

CSP in Washington County

Program Overview

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a working lands conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and available on a nationwide basis. CSP offers technical and financial assistance to farmers for maintaining high standards of environmental stewardship. Assistance is available for both the active management of existing conservation systems and for implementing new conservation activities on land in agricultural production.

Eligible lands: These include cropland, grassland, pastureland, and non-industrial private forest lands. Applicants must demonstrate they have effective control over these lands to be eligible.

Land ineligible for CSP: These include land enrolled in CRP, WRP, GRP, Conservation Security Program, public land, and land used for crop production that was not planted or considered planted 4 of 6 years prior to June 2008.

Other Land: These areas are within the boundaries of your farming operation. They include incidental areas that are not in agricultural production, or developed areas on the farm such as farm headquarters, barnyards, feedlots, manure storage facilities, machinery storage areas, and material handling facilities. **In order to be eligible under CSP-** Other lands cannot have readily observable erosion or other obvious resource concerns such as gullies, manure runoff or pesticide runoff.

Timing and Enrollment Process

Enrollment in the CSP is continuous so farmers can apply anytime. However, at certain dates during the year, applicants will be ranked and offers selected for enrollment.

NRCS has developed a self screening checklist to help farmers decide if the program is right for them. The check list covers basic applicant and land eligibility issues as well as the stewardship threshold that CSP farmers must meet. It's a useful first step in deciding whether to apply.

CSP eligibility, ranking and payment levels are pegged to how well a farmer is addressing priority resource concerns on their farm. The priority resource concerns for Southwest Pennsylvania are animals, soil erosion, soil quality, water quality and water quantity. CSP applicants must be addressing at least one priority resource concern to the "stewardship threshold" level or above at the time of application to be eligible, agree to adopt or install additional conservation activities during the contract period, and address at least one more priority resource concern to the stewardship threshold level during the first 5-year contract.

Once farmers have filed their application they will then work with their local NRCS office to complete the CSP Conservation Management Tool (CMT). The CMT is a series of questions related to a farm's existing conservation practices plus a menu of choices for conservation improvements and additional practices for new adoption.

Local Program Assistance

The Washington County Conservation District has been contracted to assist with getting the word out about this program. We also are available at the Ag Office to assist farmers with the self screening checklist and the CSP Conservation Management Tool. A Copy of the Checklist has been included with this letter. Please call John Hewitt at the WCCD Ag Office at 724-222-3060 Ext. 5 for help with this Checklist or if you have questions about the program and how it effects you.

Sincerely,

John Hewitt
WCCD Ag Administrator