



NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE COALITION

# FARMERS' GUIDE TO THE CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 2020 EDITION



# WELCOME

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Welcome to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's (NSAC) Farmers' Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program!

This guide provides an in-depth look at the program and is designed to help farmers, ranchers, and foresters to prepare and apply for this comprehensive, whole farm advanced conservation assistance program that is authorized by the federal farm bill and administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.




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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Are you...

**a farmer considering enrolling in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)?**






Use this guide to...

-  learn about how the CSP works,
  -  see examples of the program in action, and
  -  assess whether it might be a good fit for your farm.
- 

Are you...


**in the process of enrolling in CSP?**

Use this guide to...

-  understand the steps involved in applying for and using CSP,
  -  learn more about the conservation activities CSP can help you implement,
  -  understand how your farm will be ranked,
  -  understand the way CSP payments work, and
  -  prepare for the reporting requirements you will need to meet once enrolled.
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Are you...

**simply curious to learn more about CSP?**

-  Check out the farmer profiles for great examples of CSP in action, and flip to the end for interesting data on trends in CSP usage and more.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

If you are a farmer, rancher, or forester<sup>1</sup> who works to enhance natural resources and strengthen environmental protection on your working land, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides a unique opportunity for you to be rewarded for your conservation efforts.

CSP recognizes that, as a farmer, you feel a responsibility not only to produce food, fiber, and energy, but also to maintain and enhance critical natural resources and provide environmental services.

CSP provides comprehensive conservation assistance to farmers on a whole farm basis through payments for actively managing and maintaining current conservation efforts, expanding and improving on them, and adding new conservation activities—all while you work your land for production and profit. CSP contracts provide annual payments, boosting the bottom line of participating farmers as they improve their agricultural resilience to benefit the environment and future generations.



🔔 CSP provides financial assistance for conservation activities that improve soil health, sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, slow erosion, improve water and air quality, increase biodiversity, support wildlife and pollinator habitat, and conserve water and energy.

🔔 CSP includes cropland, pasture, range, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land under tribal jurisdiction. The homestead and other associated agricultural land on which resource concerns can be addressed is also eligible. Applicants must enroll all acres that they operate, whether owned or rented.

🔔 CSP contracts are available throughout the entire country, and farmers can submit applications at any time in any year. Typically, once a year in late winter, NRCS takes the applications received up to that point, invites applicants to complete a proposal that is ranked based on total environmental benefits achieved, and enrolls the highest-ranking proposals in renewable, five-year contracts.

🔔 CSP participants have the opportunity to renew their contracts for additional five-year periods whenever they are in the first half of the fifth year of a current contract, providing farmers with the opportunity to preserve and expand natural resource and environmental benefits on their land over the long term.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report we will use the word farmer to include all those who care for and harvest plants and animals from the land, including ranchers and foresters.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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CSP was originally created in the 2002 Farm Bill as the Conservation Security Program, and it became the Conservation Stewardship Program under the 2008 Farm Bill. The Conservation Stewardship Program as passed by Congress and signed into law by the President in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills continues the program's vision of investing in advanced conservation systems.

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress converted CSP from an acreage-based program to a dollar-based program, and in the process reduced total funding available, meaning that competition to get into the program now will be even greater. However, the 2018 Farm Bill does include approximately \$1 billion a year for new contracts and contract renewals in addition to funding to pay for contracts signed before 2018.

Understanding the program - using this Guide and as well as resources available from NRCS - can help you be competitive and gain access to the program. This Guide provides an overview of CSP, highlighting who is eligible, how to apply, why its benefits are so critical, and where current CSP contracts are located.

**If you control the land and take on the risk of its production, you are eligible for CSP. All private agricultural land is eligible for CSP, with limited exceptions. Public land that is part of a farming or ranching operation may be eligible in some instances.**



# 1 CSP IN A NUTSHELL

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## WHAT IS CSP?

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers, rewarding both their active management of ongoing conservation efforts and adoption of new, additional conservation enhancements and advanced conservation systems on their entire farming operation.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

All sizes and types of agricultural operations are eligible for enrollment. Ten percent of total funding is targeted toward enrolling beginning farmers and farmers of color, and military veterans receive an additional preference within those targeted groups. See more on [page 8](#).

## HOW DO I APPLY?

Reach out to your local [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) office and let them know you are planning to apply for CSP! You will be given a brief [application form](#) to fill out. 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.

## WHEN DO I SIGN UP?

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year, but your State NRCS office will select a cut-off date each year when they will review and rank applications for funding. Applications received after the cut-off date will not be considered for funding until the following year. So be sure to ask your state or county NRCS office for the current year's cut-off date, which vary by state.

## IS IT COMPETITIVE?

Yes. When you apply, your application is ranked based on your current conservation performance and how much additional work you are willing to do to address priority natural resource concerns identified for your state or region by your state NRCS office. In most years there is far more interest in CSP than there are funds available, so ranking criteria become important. See more on [page 20](#).

## HOW LONG ARE CSP CONTRACTS?

Contracts last five years and may be renewed every five years for additional five-year contract periods provided that original contract terms have been met and you make a commitment to continual improvement. See more on [page 40](#).



# 1 CSP IN A NUTSHELL

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## HOW MUCH FUNDING WILL I RECEIVE?

Farmers receive an unchanging annual payment for their active management of ongoing conservation on their operation plus additional payments for newly adopted conservation practices, enhancements, and bundles that may vary from year to year depending on timing of adoption. Supplemental payments are also available for resource-conservation crop rotations and advanced grazing management, including management-intensive rotational grazing, while cover cropping is eligible for a payment bonus. There is a minimum payment of \$1,500 dollars per year for small acreage farms and a maximum of \$200,000 over the life of a five-year contract, so a farmer can receive up to approximately \$40,000 per year. For more detailed information on payment rates, take a look at our payment examples section of the Guide on page 32.

## WHERE ARE CSP CONTRACTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY?

Farmers in all 50 states and the Caribbean Region have land enrolled in CSP. You can learn more about how that acreage is spread throughout the country and the agricultural production it helps support with maps and data on [page 49](#).

## WHY ENROLL?

CSP pays farmers to actively manage conservation on their farms and build advanced conservation into their operation. Find out how current practices and new activities are scored on a variety of farms. See more on pages [10](#), [16](#), [36](#) and [42](#).



**CSP is a competitive program that aims to achieve environmental benefits by scoring and then financially rewarding those CSP applicants with the highest conservation performance outcomes.**

# 2 ELIGIBILITY

## AM I ELIGIBLE?

If you control the land and take on the risk of its production, you are eligible for CSP. You can be an owner-operator, a renter with permission from the landlord to enroll, or an owner who crop shares with another farmer.

## WHAT IF I RENT MY FARM?

If you rent, you should discuss CSP with your landlord first and get an agreement on the management changes you plan to make, ideally in the form of a signed letter acknowledging your agreement. This doesn't mean that you need a five-year lease. However, you do need an agreement of some type that shows you have possession of the land and authority to act as decision maker for the day-to-day management of the operation. Should you drop a lease during the 5-year contract period, NRCS will simply subtract those acres from your payment.

## IS MY LAND ELIGIBLE?

All private agricultural land is eligible, which includes cropland, pastureland, rangeland, land used for agro-forestry, and non-industrial private forestland. Non-industrial private forest land competes separately from agricultural land. Acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program or in the Wetland Reserve component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program are not eligible, but the balance of your working land acres are. Most publicly owned land is not eligible; however publicly owned land that is part of the participant's overall operation is eligible. Structures, equipment, and practices related to animal waste storage, treatment, transport or transfer for animal confinement facilities are not eligible.

## HELPFUL HINTS

**EQIP** - Land enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is also eligible for CSP, but CSP cannot pay for conservation practices that EQIP is already paying for.

**ACEP** - If you have acreage that is enrolled in a farm bill conservation easement, that will affect whether or not those acres can also be enrolled in CSP. If your land is enrolled in an Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), it can also be enrolled in CSP. However, if you have acres enrolled through ACEP's Wetland Easement (WRE) program, those particular acres are not eligible for CSP.

**CRP** - Acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are not eligible, except for land that is in the last year of a CRP contract. In that case, expiring CRP acres can be enrolled in CSP during that final year of the CRP contract. In this way, CSP payments can begin the very first year following the expiration of a CRP contract.



# 2 ELIGIBILITY

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## DO I NEED A FARM NUMBER?

Yes. In order to be eligible for CSP, you will need a Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm record number. You must be listed as the operator for the agricultural operation in the local FSA farm records management system, so it may be necessary to update your records with FSA before enrolling in CSP, or to set up an appointment to receive a number if you don't already have one. Getting a farm record number is free. More information is available [here](#).

## WHAT CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS APPLY?

To be eligible for a CSP contract, you must have sufficient existing conservation on your farm to allow you to exceed the stewardship threshold (a measure of acceptable conservation, see [section 4](#)) for at least two priority resource concerns out of five designated for your State or region of the State, and, if you do not already exceed the stewardship threshold on three or more priority resource concerns at the time you apply, be willing to address a third priority resource concern to at least the stewardship threshold level through newly adopted conservation activities as part of your CSP contract.

As with participation in all other farm bill programs, CSP participants must be in compliance with any [applicable highly erodible land or wetland conservation requirements](#).

## CAN I ADD AND SUBTRACT LAND FROM THE CONTRACT DURING THE 5 YEARS?

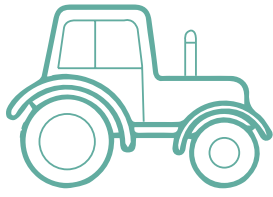
No new acres you lease or buy can be added to the contract during the five-year period, except by competing the new land during the next CSP enrollment period and, if successful, taking on a second CSP contract. Newly purchased or rented land also can be added to the CSP contract at the time of renewal of the five-year contract. If you lose a lease during the CSP contract period, however, that land can be subtracted from the contract, with payments adjusted accordingly.

## ARE THERE INCOME LIMITATIONS?

Yes. As with all federal commodity and conservation programs, CSP is limited to farmers who have an annual adjusted gross income (AGI) under \$900,000. AGI is determined after subtracting expenses (in other words, it is a measure of net income, not gross income), and the AGI limit can generally be doubled for married couples depending on tax filing status. You determine your income level based on a three-year average, and you will need to verify its amount by signing a certification form.

## IS THERE A PAYMENT LIMIT?

A farmer cannot receive more than \$200,000 over the course of the five-year contract, or an average of no more than \$40,000 a year, regardless of the number of acres (rented or owned) or farms a person enrolls, or the number of contracts signed. Each farm operator is only eligible for one CSP contract, unless they are involved in two or more substantially separate operations, or if they receive both a forestland contract and an agricultural land contract. However, USDA does allow certain joint operations such as general partnerships to double the yearly and five-year limit, even though there is no farm bill authorization for such an administrative determination. Indian tribes may enroll tribal agricultural land as a single contract, and in that case, they are not subject to the individual payment limit.



