

Major Conservation Provisions
Conference Report – 2008 Farm Bill

CRP

Reduces the cap to 32 million acres. Alfalfa, multi year grasses and legumes, when grown as part of a rotation practice is considered an agricultural commodity for the purpose of the 4 to 6 year cropping history criteria. Managed harvesting of biomass is allowed subject to the purposes of CRP and soil, water and wildlife considerations. If the biomass is sold, the Secretary reduces the CRP rental payment in an amount commensurate with the economic value of the product sold. Allows retiring farmers or ranchers to modify their CRP contracts to sell or lease it to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, who then, subject to many conditions, put it into production.

WRP

Caps the acreage enrolled at just over 3 million acres

CSP (renamed the Conservation Stewardship Program) – the biggest program in the title

Definitions:

Conservation activities: conservation systems, practices or management measures that are designed to address a resource concern and include structural measures, vegetative measures, and land management measures as determined by the Secretary.

Conservation Measurement Tools: Procedures to estimate the level of environmental benefit to be achieved by a producer in implementing conservation activities including indices and other measures developed by the Secretary

Conservation Stewardship Plan: A plan that identifies and inventories resource concerns, establishes benchmark data and conservation objectives, describes conservation activities to be implemented, managed or improved and includes a schedule and evaluation plan for the planning, installation and management of the new and existing conservation activities.

Priority Resource Concern: A resource concern that is identified at the State level in consultation with the State Technical Committee, as a priority for a particular watershed or area of the State.

Stewardship Threshold: The level of natural resource conservation and environmental management required, as determined by the Secretary using conservation measurement tools, to improve and conserve the quality and condition of a resource concern.

Eligible land: Private agricultural land (including cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, rangeland and land used for agro-forestry. This includes all acres of an agricultural operation of a producer, whether or not contiguous, that are under the effective control of the producer at the time the producer enters into a stewardship contract. Lands enrolled in CRP, WRP and GRP are not eligible.

Stewardship contracts: To participate, the producer submits a contract offer to the Secretary that shows the producer is meeting the stewardship threshold on at least one resource concern and would, at a minimum, **meet or exceed** the stewardship threshold for at least 1 priority resource concern by the end of the contract period by installing additional conservation activities.

Contracts will be ranked by the level of conservation treatment on all applicable priority resource concerns, the degree to which the treatment increases conservation performance, the number of proposed resource concerns proposed to be treated to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold. **All of these determinations will be based, to the maximum extent possible ON THE CONSERVATION MEASUREMENT TOOLS.**

The term of the stewardship contract is 5 years. The contract must include a stewardship plan approved by the Secretary. At the end of the contract a producer may renew the contract for one additional 5 year period if the producer demonstrates compliance with the existing contract and agrees to adopt new conservation activities as determined by the Secretary.

The Secretary is to make the program available to eligible producers on a continuous enrollment basis with 1 or more ranking periods, identify not less than 3 nor more than 5 resource concerns within a particular watershed or other area of a state. Develop science based conservation measurement tools.

Beginning October 1, 2008, and ending September 30, 2017, the Secretary is to enroll an additional 12,769,000 acres each fiscal year and manage the program to achieve a national average rate of \$18 per acre which includes the costs of all financial assistance, technical assistance, and any other expenses associated with participation in the program.

Payment Amount: The amount of the conservation stewardship payment is determined by the Secretary based, to the extent tractable, on 1) costs incurred by the producer, 2) income forgone by the producer and 3) expected environmental benefits as determined by conservation measurement tools.

As you can see, it is going to be important to be involved in determining priority resources of concern and development of the conservation measurement tools.

EQIP

Not many big changes. Payment amounts are 75 percent for the costs of planning, design, materials, equipment etc. and 100% of the income forgone. Practices include 1 or more of structural practices, land management practices, vegetative practices, forest management and other practices determined by the Secretary. Priority is given to residue management, nutrient management, air quality management, invasive species management, pollinator habitat, animal carcass management technology or pest management.

The 60/40 allocation between livestock and cropland is maintained.

Contract terms run from 1 year after the practices under the contract have been implemented but in no case longer than 10 years.

Priority shall be given to contracts based on their overall cost-effectiveness to ensure that the conservation practices and approaches proposed are the most efficient means of achieving the anticipated environmental benefits and based on how effectively and comprehensively the project addresses the designated resource concern.

Payment limit during the life of the contract is reduced from \$450,000 to \$300,000, but this can be waived if the projects are of environmental significance (specifically mentioning methane digesters).

Now eligible for Conservation Innovation Grants, among other things, market systems for pollution reduction and practices for the storage of carbon in soil.

Funding rises from \$1.2 billion in 2008 to \$1.7 billion in 2012.

Environmental Services Markets: The Secretary is directed to develop technical guidelines to facilitate farmer participation in emerging environmental services markets with priority given to guidelines related to farmer participation in carbon markets. These include procedures to measure environmental services benefits, a protocol to report environmental services benefits and a registry to record, collect and maintain the benefits measured. Calls for guidelines to establish a process for verification for the achievement of the environmental benefits. The Secretary is to develop these protocols and guidelines in consultation with among others farm, ranch and forestry producers.