.

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

Step 2: Completing the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART)

Once you have completed and submitted the short application form (see above; [NRCS-CPA-1200](#)) during March and April for renewal contracts and during March through July for new enrollments, you will then have a period to sit down with your local NRCS staff person to complete the CSP Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART), which will be used to evaluate your current management system and the natural resources on your land. One important purpose of the CART is to determine if you are meeting the minimum stewardship threshold requirements to participate in CSP.

CART will assess current management on eligible lands and determine the number of resource concern categories 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, among others.

CART assesses the land for each resource concern category and evaluates existing conditions and planned management activities to determine if the stewardship threshold is met for each resource concern category. CART will then rank applications based on the priorities set for each of the resource concern categories.

To be eligible for CSP initially, you already must be meeting or exceeding the stewardship thresholds for at least two priority 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. (For eligibility criteria for renewal contracts, see page 7)

Note: Some participants are able to demonstrate that they are meeting or exceeding more than two priority resource concerns from the start – that is fine (great in fact!), and does not limit your eligibility.

Resource concerns are considered met when all applicable resource concern “causes” have been addressed.

For example, within the resource concern category of “soil quality limitations,” the potential causes may include organic matter depletion, compaction, subsidence, concentration of salts and other chemicals, or aggregate instability. In order to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for this priority 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 applicable 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 CART, 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 13 for more details on the conservation enhancements, practices, and bundles available as part of the 2020 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 priority resource concerns.

NRCS is required to rank applications based on the following statutory ranking factors:

1. the natural resource conservation and environmental benefits that result from the conservation treatment on all applicable priority resource concerns at the time of submission of the application; and
2. the degree to which the proposed conservation activities increase natural resource conservation and environmental benefits.

In other words, the clear intent of Congress in the farm bill was to provide equal weight to your ongoing active management of conservation activities already adopted prior to CSP enrollment, and the additional conservation activities undertaken through the CSP contract.

However, Congress also allowed NRCS to add “other consistent criteria” and it is not entirely clear what those might be and how they will be applied. NSAC will continue to advocate that any other additional criteria that may be added must not do anything to distort the equal weighting principle.

Your application will be ranked against other eligible applications in the same local ranking pool, which considers ranking factors and questions based upon state and local priorities. Applications with the highest scoring will receive contract offers first.

Important: Ranking questions and additional information for your particular State is linked to [this national NRCS CSP page](#). Please note however that as of early March not all states have updated their information. If your state’s information seems out of date and does not indicate 2020 information, please be in contact with them directly.

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

Prior to approving your contract and obligating funds, NRCS will complete an on-farm or “field” 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, 2020, 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. For those who have been previously enrolled, note this is different than how the payment system for CSP worked from 2009-2016, when the annual payment rate was equalized to simplify program administration and delivery and make it more farmer-friendly. However, this new process hopefully allows for more flexibility for changes in management and timing of activity implementation throughout the length of the contract (see page 15).

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 10 for more information.

Step 6: CSP Contract Renewal

CSP contracts last for five years. Additionally, you may re-enroll in CSP for additional five-year contracts during the last year of any previous contract.

To be eligible for a contract renewal, you must

1. demonstrate that you are in compliance with your previous five-year contract;
2. adopt at least one new or improved conservation activity; and
3. either
 - (a) be able to demonstrate that during the new contract term, you will meet or exceed the stewardship threshold on at least two additional priority resource concerns, or
 - (b) adopt new or improved conservation activities that will help achieve a higher level of conservation performance on at least two priority resource concerns you have already addressed.

This year, farmers and ranchers whose contracts began in 2015 have the opportunity to either extend their current contract for an additional year or compete for a new five-year renewal contract.

- **For those wishing to extend their current contract for a year, the application deadline is**

March 13, 2020.

- **For those wishing to compete for a new five-year renewal contract, the application deadline is March 20.**
- **The same March 20 deadline also applies to 2014 and 2016 contract holders wishing to apply for a five-year renewal contract.**

If you have a 2014, 2015, or 2016 contract, you should have received a letter in the mail from NRCS, indicating that your contract is set to expire. If you believe you are in your final year of your initial contract but have not yet received a letter, you should get in touch with your local NRCS office immediately.

