

CRP program eligibility set

For the first time, some cropped wetlands will be eligible for enrollment into the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 10-year Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

USDA's eighth signup period for the program will be February 6-24.

"Criteria for entering highly erodible land and filter strips in CRP will be the same as the first seven signups," says Mike Nethery, State Conservationist for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in Iowa. "But now certain cropped wetlands and erosion-scoured floodplains are also eligible."

For wetland criteria, eligible fields must first be determined by SCS to include wetlands or farmed wetlands. Those wetlands or farmed wetlands must occupy one-third of the field; be in a pothole region with a wetland density of one wetland per six acres; or be in a six-to-nine acre field with a wetland of any size.

Intent of the scour erosion provision is to protect land along a stream that is scoured by floodwaters on a regular basis. A field is eligible if the land between the scoured area and the

stream makes up at least a third of the entire field.

"The new criteria will give an economic option to landowners who want to return farmed wetlands to their natural state," Nethery says. The SCS estimates there are more than 4 million acres of farmed wetlands eligible for CRP.

The USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) administers the CRP signup. ASCS will provide up to 50 percent cost-share assistance to CRP participants for the establishment of acceptable cover.

The Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with ASCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will make scour erosion and wetland area eligibility determinations. SCS will also help farmers and other landowners prepare and implement a conservation plan for the CRP enrolled land.

Landowners submit bids to USDA to receive annual payments for idling land in the CRP program. More information is available from local ASCS or SCS offices.

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