



## Conservation Program Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill

-----SUBJECT TO REGULATION TO BE ISSUED BY USDA-----

### Revised:

#### Conservation Reserve Program

- New acreage caps for CRP are set: 27.5 million acres in FY14, 26 million acres in FY15, 25 million acres in FY16, 24 million acres in FY17 & FY18.
- Allows for the enrollment of 2 million acres of grassland (under similar conditions as old GRP rental contracts)
- Allows for early termination of contracts in FY15 if certain conditions are met (contracts must be at least 5 years old and there are environmental restrictions)
- Alters haying and grazing provisions and eliminates the payment reduction during emergency
- Allows for producers to prep land in final year of contract for reduced payment if they are not enrolling the land in CRP in the future.

#### Conservation Stewardship Program

- Sets enrollment at 10 million acres per year
- Establishes one definition of "priority resource of concern" – national, State, or local priority or significant concern in a State or region (as determined by the Secretary)
- Increases the requirement for new applicants to meet the stewardship threshold for 2 priority resource concerns (up from 1 resource concern) at time of application and address 1 additional priority resource concern by the end of the contract
- Contract renewal – allows producers to renew for 1 additional 5-year contract if the producer agrees to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least 2 additional priority resources concerns or exceed the stewardship threshold of the 2 existing priority resource concerns in the original contract.
- Secretary to set at least 5 priority resource concerns

#### Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- Majority of provisions remain the same, but adds a 5% set aside of funds for wildlife habitat practices and maintains the 60% set aside for livestock
- Payment limitation set at \$450,000 for all contracts, in aggregate, during FY14-18.
- Funding: \$1.35 billion in FY14, \$1.6 billion in FY15, \$1.65 billion in FY16 & 17, \$1.75 billion in FY18

Unchanged:

Voluntary Public Access Program, Conservation of Private Grazing Land, Grassroots Source Water Protection Program

New:

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- Consolidates farmland, grassland and wetland easements into one new permanent easement program
- Farmland and grassland easements should be handled similar to old Farmland Protection Program working through local land trusts or farmland protection groups to maintain agriculture production or grazing
- Wetland easements should be handled similar to old Wetland Reserve Program with NRCS working directly with landowners to purchase wetland easements that require discontinuing productive use of the land

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- Creates a new partnership program where eligible partners, such as agriculture associations, can coordinate conservation projects for water quality, air quality, erosion & sediment control, drought mitigation, flood prevention, water retention, and water conservation.
- Eligible partners enter into agreements with USDA to assist producers with installing or maintaining conservation practices and conduct outreach to producers, provide financial and technical assistance and report results of the project.
- Projects can use existing conservation programs – the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Healthy Forest Reserve Program.
- Projects can be within a Critical Conservation Area designated by the Secretary (8 maximum) or outside the critical conservation area
- Priority for project proposals that assist farmers in meeting or avoiding regulations, have a greater number of producers involved, leverage non-federal resources, deliver greater percentages of applied conservation and provide innovative conservation methods and delivery.
- Funding allocated is \$100 million for each of FY14-18 and 7% of the covered programs (listed above) with a breakdown of 25% at the state level, 40% at the national level, and 35% for critical conservation areas.
- Under the Critical Conservation Area designation, the Secretary can also use the authorities of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL-566).
- The Secretary is authorized to enter into 20 alternative funding arrangements with multistate water resource agencies to deliver assistance under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

Eliminated:

Wetlands Reserve Program, Farmland Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Program, Farm Viability Program, Environmental Easement Program, Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program