

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Skaneateles Lake, New York

### Overview

USDA and the city of Syracuse, New York, have launched a \$900,000 Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to safeguard the city's drinking water.

CREP uses federal and state resources to safeguard environmentally sensitive land through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Producers enrolled in CRP remove lands from agricultural production and plant native grasses, trees, and other vegetation to improve water quality, soil, and wildlife habitat. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. CREP provides rental payments and other financial incentives to encourage producers to voluntarily enroll in 10- to 15-year CRP contracts.

### Benefits

The Syracuse, New York, CREP will safeguard the city's drinking water by restoring the Skaneateles Lake, one of the 11 Finger Lakes of central New York and the source of unfiltered drinking water for the 240,000 residents of Syracuse. The program will help producers install and restore riparian buffers that help prevent sediment, nutrients, and pollutants from entering the lake. The buffers will protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat for a wide array of wildlife species, like trout and pheasant.

### Goals

The goals of the Syracuse CREP are to:

- Restore 1,000 acres of cropland or marginal pastureland that drain into the Skaneateles Lake watershed.
- Reduce the risk of pathogens from animal waste applied to pasture and cropland.
- Reduce sediment deposits attributable to cropland erosion in the lake and its tributaries.
- Reduce nutrient runoff from animal waste and fertilizer applied to adjacent cropland and pastures.
- Assist the city of Syracuse to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

### Program Cost

The expected combined federal and city obligation is \$900,000 over 15 years, with \$650,000 coming from USDA and \$250,000 from the city of Syracuse. This does not include any costs that may be borne by producers. Syracuse's share is approximately 28 percent of the total program costs and USDA's share is approximately 72 percent.

### Eligible Areas

Producers with acreage in certain areas within the Skaneateles Lake watershed that meet the CREP and CRP eligibility

requirements may offer land for enrollment. To find out if your operation is located within the project area, contact your local USDA service center.

### Approved Conservation Practices

The following conservation practices may be eligible for enrollment into the Syracuse CREP:

- CP1 Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses
- CP2 Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP3 Tree Planting
- CP3A Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP6 Diversions
- CP8A Grassed Waterways
- CP15A Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips)
- CP21 Filter Strips
- CP22 Riparian Buffer

### Signup and Eligibility Requirements

Eligible producers can enroll in 10- to 15-year CRP contracts. The applicant must offer eligible acreage and satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP. Land must be cropland that has been cropped 4 out of the past 6 years (2002-2007) and is physically and legally capable of being cropped. Marginal pastureland is also eligible provided it is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees. In addition, producers enrolling the land must generally have owned or

operated the land for at least 1 year prior to enrollment. Persons with an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

### **CREP Payments**

Syracuse CREP participants are eligible for four types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment - a one-time payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in a riparian buffer practice, filter strip, or grassed waterway. USDA makes this payment soon after the contract has been signed.
- Practice Incentive Payment - payment equal to about 40 percent of the eligible cost for establishing the riparian buffer practice, filter strip, or grassed waterway practice. This payment is in addition to the 50 percent cost share assistance that USDA provides.
- Annual rental payment that is about 125 percent of the dryland cash rental rate for the county in which the land is located.
- Cost share assistance for installing the conservation practices on retired land.

The city will provide further cost-share assistance not to exceed 100 percent of the total eligible costs to establish eligible practices. The city will also develop a conservation plan and install additional conservation practices in order to protect water quality.

### **Enrollment in Other Programs**

Applicants may still enroll in general or continuous signup CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous signup. For instance, the CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are at a higher effective rate.

### **Haying and Grazing**

Haying and grazing is not allowed during the CRP contract period unless USDA permits it for emergency purposes under normal CRP rules.

### **For More Information**

For more information on the New York CREP, contact your local USDA service center, Farm Service Agency (FSA) office, or your local Soil and Water Conservation District office.

Additional information is also available on FSA's web site: [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov)

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