# FARMER PROFILE

## ***Cornelius Joe***

Cornelius Joe is a third-generation farmer raising Black Angus cattle on pasture in Greensboro, Alabama, and a mentor to beginning farmers in his community. He has used CSP over the past decade to increase the quality of both his pasture and his livestock.

CSP helped Joe improve his soil quality through soil sampling, improved forage planting, rotational grazing, reducing compaction and improving nutrient distribution from manure. He has also been able to reduce his fertilizer application, adopting a split nitrogen application which reduces runoff and improves soil quality.

Like many farmers, prior to enrolling in CSP, Joe worked with his NRCS office to enroll in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which he used to support building fencing to keep his stock out of waterways and provide other watering infrastructure.

Through CSP, he was later able to retrofit his stock tanks so that birds and bats can drink out of them without becoming trapped.

Joe is actively involved in improving conservation on his farm and often comes to his NRCS agent with new ideas and asks what programs might be able to support his plans. He values the support provided by CSP and other conservation programs, but recognizes that for many small farmers, a partial cost share payment isn't enough to justify the added costs of conservation activities.



*Cornelius Joe and his son, Christopher Joe, on their farm. Christopher Joe works as a District Conservationist for NRCS in Tuskegee, AL.*

He recommends that payments should cover 100 percent of costs for farmers who need it. "One of the major problems that small farmers face is that things are really costly," says Joe. "We need programs like CSP."

**Farmers who enroll in CSP are paid for the natural resource environmental services they provide – not only for the benefits from current conservation practices already in place on their farms, but also for planned conservation in the future.**









*\*Cornelius Joe with black angus cattle on Joe's Angus Farm*



# 3 ENROLLMENT

## ENROLLMENT PROCESS OVERVIEW

CSP is a competitive program that aims to achieve environmental benefits by scoring and then financially rewarding CSP applicants with the highest conservation performance outcomes, based on a combination of current and planned future conservation activities.

-  **First, you apply to see if you are eligible.**
-  **Second, NRCS scores your current performance and future plans, using their new **Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART)** tool (read more on **CART** on **page 13**).**
-  **Third, if you already meet acceptable conservation levels, then you compete in a ranking process that determines who will receive contracts.**
-  **Finally, contracts are awarded to those offering the highest level of environmental benefits, with NRCS working down through the list of eligible applicants until the dollars allocated to the particular state for that particular year runs out. At the national level, in most years, approximately twice as many farmers apply as get into the program in a given year, though there is some significant variation by state.**

Throughout the process of applying for CSP, you will work closely with your local NRCS conservation specialist on completing the CART, creating a conservation plan, and developing the contract. The local specialist can also help answer any implementation questions that arise.

## WHEN TO APPLY

CSP is open for enrollment at any time during the year. You can apply whenever you are ready, and your application will be considered during the next scheduled ranking period for your state. However, **NRCS typically ranks and chooses applications only once each year.** If you apply after the cut-off date has passed for any particular year, your application will not be considered until the following year.

Please check with your **county or state NRCS office** on application cut-off dates. They vary from state to state. Normally, they should occur toward the end of the calendar year before enrollment or early in the new year, i.e., during the late fall and winter months. Each state, however, may have its own peculiar timing and it may be earlier in the fall or later in the spring. NSAC continues to urge NRCS to normalize the process and make the cut-off dates uniformly from late fall through winter. Also, if you are applying to renew a CSP contract, please be advised that the cut-off deadline for renewal applications is prior to the deadline for new applicants.






# 3 ENROLLMENT

## WHAT IS CART?

The Conservation Application Ranking Tool (CART) is the new system (as of 2020) NRCS uses to rank applicants for CSP and other conservation programs. It replaces earlier ranking tools such as the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT) and the Conservation Activity Evaluation Tool (CAET). Starting in 2020, farmers will now apply for all NRCS conservation programs using CART.

NRCS district staff will use CART, in conjunction with a site visit, to evaluate current resource conditions on your farm, including soil erosion, soil health, water quality and quantity, air quality, plant condition, livestock condition, wildlife habitat, and energy use efficiency in farming operations. Resource condition is evaluated and assigned a point value based on:

-  **Geospatial analysis data, such as soil type, texture, and other inherent properties; topography and slope; nearby streams and other waters; and critical wildlife habitat.**
-  **Your current practices, including crop rotation, tillage, nutrient and pest management, grazing management, and other conservation activities.**
-  **On-site observation by you and your conservationist.**

For each resource concern, the point score is compared with its stewardship threshold to identify potential problems such as erosion above tolerance level, degraded wildlife habitat, or polluting levels of nutrient or pesticide movement to surface or groundwater. Next, you will identify the best suite of new conservation activities to restore and protect vulnerable resources and meet your stewardship goals. This becomes your conservation plan, for which the CART tool helps you identify which program(s) best fit your needs.

The combination of these factors (and several others) will calculate a ranking for your farm. This ranking will help compare your farm to others applying for CSP and will determine whether you receive funding, as well as how much funding you receive.

**Throughout the process of applying for CSP, you will work closely with your local NRCS conservation specialist on completing the CART, creating a conservation plan, and developing the contract.**

# ③ HOW TO ENROLL IN THE CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



To obtain a CSP application form, [click here](#), or contact your local NRCS office [here](#).

A NRCS representative can [mail](#), [e-mail](#), or [pass the form along in person](#). This is the same form used to apply for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and all other farm bill conservation programs. For more information and to start the application process, visit, call, or email your local NRCS service center.

## 1

### Fill out the CSP application form



Applications 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. You will need to identify all land in your operation when you meet with an NRCS representative.

#### HELPFUL HINT

In addition to filling out a CPA-1200 form, you must also provide a map that identifies and delineates the boundaries of all eligible land uses and acres included in your operation and that identifies any ineligible land.

Also remember, If you don't already have one, you need to obtain a farm record number with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) before NRCS can process and evaluate your CSP application. To contact your local FSA office, [click here](#).

## 2

### Read about the enhancements

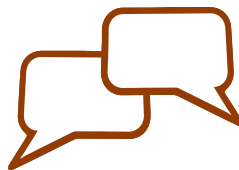


In order to enroll in CSP, you need to adopt at least one new conservation activity, called an "enhancement" by NRCS. The program also rewards you for your ongoing conservation work, but you need to add at least one enhancement for each separate land use (e.g., cropland, pasture, range, forested land) you enroll. Study the list of over 200 enhancements and 27 bundles (suites of enhancements) [here](#) and identify what you'd like to do.

In addition to enhancements, you can choose from a number of basic conservation practices as well. A list of basic conservation practices eligible for CSP support can be found in [Appendix B](#) of this Guide.

## 3

### Answer the CART questions with your NRCS representative



After you finish your basic application, a local NRCS representative will have a one-on-one conversation with you about your farming operation using the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART). CART assesses your current conservation situation and evaluates and ranks your proposals. That means both the conservation practices already in place on your farm as well as ones you adopt as part of your CSP contract. If you are already doing great conservation work, this will translate into **meeting** or **exceeding** the "stewardship threshold" of a higher number of "resource concerns." The more resource concerns you meet, the higher your annual per-acre existing practice payment will be. CART will also score any new practices and enhancements you want to undertake. You must undertake one or more new or improved conservation activities that will allow you to surpass the stewardship threshold. And remember to include all agricultural or private forest land you will control over the five-year contract!

## 4

### WAIT – NRCS will rank your application



Once NRCS completes an assessment and ranking of your operation via CART, they will determine which applications within the same ranking pool can be funded, with the highest scoring applications receiving contract offers first. Your NRCS representative will get back in touch once the selection process is complete.

#### HELPFUL HINT

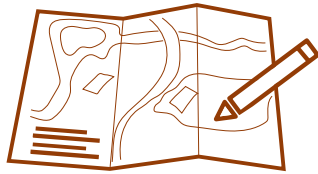
If you are a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer - [click here](#) for additional information - your application will be ranked with a separate pool of other growers in that group. Also, if you are an organic farmer or transitioning to organic, your application will also be ranked solely with other organic or transitioning growers in a separate ranking pool. Competition is then within the specific ranking pool, and since there are fewer applicants in those pools, your chance of success will likely be higher. So be sure to check the appropriate boxes in the application form and inform your NRCS field representative.



## IF YOU ARE SELECTED:

# 5

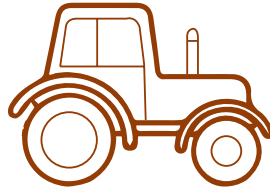
### Make a conservation plan



Once selected for the program, your NRCS representative will work with you to develop a five-year conservation stewardship plan and contract specifying your annual payment and the additional conservation enhancements you will be undertaking. Once finished and reviewed, sign the contract!

# 6

### Carry out the plan



Implement the enhancements in your plan during whatever year is specified in the plan.

# 7

### Do the Reporting



Complete the reporting requirements listed on each enhancement description. Your NRCS representative will provide you with a printout of the “job sheet” for each enhancement in your plan, and you can find them online [here](#).

# 8

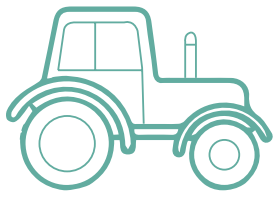
### Get the money



Your annual payment for active management of ongoing conservation will be paid each October. Newly adopted conservation payments will be made once an enhancement, practice, or bundle is certified by a NRCS representative who will then process the payment.

#### HELPFUL HINT

Don't forget to provide your banking information during the contracting phase to NRCS, so the NRCS representative can issue your payments via direct deposit. Also be aware that NRCS will make payments as soon after October 1 as possible. However, you can opt to delay your payment until January 1, for tax or other reasons, if you so choose.



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# FARMER PROFILE

## ***Paul Mugge (IA)***

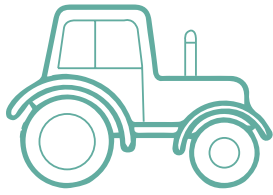
Paul Mugge is a second-generation farmer growing certified organic corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and small grains in Sutherland, Iowa. He uses CSP to help with organic management of his farm through the use of native prairie strips to control erosion, reduce runoff, and establish habitat for pollinators, beneficial insects, and birds.

Prairie strips are a conservation practice where small portions of cropland are taken out of production and planted with native prairie plants to protect soil and water resources and to provide habitat for wildlife. They help address biodiversity loss and environmental damage associated with row-crop agriculture.

Mugge first saw prairie strips during a field day and was struck by the beauty they add to the landscape. He shared, “when people think of loss of habitat, they think of the rainforest, but the tallgrass prairie is probably the most altered ecosystem on the planet – there are a few remnants left and it’s an incredibly diverse ecosystem.” The field where he installed the native prairie strips was the most erosive field on his farm, and now it’s one of the best fields in terms of resource conservation.

In addition to the use of native prairie strips, Mugge does no primary tillage and maintains much of the land no-tilled. His nutrient needs are met through cover crops and on-farm composting of livestock manure, and he has incorporated grass waterways and headlands in conjunction with the narrow prairie strips. He does primarily contour farming as well to reduce soil erosion.

