

Kansas NRCS Announces New Deadlines for Conservation Stewardship Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering a renewal option through Tuesday, March 31, 2015, for eligible agricultural producers and forest landowners with expiring Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts.

State Conservationist Eric B. Banks said farmers may renew their existing contracts on a non-competitive basis if they are willing to adopt additional conservation activities aimed at helping them achieve higher levels of conservation on their farms, forests and ranches.

Farmers without CSP contracts can apply for the voluntary program until March 13, which is an extension of the previously announced deadline for new applications.

Banks said changes in the 2014 Farm Bill allow CSP participants with expiring contracts to renew them by exceeding stewardship thresholds for two or more existing natural resource concerns or by meeting stewardship thresholds for at least two new natural resource concerns such as improving water quality or soil health. The 2014 Farm Bill includes an expanded conservation activity list that offers farmers more options to address natural resource challenges. New conservation activities include testing the effects of cover crops on soil quality, incorporating wildlife-beneficial management, and using innovative irrigation efforts to reduce water use.

Banks added the Conservation Stewardship Program will also help broaden the impacts of NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives which accelerates private lands conservation activities to address particular goals, such as creating habitat for at-risk species and conserving water. In Kansas, these include the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative and the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative.

CSP pays participants for conservation performance—the better the performance, the higher the payment. Nearly 70 million acres have been enrolled in the program nationally since its launch in 2009. About 9,300 contracts covering over 12 million acres in the U.S. are nearing the end of their five-year term.

Banks said that all farmers interested in CSP should contact their local NRCS offices, keeping in mind the two different deadlines for new applications is March 13, and for renewals is March 31. More information about CSP is available on the Kansas NRCS web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ks/programs/financial/csp/>