

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program****Overview**

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary land retirement program that helps agricultural producers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and safeguard ground and surface water.

The program is a partnership among producers; tribal, state, and federal governments; and, in some cases, private groups. CREP is an offshoot of the country's largest private-lands environmental improvement program -- the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Like CRP, CREP is administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). By combining CRP resources with state, tribal, and private programs, CREP provides farmers and ranchers with a sound financial package for conserving and enhancing the natural resources of farms.

CREP addresses high-priority conservation issues of both local and national significance, such as impacts to water supplies, loss of critical habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species, soil erosion, and reduced habitat for fish populations such as salmon. CREP is a community-based,

results-oriented effort centered around local participation and leadership.

Eligibility

A specific CREP project begins when a state, Indian tribe, local government, or local nongovernment entity identifies an agriculture-related environmental issue of state or national significance. These parties and FSA then develop a project proposal to address particular environmental issues and goals.

CREP enrollment is limited to specific geographic areas and practices. To determine if your state and county are involved in CREP and if your land qualifies, contact your local county FSA office.

Like CRP, CREP contracts require a 10- to 15-year commitment to keep lands out of agricultural production. CREP provides payments to participants who offer eligible land. A federal annual rental rate, including an FSA state committee-determined maintenance incentive payment, is offered, plus cost-share of up to 50 percent of the eligible costs to install the practice. Further, the program generally offers a sign-up incentive for participants to install specific practices.

FSA uses CRP funding to pay a percentage of the program's cost, while state, tribal governments, or other non-federal sources provide the balance of the funds. States and private groups involved in the effort may also provide technical support and other in-kind services.

Benefits

For the landowner, CREP is not just a cost-effective way to address rural environmental problems and meet regulatory requirements; it can provide a viable option to supplement farm income as well.

CREP is convenient for producers because it is based on the familiar, highly successful CRP model. Land must be owned or leased for at least one year prior to enrollment to be eligible and must be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner.

Land must also meet cropping history and other eligibility requirements. Enrollment can be on a continuous basis, permitting farmers and ranchers to join the program at any time rather than waiting for specific sign-up periods.

CREP supports increased conservation practices such as filter strips and forested buffers. These conservation practices help protect streams, lakes, and rivers

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from sedimentation and agricultural runoff.

CREP also helps landowners develop and restore wetlands through the planting of appropriate groundcover. Restoring water regimes helps protect national treasures like the Chesapeake Bay, Mammoth Cave, and the Florida Everglades. By maintaining clear goals and requiring annual monitoring, CREP helps participants measure progress and ensure success.

For More Information

For more information on CREP, contact your local FSA office or Soil and Water Conservation District office. Additional information is also available on FSA's Web site at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

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