

## Additional 800,000 Acres Dedicated to Conservation

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that an additional 800,000 acres of highly environmentally sensitive land may be enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under certain wetland and wildlife initiatives that provide multiple benefits on the same land.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will accept new offers to participate in CRP under a general signup to be held Dec. 1, 2015, through Feb. 26, 2016. Eligible existing program participants with contracts expiring Sept. 30, 2015, will be granted an option for one-year extensions. Farmers and ranchers interested in removing sensitive land from agricultural production and planting grasses or trees to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and restore wildlife habitat are encouraged to enroll. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement during a speech delivered at the Ducks Unlimited National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

“For 30 years, the Conservation Reserve Program has supported farmers and ranchers as they continue to be good stewards of land and water. This initiative has helped farmers and ranchers prevent more than 8 billion tons of soil from eroding, reduce nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to cropland by 95 and 85 percent respectively, and even sequester 43 million tons of greenhouse gases annually, equal to taking 8 million cars off the road,” said Vilsack. “This has been one of most successful conservation programs in the history of the country, and today’s announcement keeps that momentum moving forward.”

The voluntary Conservation Reserve Program allows USDA to contract with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is conserved. Participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

“CRP protects water quality and restores significant habitat for ducks, pheasants, turkey, quail, deer and other important wildlife. That spurs economic development like hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation and tourism all over rural America,” said Vilsack. “Today we’re allowing an additional 800,000 acres for duck nesting habitat and other wetland and wildlife habitat initiatives to be enrolled in the program.”

In addition to Ducks Unlimited’s partnership with the Conservation Reserve Program, other longtime partners include Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Association of State Foresters, National Wild Turkey Federation, Audubon Society, National Bobwhite Technical Committee, Quality Deer Management Association, National Rural Water Association, Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Longleaf Alliance, state soil and water conservation districts, and state forestry, agriculture and natural resource agencies.

“I encourage all farmers and ranchers to consider the various CRP continuous sign-up initiatives that may help target specific resource concerns,” said Vilsack. “Financial assistance is offered for many practices including conservation buffers and pollinator habitat plantings, and initiatives such as the highly erodible lands, bottomland hardwood tree and longleaf pine, all of which are extremely important.”

Farmers and ranchers may visit their FSA county office for additional information. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized the enrollment of grasslands in CRP and information on grasslands enrollment will be available after the regulation is published later this summer.

The Conservation Reserve Program was re-authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, which builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the past six years, while achieving meaningful reform and billions of dollars in savings for taxpayers. Since enactment, USDA has made significant progress to implement each provision of this critical legislation, including providing disaster relief to farmers and ranchers; strengthening risk management tools; expanding access to rural credit; funding critical research; establishing innovative public-private conservation partnerships; developing new markets for rural-made products; and investing in infrastructure, housing, and community facilities to help improve quality of life in rural America. For more information, visit [www.usda.gov/farmbill](http://www.usda.gov/farmbill).

For more information about CRP, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation), or contact your local USDA Farm Service Agency office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.