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NRCS Seeks Public Comments on Conservation

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Kansas is seeking public comments on changes to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) interim final rule.

USDA published the interim final rule, which contains the statutory changes to CSP in the Federal Register <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/11/05/2014-26295/conservation-stewardship-program-csp-interim-rule>. The rule will be open for public comments through January 5, 2015.

Interested individuals can submit public comments on the interim final rule on [regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=NRCS-2014-0008-0001) <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=NRCS-2014-0008-0001>. Public comments will be used to finalize the interim final rule. A final rule will be published afterwards.

“As conservation leaders, farmers and ranchers in Kansas will be pleased by the program changes,” said NRCS State Conservationist Eric B. Banks. “These changes will increase the level of stewardship needed to address critical resource concerns on working agricultural lands and enable them to deliver more conservation benefits.”

The interim final rule is used to implement CSP. This program helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Congress changed CSP in the 2014 Farm Bill and NRCS, the agency that administers CSP, incorporated those changes into this interim rule. These changes are designed to improve the competitive nature of the program, including raising the bar for the quality of projects enrolled and increasing the number of priority resource concerns to be addressed during the term of the CSP contract.

The interim final rule also expands the CSP's reach to include veteran farmers and ranchers under special funding pools for beginning and socially disadvantaged producers, updates requirements for contract renewal, uses science-based stewardship thresholds to determine program eligibility and success, and expands program enrollment to include lands protected under the new Agricultural Conservation Easements Program and that are in the last year of the Conservation Reserve Program.

NRCS has also increased flexibility for producers to make minor adjustments to their agricultural operations that will result in the same or better stewardship of the land, and removed extraneous provisions that did not relate to program participants rights and responsibilities.

For more information about CSP in Kansas, visit www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/financial/csp/ or your local USDA Service Center. Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Kansas. For information about CSP nationally, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/>.

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