

USDA TO OFFER CRP CONTRACT EXTENSIONS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that Conservation Reserve Program contracts expiring this year may be extended for another year. Participants with contracts expiring on September 30, 2002 have from January 14th to May 31st to apply for the one-year extension. Some 30,000 contracts are affected.

"The expiration affects 1.8 million rural acres now protected by CRP. This action will help ensure the continued safeguarding of this sensitive land as a new farm bill is developed, " said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman.

Local offices of USDA's Farm Service Agency have notified CRP participants of their options to modify and extend their CRP contracts. The deadline to apply for an extension is May 31st.

The extension will not change participant's rental rates. All or a portion of the acreage under contract may be included in the extension, but no new acres may be added.

USDA is not planning to offer a general CRP signup in fiscal year 2002. However, producers may continue to enroll relatively small, highly desirable acreage, such as filter strips, waterways, and riparian buffer strips in the continuous CRP program.

Producers enrolled in the CRP program receive rental payments and other financial incentives to remove lands from agricultural production for a period of 10 to 15 years. CRP participants plant native grasses, trees, and other vegetation to improve water quality, soil and wildlife habitat. About 34 million acres are currently enrolled in the program.