

Conservation Security Program

Issue

The USDA's rule (as proposed) will restrict eligibility for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) to farmers who live in as yet unknown watersheds that have the biggest environmental problems. The CSP program in the 2002 Farm Bill was intended to reward those conservation farmers that have historically and are now good stewards of the land, water and other natural resources.

Problem

The program was enacted as an uncapped entitlement program, meaning that there were no funding limitations and that any applicant who met eligibility requirements would be accepted into the program. The 2003 omnibus appropriations bill, however, amended the Farm Bill language to, among other things, place a limit on CSP funding at \$3.8 billion over the life of the program. That limitation would considerably limit the number of producers who would be able to participate.

How this would affect your constituents

The proposed rule released by NRCS on January 2 was therefore based on the CSP as a capped entitlement program. As a result, the proposed rule as currently written may not allow for any Utah farmers and ranchers to participate, among other things nationally it would:

- limit participation to about 50,000 farms and ranches in targeted priority watersheds;
- provide cost-share rates and base payments substantially lower than what is allowed in the statute;
- severely limit the number of practices eligible for payment; and
- require producers to address resource concerns before they are allowed to enroll in the program.

What you can do about this issue

The recently enacted 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Bill—the '04 omnibus—lifted the cap on CSP funding, effectively restoring CSP to its status as an uncapped entitlement program.

Encourage NRCS to issue a supplement to the proposed CSP rule to implement it as an uncapped entitlement by:

- allowing open enrollment to all eligible producers nationwide with no preference for producers in targeted watersheds;
- providing cost-share rates and base payments as provided for in the statute;
- removing the limitation on the types of practices eligible for payment; and
- allowing producers to use CSP to address resource concerns after enrollment.

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Based on NACD 2004-resolution, page 65, 9.S, NACD Policy Book.