

USDA Accepts 2.8 Million Acres for the Conservation Reserve Program

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DES MOINES, Iowa, Aug. 23, 2021 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has accepted 2.8 million acres in offers from agricultural producers and private landowners for enrollment into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in 2021. This year, almost 1.9 million acres in offers have been accepted through the General CRP Signup, and USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) has accepted over 897,000 acres for enrollment through the Continuous Signup. The Continuous Signup remains open and CRP Grasslands Signup closed last week, so USDA expects to enroll more acres into all of CRP than the 3 million acres that are expiring.

“Despite Congress raising the enrollment target in the 2018 Farm Bill, there have been decreases in enrollment for the past two years. The changes we made this spring have put us on the path to reverse this trend,” said Bob Wegand, Acting State Executive Director for the Iowa Farm Service Agency. “Even with the improved direction, USDA will still be about 4 million acres below the enrollment target. The CRP benefits for producers, sportsmen, wildlife, conservation and climate are numerous and well documented. We cannot afford to let them to be left on the table.”

The 4 million-acre shortfall in CRP would have had the following impacts:

- More than 359,000 acres less annual forage under CRP Grasslands;
- A loss of 1,500,000 acres of quality wildlife and pollinator less habitat for wildlife;
- 20% fewer apiaries in major production regions meeting critical forage thresholds;
- A loss of more than 4 million upland game and other grassland birds;
- About 90 million pounds of nitrogen entering waterways;
- Over 30 million tons of soil eroded, leading to increased pollution and sedimentation in streams and rivers; and
- Foregone sequestration of more than 3 million metric tons of CO₂.

Like other USDA conservation programs, CRP is a voluntary program that has a variety of options that can be tailored to the specific conservation issues of a state or region and desires of the landowner. The options run the gamut from working lands such as CRP Grasslands to partnerships with states and private entities to target a specific joint concern such as water quality or quantity.

“We are grateful to the leadership and staff at the USDA, who have worked diligently over the last several months to ensure that the Conservation Reserve Program remains a viable and effective conservation tool,” says Whit Fosburgh, president and CEO of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. “Today’s announcement demonstrates that when the CRP is administered with the needs of landowners in mind, they respond by investing their lands in conservation. This course correction is needed now more than ever, as management decisions in recent years have left program acreage at a 30-year low, with an additional 4 million acres set to expire by October 2022. We look forward to continuing to work with the USDA to improve the trajectory of the CRP and guarantee that the program benefits our natural resources, landowners, and the sporting community for years to come.”

Continuous CRP Signup

Continuous CRP allows USDA to target the most sensitive land like highly erodible land, the most environmentally beneficial land like wetlands and buffers along streams and rivers, or locally identified critical habitat like State Acres For Wildlife. This targeted approach also reduces the whole-farm type enrollment in CRP that was more common when it first began and helps meet the conservation goals while maintaining the majority of the land in production agriculture. FSA has accepted offers from over 37,000 producers to enroll more than 897,000 acres through the Continuous Signup. This is double the enrollment from last year and three times the enrollment from 2018 and 2019. FSA expects this process to be completed by the end of September so contracts may start on October 1, 2021.

The growth in the targeted enrollment through Continuous Signup is due to a recommitment of USDA to incentives and partnerships that brought in nearly 1.4 million acres in 2016 and 2017. These efforts have also included the expansion of the Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rives Initiative 30-year (CLEAR30) from two regions to nationwide as well as moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices from the General to the Continuous signup. This year, offers for 20,000 acres have been submitted for CLEAR30 and 296,000 acres in SAFE practices.

General CRP Signup

FSA opened the General CRP Signup 56 in January 2021 and extended the original deadline to July 23, 2021, to enable producers to consider FSA’s new improvements to the program, which included higher rental payments and more incentivized environmental practices.

Additionally, FSA introduced a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This incentive provides a 3%, 5% or 10% incentive payment based on the predominate vegetation type for the practices enrolled – from grasses to trees to wetland restoration.

Through CRP, producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. In addition to the other well-documented benefits, lands enrolled in CRP is playing a key role in mitigating impacts from climate change.

A full list of changes to CRP, including those to the Continuous and General Signups, can be found in our “What’s New with CRP” [fact sheet](#).

More Information

In April, [USDA announced several changes](#) to CRP to increase participation while improving climate-related and other environmental benefits. CRP sequesters carbon while preserving topsoil, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, reducing nitrogen runoff, and providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

The 2018 Farm Bill established a nationwide acreage limit for CRP, with the total number of acres that may be enrolled capped at 25 million acres in 2021 and growing to 27 million by 2023.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity, and natural resources, including our soil, air, and water. Through conservation practices, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers, and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including state, local, and tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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