

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - New York State

Overview

USDA and the state of New York have launched a \$62 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement to improve water conditions on 30 million acres within New York's 12 major watersheds. These watersheds serve 55 percent of the state's population.

CREP is a federal-state natural resource conservation program targeted to address state and nationally significant agricultural related environmental problems. Under CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from USDA to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contracts of 10- to 15-years. Participants remove marginal pastureland or cropland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

Benefits

The New York CREP will help farmers address erosion and nutrient runoff on 30 million acres of land within New York's 12 major watersheds. Retiring highly erodible cropland and planting it to protective vegetation will enhance water quality and provide shelter, nesting areas and food for many species of wildlife. Buffers planted along stream banks and rivers will filter phosphorus, nitrogen and sedimentation from the waterways.

Eligible Areas

Producers can offer eligible cropland and marginal pastureland in New York's 12 major watersheds, which serve approximately 55 percent of New York's population. The 12 watersheds are:

- Allegany River Basin
- Black River/St. Lawrence Water-

sheds

- Chesapeake Bay/Susquehanna River Watershed
- Delaware River Watershed
- Genesee - Oswego - Seneca - Oneida River Watershed
- Lake Champlain Watershed
- Lake Erie - Niagara River Watersheds
- Lake Ontario Direct Drainage Watershed
- Long Island Sound - Peconic Bay Watershed
- Lower Hudson River Basin
- Mohawk River Watershed
- Upper Hudson River Watershed.

Public wellhead protection areas, as designated by the New York State Department of Health in accordance with the state's approved wellhead protection program, are eligible for enrollment within these 12 watersheds. Interested producers should contact their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county office for specific information regarding their eligibility for CREP.

Goals

The goals of the New York CREP are to:

- Reduce annual nutrient loads of phosphorus by 73,000 pounds, nitrogen by 29,000 pounds per year and sediments from 109,000 tons per year;
- Reduce the potential for animal waste to enter streams and rivers;
- Establish tree buffers adjacent to 4,598 stream miles and 473,457 acres of surface waters; and
- Establish grass and trees on areas that recharge drinking water supplies for cities and towns.

Approved Conservation Practices

To better serve program goals, specific CRP conservation practices have been identified for inclusion in the program. For land qualifying on the basis of

erosion, where at least 50 percent of the land is within 1,000 feet of a surface water source and has an erodibility index of 15 or greater (relatively steep-sloping land), the applicable practices are:

- CP 1 - Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes
- CP 2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP 3 - Tree Planting
- CP 3A - Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP 4B - Permanent Wildlife Habitat Corridor, Non-Easement
- CP 4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Non-Easement
- CP 9 - Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife
- CP 10 - Vegetative Cover - Grass - Already Established
- CP 11 - Vegetative Cover - Trees - Already Established

A map of the eligible areas is available in USDA Service Centers.

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- CP 2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP 3 - Tree Planting
- CP 3A - Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP 4B - Permanent Wildlife Habitat Corridor, Non-Easement
- CP 4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Non-Easement
- CP 10 - Vegetative Cover - Grass - Already Established
- CP 11 - Vegetative Cover - Trees - Already Established

For lands qualifying as riparian buffers, the applicable practices are:

- CP8A - Grass Waterways
- CP15A - Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover - Contour Grassed Strips
- CP21 - Filter Strips (Grass Strips)
- CP22 - Riparian Buffers (Trees Planted Next to Streams)
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration
- CP23A Wetland Restoration, Non-Flood Plain
- CP29 - Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer
- CP30 - Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer

Sign-up and Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment began Dec. 1, 2003, and will run on a continuous basis, continuing as long as there is statutory authority for CRP. Cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as a buffer practice. Persons who have acreage under an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP on that acreage until that contract expires. Other requirements will also apply. Contract terms will be set out in the CRP contract and regulations.

Payments

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

- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time payment consistent with handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in a grass waterway, riparian buffer or filter strip practice. This payment is made after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time payment equal to about 40 percent of the eligible cost for certain practices. This payment

is in addition to up to 50 percent cost-share assistance that USDA will provide for installing eligible practices.

- Infeasible to Farm Acreage: In cropland where more than 50 percent of a field is enrolled as a buffer, if the remainder of the field (not part of the original offer) is determined as infeasible to farm, then the remainder may be enrolled as part of the practice at regular rental rates. Incentives do not apply for land determined and enrolled as infeasible to farm.
- Annual Incentive Payments: Annual incentive payments of 145 percent of the established weighted average county soil rental rate, as determined and established by CCC will be used in connection with normal CRP sign-ups for all practices under this agreement.
- Annual Rental Payment for the life of the contract: Producers are eligible for a base Soil Rental Rate (SRR) equal to the weighted SRR of the three predominant soils.
- Cost-Share Assistance: Cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent for the installation of the eligible conservation practices on enrolled land apply.
- Annual Maintenance Payment: In accordance with Handbook 2-CRP procedure, annual maintenance payments may apply for certain practices.

In addition, New York will offer the following:

- State cost share payments in addition to federal cost share payments, not to exceed 100 percent of the participant's out-of-pocket expenses.
- Annual tax credit to participants whose land is enrolled in CREP, amounting to 100 percent of the school property tax on land enrolled in CREP for acreage over and above the first 250 acres of qualified agricultural land.

Program Cost

USDA will contribute an estimated \$52 million and New York State will fund an additional \$10 million. The \$62 million does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers.

Enrollment in Other Programs

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll eligible land in the regular general CRP or continuous sign-up CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous sign-up. The CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are at a higher effective rate.

Haying and Grazing

Haying and grazing currently are not permitted during the CRP contract period unless USDA allows them for emergency purposes or managed haying and grazing purposes, if applicable, under normal CRP rules.

For More Information

More information on the New York CREP is available from local FSA offices and on FSA's Web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov/crp

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