CSP helps Mugge with management of his organic farm. “Organic farming provides many benefits for our climate,” says Mugge. Through his native prairie strips, Mugge is maximizing biodiversity on his farm, keeping the soil covered, and minimizing disturbances to the soil – all of which help maintain soil health and sequester carbon. In addition to sequestering carbon, Mugge explains that, on average, organic farmers use about two-thirds the amount of fossil fuels per acre as do conventional farmers. “Conventional agriculture can be very energy-intensive,” he said, “and the main reason for it is the use of nitrogen fertilizer.”



*Paul Mugge (in white) discussing a hairy vetch breeding project with Lisa Kissing Kucek of the USDA-ARS Dairy Forage Research Center and others at a field day on his northwest Iowa farm. Photo courtesy of Practical Farmers of Iowa.*

Mugge expressed his concern with our changing climate and the predicted increase in weather extremes. In response to the large impacts that climate change will have on agriculture, he asks “how do we make our farming systems more resilient in the face of a changing climate?” While he doesn’t have all the answers, he says “organic farming has huge potential to mitigate those effects just by sequestering carbon in the soil.” Programs like CSP and other conservation programs support farmers to implement practices that will help build resilience and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Mugge constantly thinks of conservation improvements on his farm and maintains a good relationship with his NRCS agent. As the end of his CSP contract approaches, Mugge is considering renewing it for another five years to further conservation activities on his farm and to further his contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

**Mugge’s nutrient needs are met through cover crops and on-farm composting of livestock manure, and he has incorporated grass waterways and headlands in conjunction with the narrow prairie strips.**

# 4 PRIORITIES, THRESHOLDS, & RANKING

CSP provides financial incentives to support the environmental protection and resource conservation that you are already implementing on your farm. Because CSP resource concerns are tailored to specific regions, it also helps you address the most pressing and relevant resource concerns within your community. CSP is the first federal conservation program to go beyond implementing practices that avoid or stop environmental harm to help solve problems and enhance natural resources and environmental health across the landscape.

## PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERNS

Resource concern categories are specific categories of natural resources problems related to soil (soil quality limitations as well as erosion), water (sediment/nutrient/pathogen loss as well as water depletion), air emissions, plant health and biodiversity, wildlife habitat and livestock health, and energy efficiency and conservation. There are 17 resource concern categories enumerated by NRCS. The categories are:

- 🌿 **Wind and water erosion (sheet and rill)**
- 🌿 **Concentrated erosion (ephemeral or classical gully, streambank and shoreline)**
- 🌿 **Soil quality limitations (organic matter, soil life, tilth, compaction, etc.)**
- 🌿 **Field sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss to surface or ground water**
- 🌿 **Field pesticide loss to surface or ground water**
- 🌿 **Salt losses to surface or ground water**
- 🌿 **Storage and handling of pollutants (nutrients, pesticides, heavy metals, petroleum, etc.)**
- 🌿 **Source water depletion (surface and groundwater, irrigation efficiency)**
- 🌿 **Weather resilience (natural moisture excesses or limitations)**
- 🌿 **Air quality emissions (particulates, ozone precursors, greenhouse gases, etc.)**
- 🌿 **Degraded plant condition (health and productivity, plant community structure)**
- 🌿 **Pest pressure (weeds, pests, and diseases of desired vegetation)**
- 🌿 **Fire management (wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation)**
- 🌿 **Livestock production limitation (feed, forage, water, shelter)**
- 🌿 **Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates (threatened species, pollinators, etc.)**
- 🌿 **Aquatic habitat for fish and wildlife, including water temperature**
- 🌿 **Energy use (equipment, facilities, field operations)**

# 4 PRIORITIES, THRESHOLDS, & RANKING

The agency in turn subdivides those 17 resource concern categories into 47 more specific resource concerns. The more specific list includes, for instance, soil organic matter depletion, gully erosion, nutrient run-off, groundwater depletion, greenhouse gas emissions, plant health, terrestrial and aquatic habitat, and energy efficiency of field operations.

By law, each state NRCS office must identify at least five **priority resource concern categories** for the state or for regional agro-ecological subdivisions of the state.

Currently then, each state chooses up to five of the 17 resource concern categories as their priority issues. This can be either a uniform five for the entire state or different sets of five for different regions of the state. These priorities can change from year to year, though many remain fairly constant over time. You should check your **state NRCS website's** CSP page for the list of the current priority resource concerns in your state or county.

As noted in the eligibility section above, to qualify for CSP you must have sufficient conservation activity ongoing on your farm to satisfy at least two of the priority resource concerns when you first enroll in CSP and you must agree to add sufficient conservation activity to exceed the threshold on at least one more priority resource concern during the contract period. If you already exceed the stewardship threshold on three or more priority resource concerns when first enrolling in CSP you can still participate by agreeing to add one or more additional conservation activity on each land use (cropland, pasture, range, forest) on your farm.

## STEWARDSHIP THRESHOLDS

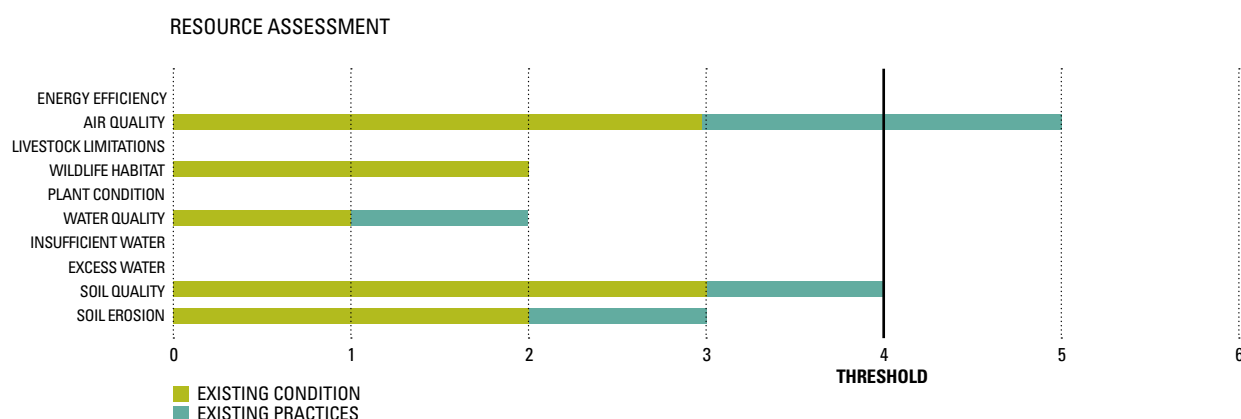
Stewardship thresholds are science-based metrics that establish a sustainable use level for a particular natural resource. Meeting or exceeding the threshold means that you are satisfactorily addressing the resource concern. The goal of CSP is to assist farmers, over time, to meet or exceed the stewardship thresholds for all the priority resource concerns in their area. By assessing where they stand in relationship to each stewardship threshold, a farmer can then choose practices, enhancements, and bundles to address those resource concerns where additional conservation would be the most advantageous. As stated above, to be eligible for CSP, first-time applicants must “meet or exceed” the stewardship threshold for at least two resource concerns on all land uses on the farm at the time of application and meet or exceed at least one additional resource concern by the end of the contract.

## HELPFUL HINT

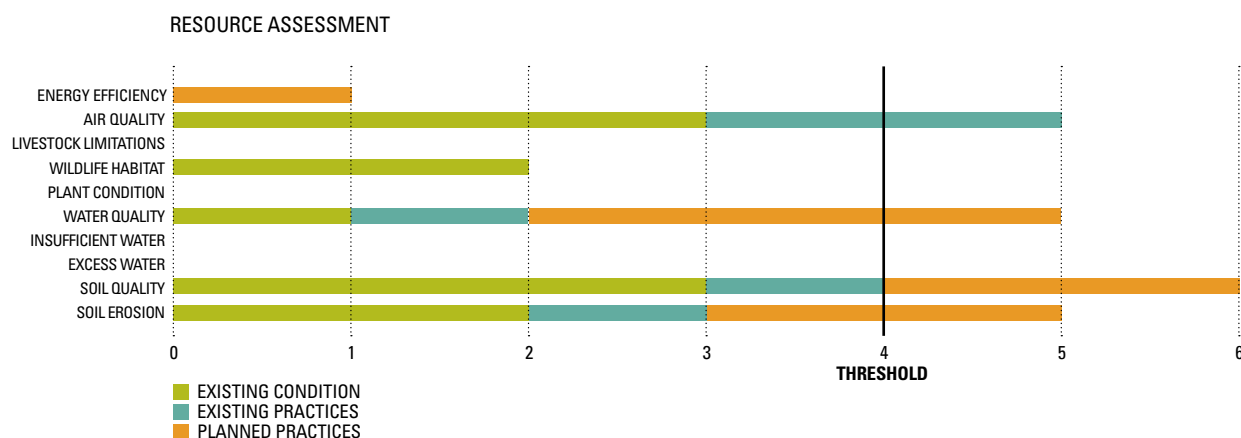
You can choose to pursue an additional resource concern on your **farmstead** or **associated agricultural land**, but it is not required. However, if you choose not to pursue additional resource concerns, you will not be paid for any conservation you are already doing on those lands. NRCS defines associated agricultural land as “land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands.”

# 4 PRIORITIES, THRESHOLDS, & RANKING

The assessment phase of the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) provides a visualization of your farm's current status with respect to the stewardship threshold, allowing you to easily see if you meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for any or all of the priority resource concerns. The example below assumes the priority resource concerns are soil erosion, soil quality, water quality, wildlife habitat, and air quality. For this hypothetical farm, the stewardship threshold is met for soil quality, exceeded for air quality, but erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat all still need improvement.



This next chart continues with the same hypothetical farm, and assumes that the farmer agrees as part of the proposed CSP contract to undertake conservation activities that will surpass the stewardship threshold for erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat, while also making even further enhancements for soil quality and undertaking some initial improvements in energy efficiency.










# 4 PRIORITIES, THRESHOLDS, & RANKING

## RANKING

Using CART, NRCS will assign number values to specific categories that add up to the final score they will use to rank your application. Program applications via CART are ranked based on the following five components:

-  **Site vulnerabilities:** the degree to which the current condition of soil, water, and other resources of concern fall below their stewardship thresholds; applications from sites with greater vulnerabilities (risk) receive higher ranking points.
-  **Planned activities:** ranking points are awarded in proportion to the expected conservation benefits of the new activities in your conservation plan.
-  **Resource priorities:** the degree to which the applicant's ongoing and new conservation activities address the State's selected Priority Resource Concerns.
-  **Program priorities:** priorities determined at the State level and may vary from state to state and year to year, and which may include geospatial factors (e.g., site located within an impaired watershed or in an area with a threatened or endangered species) and applicant demographic characteristics (e.g., additional points if the applicant is a military veteran or a beginning farmer).
-  **Efficiency score:** ratio of the cost of the proposed contract with the expected conservation benefits; a lower cost-benefit ratio earns higher ranking points.

