



# FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

May 2013

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program – Colorado Rio Grande Basin

### Overview

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state cooperative conservation program that addresses targeted agriculture-related environmental concerns. CREP participants voluntarily enroll in 14 to 15 year Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts with the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA). Participants receive financial incentives to remove cropland from agriculture production. Converting enrolled land to native grasses, forbs and other applicable vegetation improves soil retention and water, air and wildlife habitat quality. CRP and CREP are authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

The Colorado Rio Grande CREP targets the enrollment of up to 40,000 acres in the Rio Grande Basin to reduce irrigation water use and improve water quality. The CREP agreement is a partnership between:

- Farmers and ranchers;
- FSA;
- The State of Colorado – Department of Natural Resources, Division of Water Resources; and
- Subdistrict No.1 of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District Water Activity Enterprise (RGWCD-WAE).
- In addition to CREP and non-Federal payments, the Subdistrict will offer incentive payments for temporary (14 to 15 year) and permanent irrigation water retirement payments for voluntarily enrolled irrigated cropland.

### Benefits

Enrolling up to 40,000 acres of eligible cropland will reduce irrigation water consumption by approximately 12 percent within the boundaries of Subdistrict No. 1. The CREP will decrease agricultural chemicals and sediments entering the Rio Grande and its tributaries. CREP enrollment will conserve water and energy and reduce soil erosion, as well as improve wildlife habitat through the planting of native grasses and forbs and other permanent covers.

### Goals

The specific goals of the Rio Grande CREP when fully enrolled are to:

- Enroll up to 40,000 acres of irrigated cropland into the CREP and establish native grasses, forbs and other habitat;
- Reduce the irrigation water use by approximately 60,060 acre-feet per year;
- Reduce soil erosion from approximately 681,252 tons to less than 149,487 tons per year on all acres enrolled in CREP, a total reduction of over 531,765 tons per year;
- Reduce annual fertilizer and pesticide application from enrolled acres by approximately 3,650 tons per year;
- Restore and enhance a minimum of 750 acres of degraded temporary and permanent wetlands;
- Increase streamflows in streams associated with the watershed within the project area;
- Reduce energy consumption over the 15 year term of the CREP contracts by 200- million kilowatt hours and;
- Reduce the percentage of

ground water test wells containing nitrogen (NO<sub>3</sub>) levels above EPA standards.

### Eligibility Requirements

Landowners can offer eligible cropland acres located in the CREP project area which covers portions of Saguache, Rio Grande, and Alamosa counties within Subdistrict No. 1.

*Generally to be eligible:*

- Irrigated cropland must meet all CRP cropland eligibility requirements as established in FSA’s national CRP directives and must have been irrigated with ground water or surface water at a rate of not less than half acre-foot per acre for four out of six years, 2002–2007.
- Irrigated cropland must have been irrigated with not less than half acre-foot per acre for the planting of an irrigated crop within 24 months prior to submission of an offer.
- Irrigated cropland must be physically and legally capable of being irrigated in a normal manner when offered for enrollment, (or in cases where irrigated cropland had been enrolled in a voluntary water lease program, within 12 months after being offered for enrollment).
- Irrigated cropland must have water rights that are in good standing and must be owned or controlled by the cropland owner. If the irrigated cropland and water rights are controlled by more than one person or entity, each person or entity must agree to the contract terms.
- All non-irrigated land, including all non-irrigated center pivot corner land is ineligible

for enrollment in this program. All the offered acreage must be completely located in the Project Area for an offer to be eligible.

Other requirements may also apply. Interested producers should contact their local FSA office for specific information regarding their eligibility for CREP.

**Sign-Up and Contract Duration**

The CREP sign-up is scheduled to begin May 13, 2013, and will continue until enrollment goals are attained, or there is no longer statutory authority for CRP, whichever comes first. Enrolled land remains under contract for 14 to 15 years as specified in the contract.

**Approved Conservation Measures and Plans**

To better serve program goals, FSA has approved the following CRP conservation practices (CP) for the Colorado Rio Grande CREP.

- CP2 – Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses and Legumes;
- CP4D – Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement;
- CP9 – Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife;
- CP23 – Wetland Restoration, Floodplain and;
- CP23A – Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain.

Participants must establish the selected practice according to a conservation plan developed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service or Technical Service Provider. To help establish the permanent vegetative covers in this arid region participants may be allowed to apply limited amounts of irrigation water during the first years of the CRP contracts if/as outlined in the conservation plan.

**FSA Payments**

Subject to contract terms and certain limitations, CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of FSA payments:

- Cost share with all participants for 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable costs for establishment of approved conservation practices;
- A one-time signing incentive payment (SIP) and practice incentive payment (PIP) for land enrolled in practices CP23 and CP23A, and a PIP for land enrolled in practices CP9.
- An annual rental payment based on the posted county irrigated rental rates for each eligible enrolled irrigated acre.

**NonFederal Rio Grande Water Conservation District - Subdistrict No. 1 Water Activity Enterprise (WAE) Payments**

Subdistrict No. 1 Water Activity Enterprise of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District will provide the following payments and assistance:

**Annual WAE Payments**

1. To participants who enroll in the 15-year water rights retirement, to be paid over the life of the CRP contract:
  - Non-Focus Area Annual Water Retirement Payment – \$22.00 per acre per year for 14 or 15 years;
  - Focus Area Annual Water Retirement Payment – \$33.00 per acre per year for 14 or 15 years;
  - Focus Area Annual Rental Payment Incentive – \$10.00 per acre per year / for 14 or 15 years.
2. To participants who voluntarily permanently retire the water rights associated with the irrigated parcel, to be paid over the life of the CRP contract:

- Non-Focus Area Annual Water Retirement Payment – \$44.00 per acre per year for 14 or 15 years;
- Focus Area Annual Water Retirement Payment – \$66.00 per acre per year for 14 or 15 years;
- Focus Area Annual Rental Payment Incentive – \$10.00 per acre per year for 14 or 15 years.

**One-Time WAE Payments**

1. To participants who enroll in the 15-year water rights retirement option:
  - Focus Area One-Time Incentive Payment – \$100.00 per acre;
  - Focus Area One-Time Cover Establishment Cost Share for 50 percent of the eligible cost – up to \$100.00 per acre.
2. To participants who voluntarily permanently retire the water rights associated with the enrolled irrigated parcel:
  - Permanent Water Right Retirement Incentive – \$200.00 per acre;
  - Focus Area One-Time Incentive Payment – \$100.00 per acre;
  - Focus Area One-Time Cover Establishment Cost Share for 50 percent of the eligible cost – up to \$100.00 per acre.

For more information on CRP contact a nearby FSA county office, or visit us online at [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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