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1 million acres of farmland put in conservation

DES MOINES (AP) — The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program will idle more than 1 million acres of Iowa farmland within the next 10 years, officials said Friday.

The latest round of bidding resulted in the USDA granting 12,388 Iowa farmers preliminary approval to set aside 1,029,762 acres of erosion-prone land, nearly three times the total acreage of the previous three sign-up periods.

The program accepts bids from farmers who offer to idle their land in exchange for annual payments.

The USDA estimates the most recent Iowa sign-ups will cost the government \$79.3 million.

In the whole country, only Texas exceeds Iowa's conservation set-aside total. Texas farmers have agreed to set aside 1,325,181 acres.

In the first three rounds of bidding, the USDA accepted bids from 5,300 Iowa farmers, with 358,553 acres of fragile cropland involved.

Nationally, nearly 20 million acres of cropland have been set aside for the program.

The latest round of bidding, which started Feb. 9 and ended Feb. 27, had an extra added attraction for corn farmers, who will get an extra \$2 for every bushel of corn base yield idled in the reserve program.

In Iowa, corn producers will receive \$122 million from the corn bonus.

"This was a very good sign-up for us, and the corn bonus really helped us," said Maynard Frost, deputy director of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service's Midwest office.