State NRCS offices, with input from State Technical Committees, determine program and resource priorities, and select weighting for ranking components within ranges set at the national level (see chart below). The efficiency score is set at 10% nationwide.

## WEIGHTING RANGES FOR RANKING COMPONENTS IN CART FOR CSP

Site vulnerabilities	5 – 10%
Planned activities	35 – 50%
Resource priorities	15 – 35%
Program priorities	15 – 35%
Efficiency score	10%

You are ranked in each ranking pool (sometimes referred to as funding pools) for which you are eligible (see below for more details on ranking pools). Depending on which conservation practices you are planning, an NRCS agent will need to visit your farm. These visits can be for a number of different reasons – taking soil samples, checking field slope and elevation, or, for more complex situations, in-field surveys and hydrologic analyses.

## HELPFUL HINT

If you do not currently meet the CSP entry-level conservation requirements (referred to as the stewardship thresholds), or if you want to improve your chances of being selected by accumulating more points for pre-existing conservation activities on your land, then implement improvements now and apply later. If you are not selected the first time, you can make improvements to increase your points for the next application cycle and apply again. Cost-share assistance is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for the practices you need to bring you up to the conservation level needed to be eligible for CSP.

# 4 PRIORITIES, THRESHOLDS, & RANKING

## RANKING POOLS

When you apply for CSP, your application is ranked against others in your state that are in your “ranking pool” rather than against all who are applying for CSP.

You are first sorted into one of two camps: (1) first-time CSP applicants and (2) those renewing their CSP contracts. Contract renewals compete in a separate pool and have an earlier application deadline than is the case for new first-time applicants. The renewal application deadline will vary from year to year so be sure to check with your local NRCS office for the current year deadline date. More details about contract renewals are included below in Section 8.

Whether you are applying to CSP for the first time or renewing a contract, your land is categorized as either agricultural land (cropland, rangeland, and pasture land) or nonindustrial private forest land (NIPF). NIPF applications compete separately from agricultural land applications.

## NON-INDUSTRIAL PRIVATE FORESTLAND

Non-industrial private forestland (family-owned forestland) is eligible for CSP. Like all CSP participants, you must enroll your entire forestland property and you cannot selectively choose to enroll land that is in good condition and exclude acres that need help. Forestland owners interested in improving woodlands should consider some of the enhancements available to them, including (partial list):

- 🌱 **Planting for high carbon sequestration rate**
- 🌱 **Increasing on-site carbon storage**
- 🌱 **Forest songbird habitat maintenance**
- 🌱 **Forest understory management to limit wildfire risk**
- 🌱 **Sequential patch burning**
- 🌱 **Adding food producing trees and shrubs**
- 🌱 **Creating structural diversity**
- 🌱 **Establishing species to restore native plant communities**
- 🌱 **Facilitating oak forest regeneration**
- 🌱 **Converting slash pine plantations to longleaf pine**
- 🌱 **Biochar production from woody residue**

# 4 PRIORITIES, THRESHOLDS, & RANKING

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All states are required to have separate ranking pools for beginning farmers and ranchers (those who have operated a farm for 10 years or less), socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (African American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Asian American, and/or Pacific Islanders), and certified organic producers and those transitioning to organic production. More information on these categories can be found in **Sections 9** and **10**.

Most states opt to have additional ranking pools, some based on geographic location (e.g., a particular problematic watershed) and others based on specific resource concerns. Often, within those additional ranking pools there will be a special sub pool for beginning or socially disadvantaged producers. Contact your local NRCS office for additional information about ranking pools in your area.

# 5 PRACTICES, ENHANCEMENTS & BUNDLES

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Conservation practices, enhancements, and bundles are all collectively known as conservation activities for the purposes of CSP.

**Conservation Practices** are the basic conservation activities that have long been supported by EQIP and other cost-share programs. As of the printing of this Guide, there are 84 conservation practices approved for use within CSP (see **Appendix** for a complete list).

Basic conservation practices might prove particularly helpful in meeting the stewardship threshold for additional priority resource concerns. Conservation practices for CSP include land management, vegetative, and forest management practices. As is the case with enhancements (see below), practices can be limited to specific land use areas. For example, the “critical area planting” practice could be applied to cropland, rangeland, pastureland, and forestland, while the “alley cropping” practice is only applicable to cropland and pastureland.

**Conservation Enhancements** are more substantial interventions and are unique to CSP. As of the publication of this Guide, there are 156 NRCS-approved enhancements, each of which is associated with and builds upon, but goes beyond, the basic requirements of the associated conservation practice.

CSP conservation enhancements are designed to help farmers exceed the sustainable performance level for a given resource concern. In other words, they are intended to help solve natural resource problems and improve overall conservation performance. As with practices, some enhancements apply to all land use categories, while others are specific to one or more land uses.

At least one enhancement must be adopted in the first year of the contract no matter the level of your current conservation performance, and all selected conservation activities (enhancements and practices) must be implemented by the end of the third year of the contract, resulting in full implementation of the contract for the fourth and fifth years.

As a result of improvements made to CSP by the 2018 Farm Bill, enhancements to adopt or improve upon resource-conserving crops rotations as well as enhancements for advanced grazing management, including management-intensive rotational grazing and swath grazing, are eligible for supplemental payments (see **page 33**). In addition, enhancements to adopt various forms of cover cropping are eligible for a payment bonus rate.







# 5 PRACTICES, ENHANCEMENTS & BUNDLES

**PRACTICES** are the basic conservation activities that have long been supported by EQIP and other cost-share programs. As of the printing of this Guide, there are 84 conservation practices approved for use within CSP (see **Appendix** for a complete list).

**ENHANCEMENTS** are more substantial interventions and are unique to CSP. As of the publication of this Guide, there are 156 NRCS-approved enhancements, each of which is associated with and builds upon, but goes beyond, the basic requirements of the associated conservation practice.

## **ENHANCEMENT:**

**Conservation activities that take conservation practices to a higher level of stewardship**

## **PRACTICE:**

**Basic conservation activities**

PRACTICE  
EXAMPLE:  
**COVER  
CROP**

ENHANCEMENT  
EXAMPLE:  
**INTENSIVE COVER  
CROPPING TO  
INCREASE SOIL  
HEALTH AND  
ORGANIC  
MATTER**



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**BUNDLES** are the most integrated elements of CSP supported interventions. 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.

## **BUNDLE:**

**A group of enhancements that work together to provide increased conservation benefits**



# 5 PRACTICES, ENHANCEMENTS & BUNDLES

**Conservation Bundles** are the most integrated elements of CSP supported interventions. 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 three or more required enhancements. All bundles include a set of enhancements that must be undertaken, while for some bundles, you also have the option to pick additional enhancements from a select list that addresses specific resource concerns.

In 2020, for instance, 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)**

## Examples of Bundles

**Conservation Buffer Bundle** – Enhance filter strips with pollinator and wildlife plantings and food producing trees or shrubs

**Soil Health Crop Bundle** – Adopt advanced pest and nutrient management, improved rotations to increase carbon sequestration, pollinator friendly cover, and either reduced or no-till

**Organic Farming Soil Bundle** – Adopt advanced pest and nutrient management, soil health crop rotation, reduced tillage, cover crops, and pollinator cover

**Forest Bundle** – Improve forest soil quality, reduce forest density, enhance understory vegetation, crop tree management, and create wildlife habitat

**Pasture or Range Grazing Bundle for Streams** – Manage livestock access to waterbodies, increase riparian cover to enhance wildlife habitat, and improve stream bank stability

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

For more details and links to complete lists of NRCS practices, enhancements, and bundles, refer to the Appendix on [page 51](#).

# 5 PRACTICES, ENHANCEMENTS & BUNDLES

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*California buffer strip, one of many conservation practices supported by the farm bill's working lands conservation programs. Photo credit: USDA NRCS.*

# 6 HOW DO CSP PAYMENTS WORK?



Your annual CSP payment will consist of at least two and possibly as many as four payments. For all participants, you will receive (a) an annual existing activity payment as well as (b) an additional activity payment. Participants may also receive (c) a supplemental payment for resource-conserving crop rotations and advanced grazing management and/or (d) a one-time comprehensive conservation planning payment, depending on their program choices.

The annual payment total cannot be less than \$1,500 thanks to a minimum contract payment amount that helps to recognize the significant conservation contributions of smaller acreage operations. For instance, a 20-acre farm with 15 acres of cropland that exceeds the stewardship threshold for two priority resource concerns and with two planned enhancements would, absent the minimum contract provision, qualify perhaps for approximately \$1,000. The minimum contract amount will adjust that to \$1,500.

At the high end, the annual payment total generally cannot exceed \$40,000, as the payment limit for five-year CSP contracts is \$200,000.

Payments are generally made every October, though you have the option, should you so choose for tax purposes or other reasons, to delay your payments until the following January.

## 1. EXISTING ACTIVITY PAYMENTS

Existing activity payments are made to support your active management and maintenance of existing, ongoing conservation activities. The payment is 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.

$$+ \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{NUMBER OF ACRES TREATED} \end{array} \times \begin{array}{c} \text{ENHANCEMENT PAYMENT RATE} \end{array} \right] = \text{YOUR PAYMENT AMOUNT}$$


The existing activity payment component of your annual payment has two parts:

**(a)** A payment of \$350 for each resource concern for which you meet or exceed the stewardship threshold 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:**  
**\$0.50 per acre**

In order to be eligible to receive the existing activity payment for any specific land use, you must agree to adopt at least one new conservation activity for each land use, with the exception of the farmstead and any associated agricultural land. For farmsteads and associated agricultural land you have the option of forgoing additional conservation activity, though in that instance, you will not receive an existing activity payment on those particular acres.

You are eligible for the existing activity payment for ongoing conservation activities even if one or more of the underlying practices was originally implemented under another USDA conservation program.

# 6 HOW DO CSP PAYMENTS WORK?

## Existing Activity Payment Example:

A CSP participant with a 640 acre farm comprised of 560 acres of cropland, 70 acres of pasture, and 10 acres of associated agricultural land, has agreed to adopt at least one new activity on each of those three land uses, and NRCS has determined that the participant is meeting or exceeding the stewardship thresholds as follows:

- ▶ 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 pasture

- ▶ 5 RCs:  $5 \times \$350 = \$1,750$

- ▶ 70 acres:  $70 \times \$3 = \$210$

- ▶ Total = \$1,960

- ▶ Meeting/exceeding stewardship threshold for 2 resource concerns on associated land

- ▶ 3 RCs:  $2 \times \$350 = \$700$

- ▶ 10 acres:  $10 \times \$0.50 = \$5.00$

- ▶ Total = \$705

**Total Annual Existing Activity Payment =**  
**\$5,250 + \$1,960 + \$705 = \$7,915**

## 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. **This portion of your payment may vary from year to year depending on the which conservation activities the participant has completed during the preceding fiscal year.** In some cases, a new activity may not be implemented until year two or three of the contract and hence the payment for those particular activity will also be delayed.

