

Deadline Extended for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Written by Elisha Smith

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Center for Rural Affairs Offers Farm Bill Help Line to Assist Producers

Lyons, NE - USDA's National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently announced that the deadline for producer applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has been extended to January 27, 2012.

While CSP is a continuous sign-up program and producers can apply to enroll at any time of the year, NRCS applies a cut-off date for applications to be considered during a particular fiscal year. Once the cut-off date is past, producers may continue to apply for the program, but they will not be considered for entry until the spring of the following year, in this case spring of 2013. In order to enroll in 2012 applications must be filed by January 27.

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary stewardship incentives program, administered by USDA's NRCS, designed to reward farmers, ranchers, and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation on working lands, as well as for the adoption of additional conservation measures that provide multiple environmental benefits that run beyond the farm or ranch. This program pays producers for clean water, better soil management, improved habitat, energy efficiency, and other natural resource benefits.

"We hope more farmers and ranchers will take advantage of this extension for the CSP application deadline. To meet this deadline, they just need to submit the basic application form to their local NRCS office," said Traci Bruckner, Assistant Director of Rural Policy at the Center for Rural Affairs.

CSP is one of the most popular conservation programs. In 2010 alone, nearly 21,000 applicants enrolled in CSP, putting additional conservation on 25.2 million acres, about the size

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of the state of Kentucky. Farmers and ranchers interested in applying should contact their local NRCS office as soon as possible to meet the deadline.

To sign up, producers should [visit their NRCS local service center](http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs) (<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>).

Bruckner is encouraging farmers, ranchers and others to call the Center for Rural Affairs' Farm Bill Helpline with questions about the application process and to share their experiences, both positive and negative. "We know the previous sign-ups have yielded some great success stories for farmers and ranchers, but also some disappointments and frustrations."

"We want this program to work for all farmers and ranchers employing conservation-based farming systems, and firmly believe the CSP is a step in the right direction for policy to financially reward historical commitments to conservation, as well as encourage further adoption," Bruckner continued. "This is a far better approach than paying to clean-up problems."

Bruckner commented that it would be most useful for producers to have specific information available when they call, including a complete copy of their application materials, and more specifically the Conservation Measurement Tool responses and ranking information for their state or ranking area. The NRCS office will provide only a summary, unless specifically asked for a complete print out that includes their ranking information, the highest scores in their state or area, and how far down the ranking list NRCS was able to provide contracts before the money ran out for the last sign-up period.

"One of the main goals for our Farm Bill Helpline is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of programs such as the CSP," said Bruckner. "It is only with that information that we are able to push for any needed changes and improvements."

Producers can also receive guidance for applying for other conservation programs. "Through our helpline you will speak to someone who is knowledgeable about the program rules to help you understand how to participate in the program," Bruckner added. Producers can call [\(402\) 687-2100](tel:4026872100) and ask for the Farm Bill Helpline or send an email to tracib@cfra.org

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