In order to ensure a seamless transition between your previous and new CSP contracts, you should follow the five simple steps listed below:

1. Complete two simple forms: CPA 1200 (the same form used for new applications) and CPA 1248 (CSP Renewal Offer Worksheet). See Page 2 for more details regarding what identification numbers you must have in place to complete the initial application form.
2. After you submit your initial application by March 20, the Conservation Application Ranking Tool (CART) will be used to ensure that the minimum stewardship threshold is met and you remain eligible for CSP.
3. If your renewal application is deemed eligible, you will work with the NRCS to complete the CART process. The renewal requirements will be analyzed by comparing the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT) summary reports from your initial contract with the CART summary reports and the Contract Renewal Criteria Worksheet. You will work with NRCS in selecting new conservation activities to be implemented during your second contract. Remember that all new activities must be planned and started after your initial contract has expired
4. Field verification - see Page 6 for more details on the field verification process.
5. You will work with NRCS to develop a new stewardship plan to support your new contract, and your renewal offer will be obligated once all of your initial contract's scheduled activities have been certified as complete.

CSP Payments

Special Note for Contract Renewals from 2014, 2015 and 2016. A major component of the 2017 CSP program “reinvention” by NRCS 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 a great deal from previous years in the process used to calculate annual payments, and it is also 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: management and maintenance (existing activity) payments, additional activity payments, supplemental payments for resource conserving crop rotations and advanced grazing management for those adopting those practices, and in the case small acreage operations, a minimum contract payment proviso. In addition, there is a special payment rate for cover crop activities and a new, unique payment for comprehensive conservation planning. **Details follow.**

1. Management and 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 \$300 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 \$300 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 and Farmstead: \$7.50 per acre
- Pasture: \$3.00 per acre
- Non-industrial Private Forestland: \$1.00 per acre
- Range and Associated Agricultural Land: \$0.50 per acre

Maintenance Payment Example:

Participant has 560 acres of cropland and 80 acres of pasture:

o Meeting/ exceeding stewardship threshold for 3 resource concerns on cropland

- ▶ 3 RCs: $3 \times \$300 = \900
- ▶ 560 acres: $560 \times \$7.50 = \$4,200$
- ▶ Total = \$5,100

o Meeting/exceeding stewardship threshold for 5 resource concerns on rangeland

- ▶ 5 RCs: $5 \times \$300 = \$1,500$
- ▶ 80 acres: $80 \times \$3 = \240
- ▶ Total = \$1,740

o **Total Maintenance Payment** = $\$5,100 + \$1,740 = \$6,840$

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 are based on payment schedules. 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. For some CSP enhancements, foregone income also will be included in the calculation.

For the practices that are available for inclusion within your CSP contract, the scenario practice rate is 10 percent the estimated cost for the typical scenario. The CSP payment for practices will thus be between 11 to 20 percent of the payment rate for the same practice under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), varying based on the EQIP cost share rate for the particular practice.

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: While NRCS is required to post the payment rates for practices, enhancements, and bundles (as well as other relevant information for the sign-up process),

this information is not always publicly available or easy to find. If this information is not yet publicly available or you have trouble locating it as you are preparing to submit an initial application to enroll, please contact your NRCS office and request it directly.

3. Supplemental Payments

A 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. On the livestock side, supplemental payments are available for advanced grazing management, including management-intensive rotational grazing. The 2018 Farm Bill directs NRCS to pay no less than 150% of the normal annual payment rate for these enhancements, to ensure there is a strong incentive for those willing to adopt them.

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 advanced grazing management system, or 2) improving an existing rotation or advanced grazing management system.

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.

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.

Management-intensive rotational grazing is a specific CSP enhancement choice for 2020 and beyond, and qualifies for the supplemental payment. Additional advanced grazing management enhancements may differ by state, so if you are interested, it will be important to check with your state office to see what the other supplemental payment-qualifying offerings will be in your region.