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.



# 6 HOW DO CSP PAYMENTS WORK?

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 (i.e., 10 percent of what would normally be paid for the same practice under an EQIP contract). NSAC strongly disagrees with NRCS over this payment rate and will continue to advocate for fairer treatment.

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.

## HELPFUL HINT

Payment rates for all practices, enhancements, and bundles may vary from state to state and from year to year, so be sure to check the NRCS website here for the payment rates for your state in the year in which you apply.

Also, as part of the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress directed NRCS to increase the payment rate for all cover cropping related practices and enhancements to at least 125% of the normal rate as an added incentive to help speed adoption of cover cropping. That new higher rate is already factored into the State CSP payment schedule.

## 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. Supplemental payments are also 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 reflect the additional labor and management time to implement the measures and to ensure there is a strong incentive for those willing to adopt them.

Supplemental payment rates will be included in the **payment rate tables** for your particular state and are also sometimes available on your state NRCS website.

Two supplemental payment options exist for participants: 1) **adopting a new** resource-conserving crop rotation or advanced grazing management system, or 2) **improving an existing** rotation or advanced grazing management system.

# 6 HOW DO CSP PAYMENTS WORK?

**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.

**Improved Resource Conserving Crop Rotations** 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.

**Advanced Grazing Management** on pasture or rangeland can include a combination of grazing conservation activities that provide for improved soil health and carbon sequestration, drought resilience, wildlife habitat, wildfire mitigation, control of invasive plants, and water quality improvement.

One specific enhancement choice that helps qualify you for the supplemental payment on both pasture and rangeland is Management-Intensive Rotational Grazing. Management-intensive rotational grazing is defined as a strategic, adaptively managed grazing system in which animals are regularly and systemically moved to fresh range or pasture in a manner that maximizes forage growth, improves nutrient cycling, increases carbon sequestration, improves wildlife cover, protects soil from erosion, and improves water quality.

In addition to rotational grazing, there are two other core rangeland options and two other core pasture options to choose from, as well as an array of complementary additional enhancements that form the complete advanced grazing management package. Additional advanced grazing management enhancements may also differ by state. If you are interested, ask your local NRCS staff for more information.

## 4. COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLANNING

A comprehensive conservation plan is a conservation plan that meets or exceeds the stewardship threshold for all applicable resource concerns. Comprehensive conservation plans are new to CSP and can help farmers who wish to chart their own course on their land. 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.

The 2018 Farm Bill directs NRCS to provide a one-time payment to CSP participants who wish to develop a comprehensive conservation plan. 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.

Your NRCS agent will be able to help you determine which activities fall under your plan so you can get the most out of your CSP contract.

# 6 HOW DO CSP PAYMENTS WORK?

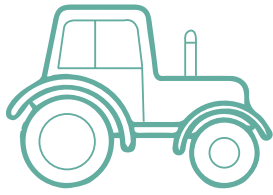
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## HELPFUL HINT

Your State NRCS office will identify resource-conserving crops and advanced grazing management options for your state and should make the list available to the public before the start of each ranking period. If you cannot find that information on your State's NRCS website, please call your State office and ask for it.





# FARMER PROFILE

## ***Alyssa Jumars (WA)***

Alyssa Jumars grows four varieties of organic berries at **Methow Wild Fruits** in the Methow Valley of north-central Washington. Her farm is 10 acres, with 6 acres fenced-in for organic production of aronia berries, elderberries, saskatoons, and black currants, which she sells to herbal product manufacturers and cider and mead producers.

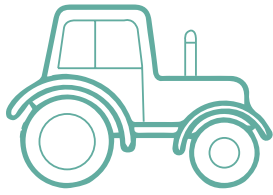
Formerly an annual row crop farmer, Jumars transitioned to organic perennial berries five years ago. The sandy soil in her region makes it hard to retain organic matter, so she decided to transition to permanent crops and perennial ground cover.

Having participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to do a farm energy audit, Jumars already had a relationship with her local NRCS office. She was interested in building onto her existing cover cropping and other conservation practices but had been limited in conservation program options by the small size of her farm. Because many programs are acreage-based, she is often told that, while she technically may be eligible for a program, the minimal payments may not be worth her time. However, her NRCS agent was willing to work with her to apply for CSP, and Jumar says, "It's been amazing."



*Alyssa Jumars on her farm in Methow Valley, Washington.*





Jumars is using CSP to plant habitat for pollinators throughout her farm, install bee boxes, manage invasive weeds, implement rotational grazing with her horses, plant shrubs in the pasture to capture excess manure, and create nesting habitat for native birds by leaving a certain portion of pasture ungrazed.

“We have super well-drained, sandy soil that readily leeches,” Jumars says. “The pasture is looking really healthy and it’s been so cool to see the change. Horses are super destructive when it comes to grazing, so the rotation helps a lot with the impact and reducing bare ground.”

While CSP has had numerous environmental benefits for Jumars’ farm, she also appreciates what she’s been able to learn about conservation practices and soil health through her participation in the program.

“One of the things I’m most grateful for about being the program is the opportunity to have my own thinking expanded,” Jumars says. “I’ve had to learn a lot about different kinds of pollinators and native plants that I otherwise would not have learned about. Every time my agent comes out to my farm I think about something that I might want to do a little differently.”

Jumars adds, “I think the CSP program is an incredible opportunity to give farms financial support to pursue conservation practices, and, at the same time, learn a lot from their local resource providers about how to improve habitat and soil health. Having somebody holding your hand and making sure you stay on track and follow through is really important on a small farm, so I definitely appreciated that help and being held accountable.”



**“One of the things I’m most grateful for about being the program is the opportunity to have my own thinking expanded,” Jumars says. “I’ve had to learn a lot about different kinds of pollinators and native plants that I otherwise would not have learned about.”**

# 7 FUFILLING YOUR CSP CONTRACT

Once you've gotten your CSP contract, it is time to begin implementing your conservation plan! This includes maintaining the activities that were already in place on your farm in addition to implementing the new activities you agreed to in your contract.

You should note that there are different reporting requirements for each conservation activity, with enhancements and bundles requiring very specific reporting before, during, and after implementation.

Your NRCS agent will provide you with a printout of reporting requirements for your planned activities. You can take a look at the reporting forms for specific enhancements and bundles [here](#).

Below is an example of reporting requirements for the enhancements known as "Soil Health Crop Rotation" and "Management-Intensive Rotational Grazing."

## EXAMPLES OF DOCUMENTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

### **Soil Health Crop Rotation - Participant will:**

- 🔑 Prior to implementation, provide NRCS with the current and planned crop rotation and planned field operation(s) for each crop.
- 🔑 During implementation –
  - notify NRCS of any planned changes in crops, crop rotation, or field operations to verify the planned system meets the enhancement criteria.
  - take dated pictures with field indicated at least every 3 months to show residue or growing crops.
  - leave crop residue on the soil surface throughout the year.
- 🔑 After implementation –
  - if changes to the rotation were made, complete the tables above (included in NRCS form) to document the applied Soil Health Crop Rotation for the Contract period and provide to NRCS.
  - provide for review pictures showing residue or growing crops throughout the year.

### **Management-Intensive Rotational Grazing – Participant will:**

- 🔑 Prior to implementation –
  - obtain a grazing plan map delineating the existing paddock systems and current stocking density and stocking rate
  - acquire a prescribed grazing plan, including goals, map of paddocks, forage inventory, grazing plan, monitoring plan, etc.
- 🔑 During implementation, keep pasture and stock density records and photos of paddock condition and grazing implementation
- 🔑 After implementation, provide NRCS with the plan, map, documentation, photos, and any changes made to the plan.



# 7 FUFILLING YOUR CSP CONTRACT

It is very important that you report on your progress! Without accurate reporting, you will not be paid for the good conservation work you are doing on your land! In the contract, NRCS will specify the kinds of assistance it will provide in your implementation process, but much of the reporting will fall on you.

## CHANGES DURING THE CONTRACT PERIOD

Below are some of the basic rules in place for contract modifications. Please note, however, that this is a summary, and there is a great deal more detail in the NRCS program manuals. If you have particular questions, it is best to consult directly with your local NRCS staff.

**General Rules** - NRCS may approve contract modification requests when they do not decrease the overall conservation performance level. Generally, it is acceptable to adjust the schedule of operations due to operational or design changes.

The agency may only approve a modification request that decreases the performance level if the reason for the decrease is beyond the participant's control. However, the participant must continue to meet the minimum stewardship threshold requirements for program participation and continue to meet as many resource concerns as remain feasible.

**Lost Lease** - If you lose a lease during the contract period, NRCS will remove those acres from your contract but you can remain in the program, provided that the original objectives and minimum program requirements continue to be met.

**Land Transfer** - If, during the CSP contract, you decide to sell your land or transfer rights to another person, it is possible to transfer the CSP contract to the new owner/producer. If the entirety of your operation is transferred to someone else, the existing contract number and period of performance will not change. If it is just a partial land transfer and contract assumption, the description of the acreage transferred and all conservation practices or activities to be maintained and carried out by the transferee must be included in a new application. A new contract will then be created for the remaining years of the original contract.

**Contract violation** – If a CSP contract is violated (e.g. a practice outlined in the contract is not implemented), NRCS first provides a period of time for the contract holder to correct the violation and come back into compliance. If the violation is not corrected, however, NRCS can terminate the contract and may demand a full or partial refund of any program payments received, with interest. If, however, a violation is due to a natural disaster or related crisis condition or other hardships, as determined by the State Conservationist, then a violation would not be considered a failure to comply with the contract's terms and past payments may be retained by the farmer.

# 8 CONTRACT RENEWALS

CSP contracts last for five years. You may re-enroll in CSP for additional five-year contracts during the first half of the last year of any previous contract. Contract renewals provide an important opportunity for farmers to demonstrate continuous improvement, preserving and expanding upon the conservation and environmental benefits gained from the initial 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 five priority resource concerns, which is two more than was required during the initial contract; or**

**(b) adopt new or improved conservation activities that will help achieve a higher level of performance on at least two priority resource concerns you have already addressed.**

Renewal contract applications will be considered each year prior to agency consideration of new first-time CSP applications. Annually the agency will announce a deadline date for renewal applications. While contract holders in their final year of the five-year contract will receive a letter from NRCS with this information, it would be advisable to be talking to your local NRCS office about your desire to renew ahead of time.

Note that if you gained additional land during your previous CSP contract, that land must be included in your renewal application!

