

Conservation stewardship deadline approaching

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Stewardship Program will provide about \$175 million in funding for up to 12.6 million additional acres enrollment this year.

Although applications are accepted all year, farmers, ranchers and forestland owners interested in CSP should submit applications by Friday, June 14 to a local NRCS office to ensure consideration for this year's funding. The deadline was extended from May 31.

The voluntary program allows producers to go the extra mile in conserving natural resources while also maintaining or increasing the productivity of their operations.

"CSP is different than our other financial assistance programs," said NRCS acting chief Jason Weller. "It offers payments to producers who maintain a high level of conservation on their land and agree to adopt higher levels of stewardship. It's about conservation activities on the entire operation, focusing on multiple resource concerns."

Playing a significant part in conserving and improving the nation's resources, producers enrolled an additional 12.1 million acres in CSP last year, bringing the total number of acres to more than 50 million.

Many of the CSP enhancements improve soil quality, which helps land become more resilient to extreme weather.

Several other improvements are available for producers, including intensive rotational grazing, intercropping and wildlife-friendly fencing.

Because of the extreme weather in 2012, more interest and participation in the cover crop enhancements is expected this year, according to NRCS experts.

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A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements and payment types.

For the checklist and additional information, visit the CSP website, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/> or visit a local USDA NRCS office.

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