
USDA Expands Partnerships for Conservation Through Its Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

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MADISON, Dec. 21, 2021?— The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is leveraging its authorities under the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to bring in new types of partners and ultimately expand opportunities in voluntary conservation for the Nation’s agricultural producers and private landowners. In direct response to feedback from state agencies, Tribes, non-profits and other groups, USDA has updated CREP’s rule regarding matching fund requirements, and invested in additional staff to work directly with partners for streamlined, partner-driven conservation efforts.?

CREP is part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and enables USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), through Farm Service Agency (FSA), and partners to co-invest in partner-led projects. CREP also plays an important role in USDA’s broader climate change strategy, bringing together producers, landowners and partners for climate-smart land management.

“CREP is one of the most flexible tools we have for locally-driven, partner-led efforts to reward producers and drive important environmental and climate outcomes, said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. “We look forward to working with new, diverse partners who can shape CRP to address priorities most important to them and to local communities, from water quality and conservation to wildlife habitat and climate outcomes. The CREP changes in this rule will remove barriers and provide partners with increased flexibility to participate in this powerful program.”

Matching Funds

A Dec. 6, 2019, rule required that 50% of matching funds from partners be in the form of direct payments, which made it more difficult for diverse types of groups to participate as partners in CREP. With this rule change, partners can now provide their negotiated level of matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance. This change allows for greater flexibility and opportunity for additional partners to participate in the program.

This change was enacted through a [Dec. 13, 2021 rule in the *Federal Register*](#).

The rule also updated policy to now provide a full annual rental rate to producers who are impacted by state, Tribal or local laws, ordinances and regulations that require a resource conserving or environmental protection measure. The previous rule reduced the rental payment made to producers who were covered by such laws.

Additional Capacity to Support Partners and Producers

In order to implement these changes, FSA has hired three new CREP staff members, using a regional approach to work closely with potential and existing partners and expand program availability. The team members include:

- **Evelyn Whitesides**, focusing on Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia and Caribbean Region (Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands).
- **Kim Martin**, focusing on Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin.
- **Patrick Lewis**, focusing on Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Pacific Basin, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

“We want to build capacity so that we can better reach partners, including those who we may not have worked with before,” Ducheneaux said. “We’re taking action to reduce barriers to access and opportunity for historically underserved producers and landowners, and by engaging more partners, we’re working with groups that provide a direct link to these communities.”

These investments in CREP staffing build on other recent outreach and education efforts by FSA, including a [\\$4.7 million investment announced this year](#) to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers on a variety of CCC and FSA programs, including conservation programs.

Currently, all CREP partners are States; however, FSA is strongly encouraging Tribes and non-governmental organizations to consider partnerships. This program is a great vehicle for their conservation-focused efforts.

About CREP

Currently, CREP has 34 projects in 26 states. In total, more than 860,000 acres are enrolled in CREP.

Eligible partners include States, Tribal groups, and non-governmental organizations. Potential partners interested in CREP should contact their FSA [State Office](#) or one of the new CREP team members listed above.

More Information?

Earlier this year, FSA rolled out a number of improvements to CRP, which included a larger emphasis on climate-smart agriculture through a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP general and continuous signups. Learn more in our [“What’s New with CRP” fact sheet](#). These updates to CREP build on FSA’s larger effort to improve all components of CRP.

To learn about CREP and other CRP opportunities, producers and landowners should contact their [local USDA Service Center](#).

CREP is one of many USDA programs to support the [America the Beautiful Initiative](#), and today the Biden-Harris Administration issued its first annual progress report highlighting steps the Administration has taken over the past year to support locally led and voluntary initiatives efforts to conserve and restore lands and waters across the nation.

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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