**Contract renewals provide an important opportunity for farmers to demonstrate continuous improvement, preserving and expanding upon the conservation and environmental benefits gained from the initial contract.**

# 8 CONTRACT RENEWALS

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

**1. Complete two simple forms: [CPA 12001248](#) (the same form used for new applications) and [CPA 1248](#) (CSP Renewal Offer Worksheet).**

**2. After you submit your initial application, the Conservation Application Ranking Tool (CART) – [see page 13](#) - will be used to ensure that the minimum stewardship threshold is met and that you remain eligible for CSP.**

**3. If your renewal application is deemed eligible, you will work with NRCS in selecting new conservation activities to be implemented during your second contract. Remember that all new activities must be started after your initial contract has expired, so don't jump the gun.**

**4. Field verification.**

**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.**

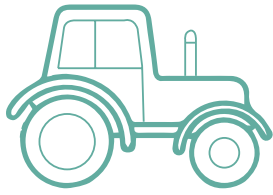
## HELPFUL HINT

If you are in the fifth and final year of a CSP contract, there is significant benefit to taking advantage of the window of opportunity for renewal. While renewal is optional, NRCS has decided in its rulemaking that you will not be able to apply for a new CSP contract for two full years if you do not choose to renew.

If you do apply to renew, but your application is not chosen given the limited funding available, you should ideally be able to re-apply for a new CSP contract immediately, in the same year you applied for renewal or the following year, while perhaps increasing the conservation benefits included in your plan to improve your chances of success. Sadly, however, NRCS has decided to force farmers who were not accepted, given limited federal funds, to wait out two full years before submitting a new application.

Even with this unfortunate decision by NRCS to penalize farmers, your best option is still to submit a renewal application, which, if accepted, will allow you to remain in the program and continue to make conservation improvements on your land with federal support. Maximize your chances of success by choosing perhaps a few more enhancements that are appropriate to your land and farming system.

Prior to the 2018 Farm Bill, renewals were non-competitive. However, now they are competitive, so acceptance is not assured and will depend on how many participants decide to renew and how your application ranks. Please note, that while this change does make it less certain 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 most renewal applications quite competitive.



# FARMER PROFILE

## ***Chaw Chang (NY)***

On a highly diversified vegetable farm like Stick and Stone Farm outside Ithaca, NY, there is always a lot going on. Farmers Chaw Chang and Lucy Garrison manage over 100 acres of land, growing a diverse array of organic vegetables and fruits on 40 of those acres.

They sell their produce into a multi-farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, farmers markets, and several wholesale outlets. Conservation plays a central role in Stick and Stone's organic vegetable production: over half of the cropland at Stick and Stone is planted in cover crops at all times, which helps the farm manage weeds and boost soil fertility. Nonetheless, Chang says, there are always conservation projects waiting on the to-do list.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helped Chang and Garrison prioritize several new on-farm conservation projects. On their non-tillable acres, they have been able to dedicate time to removing invasive vegetation, and hone their grassland management, including delaying mowing to support bird habitat.

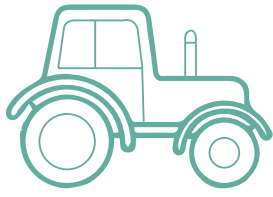
They were also able to reduce erosion by upgrading the farm's drainage ditches and roadways. On their cropland, CSP helped Chang and Garrison invest in reduced tillage, mulching, and adding more species to their cover crop mix.



*Chaw Chang, Lucy Garrison and family* Sara Tro Photography

Chang had previously worked with NRCS using the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to build a high tunnel and said his NRCS conservationist helped him get through the CSP application process without problems. Overall, Chang says, "CSP encouraged us to do conservation that we've been wanting to do but might have hesitated otherwise."





*Sara Tro Photography*

**On their non-tillable acres, they have been able to dedicate time to removing invasive vegetation, and hone their grassland management, including delaying mowing to support bird habitat.**

# 9 BEGINNING AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS AND RANCHERS

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Five percent of all CSP dollars each year are reserved for separate ranking pool competitions among beginning farmers only and among socially disadvantaged farmers only. Military veterans who are also beginning or socially disadvantaged are given preference within these categories.

If you qualify, it is generally advantageous to compete within the smaller ranking pool rather than against all other producers applying to enroll in the program or larger ranking pools.

## **Beginning Farmer or Rancher means an individual or entity who:**

1. Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years.
2. Will materially and substantially participate (i.e., providing substantial day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch) in the operation of the farm or ranch.

*Note: These requirements apply to all members of an entity.*

**Socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher** means a producer who is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices and injustices. These groups consist of the following:

- 🌿 American Indians or Alaskan Natives
- 🌿 Asians
- 🌿 Blacks or African Americans
- 🌿 Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
- 🌿 Hispanics

Note: For an entity, at least 50 percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals.

For the five years of the 2014 Farm Bill (2014-2018), the set-aside and separate ranking pool resulted in an average of 13 percent of CSP contracts each year going to beginning farmers and ranchers. Those contracts equaled, on average, six percent of total CSP acres each year and eight percent of CSP dollars. Over the same five years, the socially disadvantaged farmer set-aside and separate ranking pool resulted in an average of five percent of CSP contracts, representing on average seven percent of all acres and four percent of all dollars.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Applicants must designate which ranking pool they want to compete in, so some beginning farmers may be in the socially disadvantaged farmer pool and vice versa. The categories are not mutually exclusive, and the data presented here is based on whichever pool was designated.

# 9 BEGINNING AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Acceptance rates within the separate ranking pools is also an important factor. In 2019, over a third of beginning farmer applicants gained access to the program nationwide, and in 18 states, including Oregon, Texas, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Ohio, Virginia, the Carolinas, New York, and New England, the beginning farmer acceptance rate was over three-fifths, far higher than the overall CSP acceptance rate. Nearly a third of socially disadvantaged farmer applicants were accepted that year, including 13 states, including California, Arizona, Michigan, and Texas, with a three-fifths or greater acceptance rate.

As important as the set-aside and separate ranking pools are, these contract, acres, and dollar outcomes still lag behind the percentage of American farmers who are beginning or socially disadvantaged and U.S. farms operated by beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers, suggesting there is still a considerably way to go to get to a level playing field. However, it is clear that the set-aside and separate ranking pool policies are helping and that beginning and socially-disadvantaged farmers should not hesitate to apply.

**It is clear that the set-aside and separate ranking pool policies are helping and that beginning and socially-disadvantaged farmers should not hesitate to apply.**

## HELPFUL HINT

Because of the history of racial discrimination at USDA, local offices are required to provide, upon request, a Receipt For Service ([Form AD-2088](#)). This form documents which services you are provided (or denied) by USDA. If you face a pattern of denial of services by USDA, getting a receipt for service can help you demonstrate that pattern and seek recompense.

If you experience any problems obtaining a Receipt for Service, you can contact the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement at 800-880-4183 or [partnerships@usda.gov](mailto:partnerships@usda.gov).



# 10 CSP ORGANIC INITIATIVE

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As of 2020, there are nearly 20,000 certified organic farms in the U.S. and over 3 million acres of certified cropland plus additional pasture and other land, with a trendline of steady increases each year. Conservation is central to organic agriculture, and CSP can be an excellent match for organic producers, given its combination of rewards for managing ongoing conservation activities and adopting new ones to solve particular resource problems. Many CSP enhancements work well in addressing key resource concerns in organic farming.

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 option is available. CSP organic funding is now being 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.

The farm bill also requires NRCS to take specific steps to ensure that CSP will benefit organic farming and ranching systems. NRCS is required by law to provide appropriate outreach and technical assistance to organic producers so they can participate in CSP. NRCS is also required to create a transparent process that will allow organic producers to coordinate the organic certification process and their farm's Organic System Plan with their participation in CSP and their CSP conservation plan.

Several resources are available from USDA to assist organic and aspiring organic farmers to navigate the process, including the [Organic System Plan template](#), [10 Steps to Organic Transition](#), [Resources for Conservation Planning on Organic Farms](#) and the [NRCS Organic Farming Handbook](#). An [NRCS CSP-Organic "crosswalk" chart](#) linking CSP conservation activities to organic farming system plans is also a handy resource as you consider your enhancement options.

**The farm bill requires NRCS to take specific steps to ensure that CSP will benefit organic farming and ranching systems. NRCS is required by law to provide appropriate outreach and technical assistance to organic producers so they can participate in CSP.**



# 10 CSP ORGANIC INITIATIVE

For transitioning and certified organic farmers, there are many CSP enhancement activities that could prove very useful. Specific examples include:

- 🌱 Resource-conserving crop rotation
- 🌱 Improved resource-conserving crop rotation
- 🌱 Management-intensive rotational grazing
- 🌱 Intensive cover cropping to increase soil health and organic matter
- 🌱 Cover cropping to suppress excessive weed pressure and break pest cycles
- 🌱 Cover cropping in orchards, vineyards, and other perennial crops
- 🌱 Advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM) using prevent, avoidance, monitoring, and suppression (PAMS) techniques
- 🌱 Reduced tillage to reduce soil erosion, increase soil health, or increase plant-available moisture
- 🌱 Mulching to improve soil health
- 🌱 Forage plantings to increase soil organic matter
- 🌱 Conservation cover for pollinators and beneficial insects
- 🌱 Enhanced field borders to increase carbon storage of for pollinators or wildlife habitat
- 🌱 Silvopasture

This is only a partial, suggestive listing, so be sure to explore the full range of enhancements to see what works with your farm and the specific resource concerns you are trying to address.

Also remember there are currently two organic “bundles” available – one for organic cropping and one for specifically addressing erosion issues.

For more details, review the [full list](#) of enhancements and bundles.

## HELPFUL HINT

While organic and transitioning to organic farmers are not required to enroll as such to participate in CSP, it does behoove eligible producers to designate themselves as such in order to compete in the separate organic ranking pools, a move that can increase your chances of being selected during the ranking process.



# APPENDIX A - CSP STATISTICS

This appendix provides data and statistics on CSP sign-up periods under the 2014 Farm Bill (2014 – 2018). NSAC provides regular updates on recent CSP data on our [blog](#) and our [publications](#) page as soon as that data is made available by NRCS.

During the term of the 2014 Farm Bill (2014-2018), over 59,847 farmers and ranchers enrolled over 78 million acres in CSP. To put that into perspective, as of 2018, the program covered over 8 percent of total farmland within the United States, and 18 states had 10 percent or more of their total agricultural land enrolled in the program. NRCS obligated \$4.6 billion to CSP farmers and ranchers over the course of their five-year contracts for those enrollment years.

## ALLOCATION OF CSP ACREAGE

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, NRCS was authorized to enroll 10 million new acres into CSP each year. Over 35,000 new contracts were enrolled in CSP during the lifecycle of the 2014 Farm Bill, totaling almost 40 million new acres being added to the program. At the same time, over 24,000 farmers decided to renew their CSP contracts and re-enrolled over 39 million acres in CSP between 2014 and 2018.

Most years, cropland represents slightly over half of CSP acres, with rangeland the next biggest enrolled land use by acres, and then pasture and forest land, followed by associate agricultural land. In reality, of course, most CSP contracts include a combination of different land uses.