State Conservations will identify resource-conserving crops and advanced grazing management options for your state and should make the list available to the public before the ranking period starts. Likewise, the state payment schedule, including supplemental payment rates, should be available to you online. If you cannot find that information on your State's NRCS website, please call and ask for it. As of the publishing date of this Information Alert, not all states had made everything available yet.

4. Cover Crop Payment Rate

In addition to the new 150% bonus rate for the two supplemental payment activities, Congress also directed NRCS as part of the 2018 Farm Bill to increase the payment rate for all cover cropping related practices and enhancements to at least 125% of the normal rate. That new higher rate should already be factored into the payment schedule on your State's NRCS webpage.

5. 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, depending on new enhancements selected, but due to the minimum contract rate will nonetheless receive \$1,500 per year.

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.

6. Comprehensive Conservation Planning

The 2018 Farm Bill also directs NRCS to provide a one-time payment to CSP participants who wish to develop and implement a comprehensive conservation plan. Given the goal of CSP over multiple contract periods is to assist participants in exceeding the stewardship threshold for all priority resource concerns in their region, it could be very handy and advisable to develop such a comprehensive plan. Congress, in recognition of the time it takes to do so, decided that a CSP payment should be provided to offset the cost. The payment level will vary depending on the number of priority resource concerns included in the plan and the number of different land use types on your farm or ranch. The exact payment rates have not yet been set, but NRCS has indicated the new comprehensive planning payments should be ready for implementation later this spring. Ask your state or local NRCS office for more details.

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 – 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, and may combine both practices and enhancements.

The [list of conservation activities](#) for 2020 includes a total of 156 individual conservation enhancements and 84 conservation practices that are eligible for CSP. The list of enhancements is long, but you can search by resource concern, by land use, and by enhancement name to help find the ones that might be right for you.

The list of regular conservation practices includes many, but not all of the land management and vegetative practices that are available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and other working lands programs, so it is important to review which are offered. NSAC will continue to advocate for NRCS to include several very important conservation practices that have unfortunately as of now been omitted from CSP.

Deciphering Enhancement Codes

In earlier CSP contracts, enhancements had a code that was comprised of 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.

Since then, however, NRCS assigned new codes to the enhancements for 2018-2019, in order to indicate the practice that the enhancement is based upon, as well as the resource concern that is being addressed. The codes and enhancements themselves have thankfully been simplified for 2020 and beyond. The basic components of the enhancement codes include the following:

- ◆ E = for Enhancement
- ◆ Code Number = the three-digit Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) code
- ◆ A letter (A, B, C, etc.) depending on how many enhancements are tied back to that particular CPS code

***For example, the enhancement code “E328E” indicates that the enhancement is based on conservation practice standard 328 (Conservation Crop Rotation), and the enhancement option is “E” which in this case stands for a soil health crop rotation.*

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 uses
- d. Resource concerns addressed
- e. Enhancement description
- f. Enhancement lifespan
- g. Criteria
- h. Documentation requirements

You can view and browse all available enhancements job sheets online [here](#).

Enhancement Bundles

Beyond individual enhancements and conservation practices, the current list of activities includes 27 **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 2020, the bundles include:

- A conservation buffer bundle
- Five cropland bundles offered nationwide including two focused on soil health and two designed specifically for organic producers
- One forest bundle and five longleaf pine bundles
- Five grazing bundles for pasture or range, plus one pasture-only and one range-only bundle
- Two bundles for irrigated cropland in the Ogallala Aquifer region
- Six cropland bundles for irrigated and non-irrigated land within the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI)

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

A Few Other Key Points

Additional Flexibility

NRCS provides 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 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 for 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.

Beginning and Minority Farmers

Five percent of all CSP dollars 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 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.

Organic Initiative

The 2018 Farm Bill directs NRCS to allocate dollars to the States specifically for organic and transitioning to organic producers, who may then compete in a separate pool for those dollars. The 2020 enrollment will be the first time this new feature comes into play. Funding is allocated to the States based on both the number of certified and transitioning to organic operations in the State and the total organic acreage in the State. With only certified organic and transitioning organic producers competing for these funds, it should help ensure strong participation by organic farmers in the program. For more details, contact your State NRCS office.