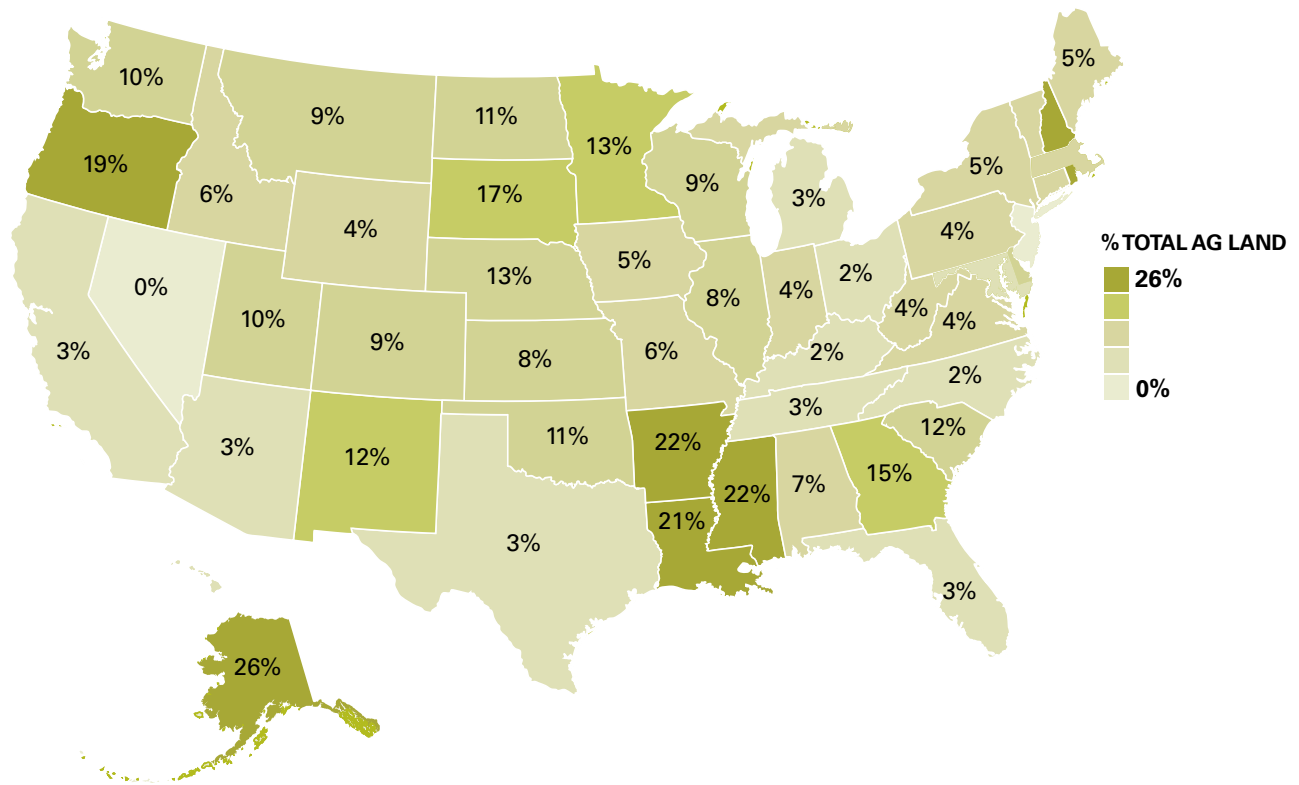
South Dakota, Nebraska, and Montana enrolled the highest number of acres in the program over the course of the five-year 2014 Farm Bill cycle, with each enrolling over 5 million acres.

Perhaps the most intriguing way to look at CSP enrollment is not the number of contracts or the total acreage, but rather the percentage of total farmland in a state that is enrolled in the program. When new enrollments and renewals are considered cumulatively, CSP's footprint is quite significant – the program covers over 8 percent of the total farmland within the United States. While the top two CSP states by percentage (Alaska and New Hampshire) have small total agricultural acreages, major agricultural regions (including the Deep South, Upper Midwest, Great Plains, and Pacific Northwest) also ranked highly for percentage of total agricultural land currently enrolled in CSP. Figure 3 depicts the percent of agricultural land that is enrolled in CSP in each state. As of 2018, 18 states had 10 percent or more of their agricultural land enrolled in the program.

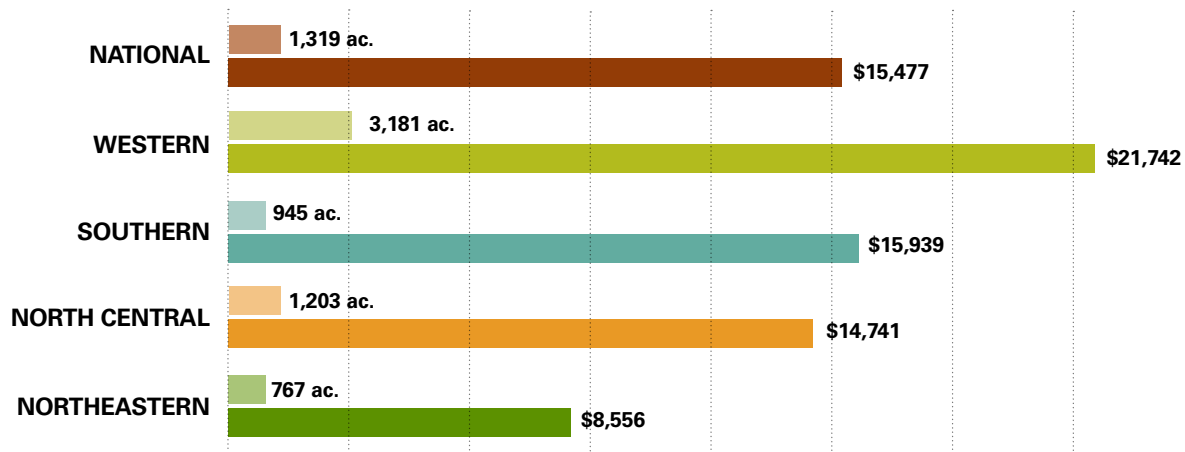
Nationally, the average CSP contract enrolled 1,300 acres with the average contract payment totaling over \$15,000 per year. The average size of CSP contracts in terms of acres and payment varied from region to region. Figure 4 depicts the average CSP contract size, in terms of acres and dollars, by region. Western states had, on average, larger contracts than other regions in the country. Northeastern states generally had smaller contracts, which is to be expected given that farm operations in this region tend to be smaller.

# APPENDIX A - CSP STATISTICS

PERCENT OF TOTAL FARMLAND IN CSP BY STATE IN FY 2018



AVERAGE CSP CONTRACT SIZE BY REGION OVER 2014 FARM BILL CYCLE



# APPENDIX A - CSP STATISTICS

## POPULAR PRACTICES AND ENHANCEMENTS

The graphic on page 51 depicts the most popular CSP practices and enhancements in 2018. It highlights only a few of the dozens of different practices and hundreds of enhancements that producers can select from and implement on their farms. We encourage farmers to review the full list of available practices, enhancements, and bundles and to check in with their local NRCS agent to determine which practices and enhancements would be most suitable for their operations.

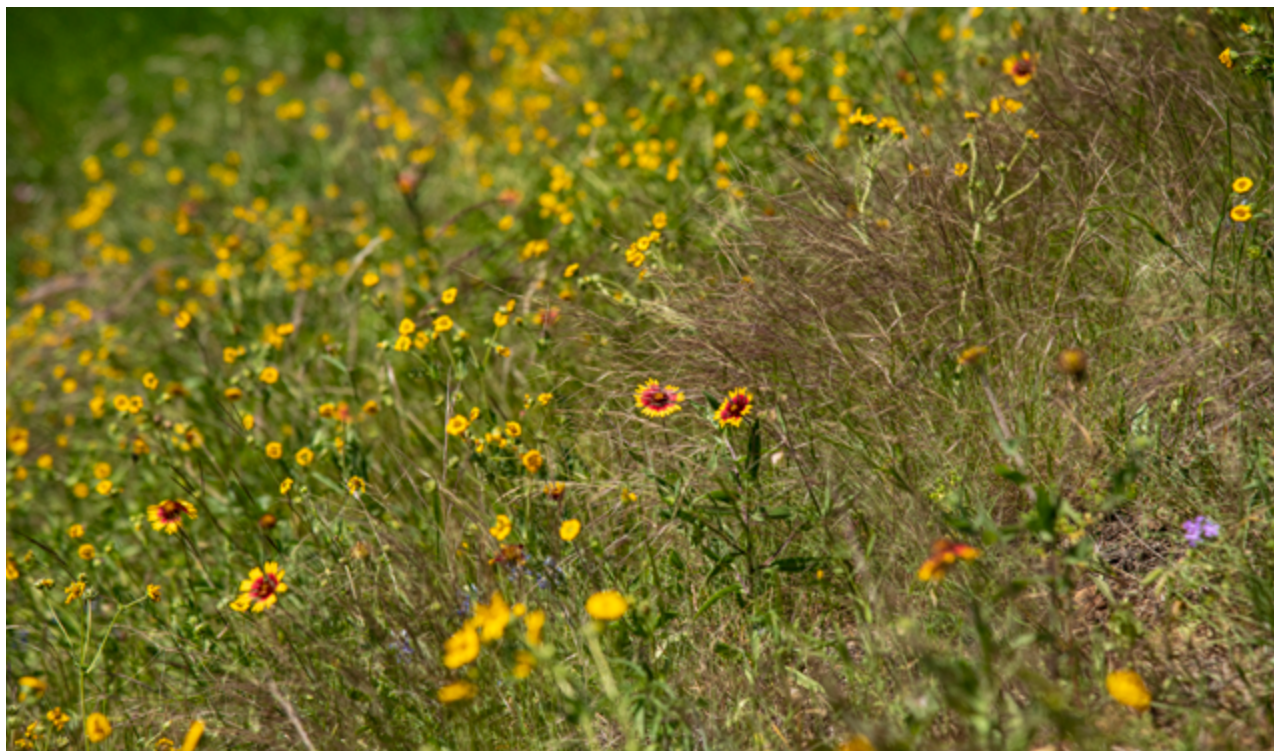
The top conservation practices in terms of total treated acres were integrated pest management (IPM), cover crops, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, and conservation crop rotation, demonstrating a strong focus on water quality and soil health.

Four of the top five enhancements in 2018 were related to the IPM and nutrient management conservation practices and sought to address water quality concerns, including reducing risk of pesticides in surface water and improving nutrient uptake efficiency to reduce nutrient losses to surface water.

The third most widely adopted enhancement was related to the prescribed grazing conservation practice and addresses the livestock production limitation resource concern by maintaining quantity and quality of forage for animal health and productivity. Nutrient loss prevention and reduction enhancements and soil health enhancements followed on the list of top enhancements across the country as of 2018.

In 2018 alone, over \$27 million was invested in that single year in the top five CSP conservation practices and their related enhancements to address water quality degradation, soil erosion, soil quality degradation, and degraded plant condition, among many other natural resource concerns. With five-year contracts, the total contract amount for these practices and enhancements are several times larger.

For more details on CSP data, look at our recent [report](#) analyzing 2018 CSP enrollment data and our [blog](#) for the latest news around federal conservation programs.

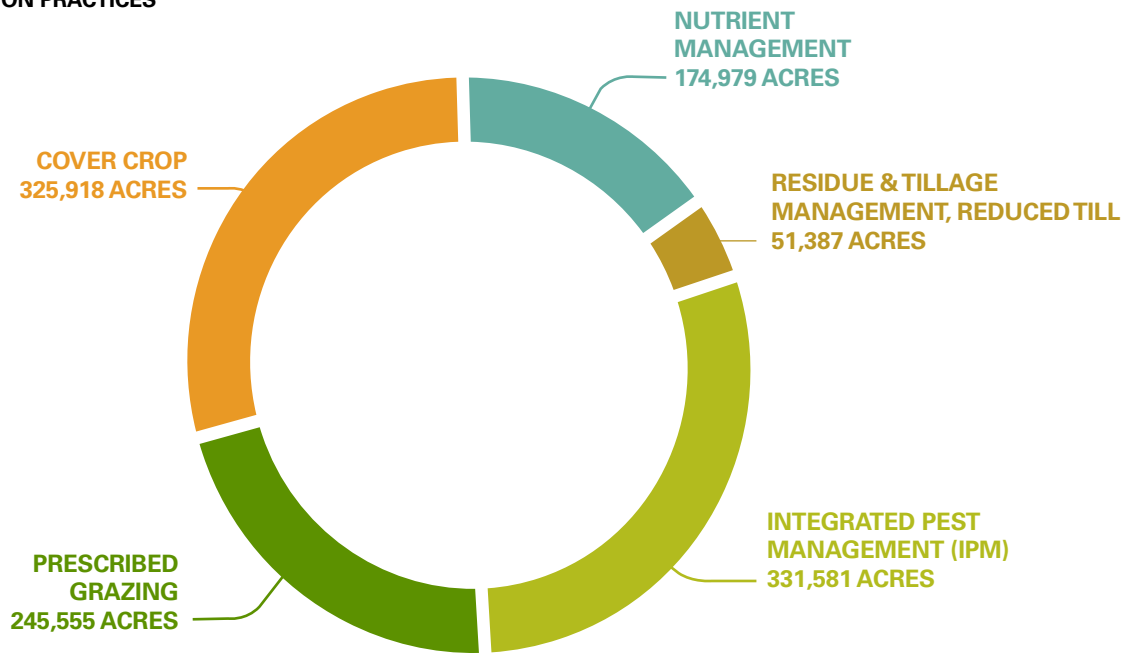




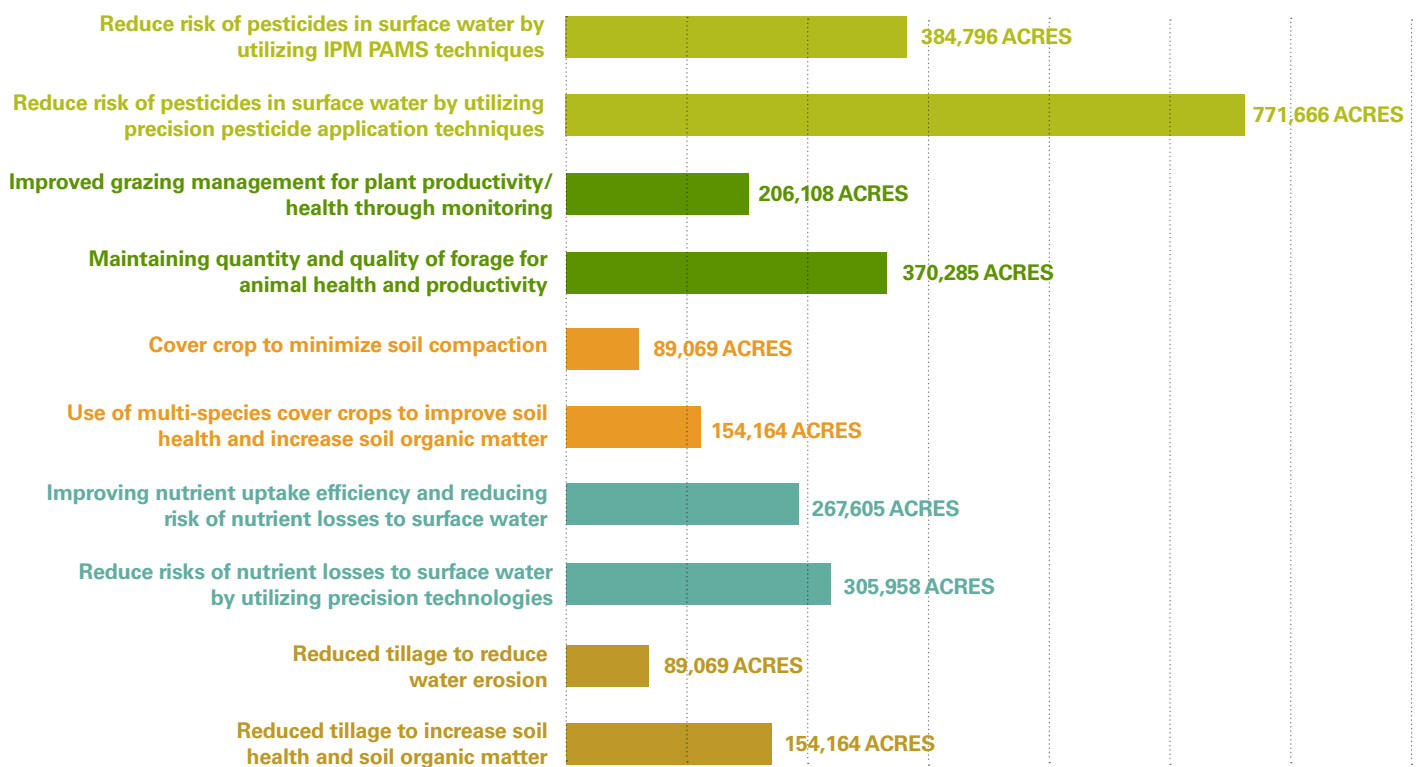
# APPENDIX A - CSP STATISTICS

## MOST POPULAR CSP CONSERVATION PRACTICES AND ENHANCEMENTS IN FY 2018 ENROLLMENT

### CONSERVATION PRACTICES



### RELATED ENHANCEMENTS



## APPENDIX B – CSP-ELIGIBLE CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Practice Code	Practice
311	Alley Cropping
314	Brush Management
315	Herbaceous Weed Control
319	Secondary Containment Facility
324	Deep Tillage
327	Conservation Cover
328	Conservation Crop Rotation
329	Residue Management, No Till
333	Amending Soil with Gypsum
334	Controlled Traffic Farming
338	Prescribed Burning
340	Cover Crop
342	Critical Area Planting
345	Residue Mngt., Reduced Till
348	Dam, Diversion
373	Dust Control on Unpaved Roads
374	Farmstead Energy Improvement
376	Field Ops Emission Reduction
378	Pond
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt
381	Silvopasture Establishment
382	Fence
383	Fuelbreak
384	Woody Residue Treatment
386	Field Border
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
391	Riparian Forest Buffer
393	Filter Strip
394	Firebreak
395	Stream Habitat Management
578	Stream Crossing
580	Streambank & Shoreline Protection
587	Structure for Water Control
590	Nutrient Management
595	Integrated Pest Management
604	Saturated Buffer
605	Denitrifying Bioreactor
606	Subsurface Drain
610	Salinity & Sodic Soil Management
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
614	Watering Facility
620	Underground Outlet

Practice Code	Practice
396	Aquatic Organism Passage
399	Fishpond Management
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
412	Grassed Waterway
422	Hedgerow
430	Irrigation Pipeline
441	Microirrigation
442	Sprinkler System
443	Surface and Subsurface Irrigation
447	Tailwater Recovery
449	Irrigation Water Management
462	Precision Land Forming
464	Irrigation Land Leveling
466	Land Smoothing
472	Access Control
484	Mulching
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
511	Forage Harvest Management
512	Forage and Biomass Planting
516	Livestock Pipeline
528	Prescribed Grazing
533	Pumping Plant
550	Range Planting
554	Drainage Water Management
557	Row Arrangement
558	Roof Runoff Structure
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
570	Stormwater Runoff Control
574	Spring Development
576	Livestock Shelter Structure
643	Rare & Declining Habitat
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat
646	Shallow Water Development/Mngt.
647	Early Successional Habitat
649	Structures for Wildlife
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure
655	Forest Trails and Landings
660	Tree/Shrub Pruning
666	Forest Stand Improvement
782	Phosphorus Removal System

The standards and job sheets for these and other conservation practices are available [here](#), listed in practice code numerical order.

Please return to **Section 5** of this guide for more complete information on CSP practices, enhancements, and bundles.

# APPENDIX B – CSP-ELIGIBLE CONSERVATION PRACTICES

## DECIPHERING ENHANCEMENTS CODES

Each conservation enhancement has a number and letter code as follows:

- 🔔 **Each one starts with an E for Enhancement.**
- 🔔 **The E is followed by three numbers, which refer to the conservation practice number the enhancement builds upon. For instance, 328 is the practice code for Conservation Crop Rotation.**
- 🔔 **The three-digit number code is then followed by a letter. For instance, there are 11 enhancements that are tied back to Conservation Crop Rotations (328) and they are lettered A through J.**

Putting those altogether, then, E328E would, for instance, indicate an enhancement based upon the Conservation Crop Rotation conservation practice and, in this particular case, the final E stands for Soil Health Crop Rotation.

---

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

New enhancements may be added each year, so be sure to check the NRCS website for the current list. In 2020, for instance, there were:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 🔔 <b>Enhancement name</b>                              | 🔔 <b>20 soil quality enhancements</b>  |
| 🔔 <b>Base conservation practice</b>                    | 🔔 <b>8 soil erosion enhancements</b>   |
| 🔔 <b>Applicable land uses</b>                          | 🔔 <b>14 water quality enhancements</b>   |
| 🔔 <b>Enhancement life span</b>                         | 🔔 <b>10 water conservation enhancements</b>  |
| 🔔 <b>Resource concerns addressed</b>                   | 🔔 <b>48 wildlife habitat enhancements, a few of which also factor in livestock and forage health</b> |
| 🔔 <b>Enhancement description</b>                       | 🔔 <b>15 plant health and biodiversity enhancements</b>   |
| 🔔 <b>Criteria, spelling out what is required</b>       | 🔔 <b>6 air quality enhancements</b>  |
| 🔔 <b>Documentation and implementation requirements</b> | 🔔 <b>5 energy conservation enhancements, and</b>   |
|  | 🔔 <b>28 enhancements that targeted multiple resource concerns</b>                                    |

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

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION

NSAC is an alliance of over 130 grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities.

See <https://sustainableagriculture.net/about-us/members> for a full list of NSAC members.

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