

# Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Is CSP Right for Me?



## Can You Answer “Yes” to the Following?

Then Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) may be a good fit for you.

- I own or rent, and manage land for agricultural or forest production, such as cropland, rangeland, grassland or pasture.
- I have already been doing conservation work on my operation.
- I want to expand my existing conservation efforts to achieve a higher level of environmental stewardship.
- I intend or plan to maintain control of the land for at least five years.
- My land complies with highly erodible land and wetland conservation determination provisions (if unsure, ask your local USDA Service Center)
- I have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS.
- My adjusted gross income is less than \$900,000 (does not apply to Indian Tribes).
- As a member of an entity or joint operation, I have authority to make management decisions for the business

## What is CSP?

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** offers technical and financial assistance to help agricultural and forest producers take their conservation efforts to the next level.

The program is designed to compensate agricultural and forest producers who agree to increase their level of conservation by adopting additional conservation activities and maintaining their baseline level of conservation. CSP is for producers who are passionate about conservation and environmental stewardship.

## What are the Benefits?

CSP may provide many benefits, including increased crop productivity, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements and increased resilience to weather extremes. CSP also encourages adoption of new technologies and management techniques.

For example, CSP can help you:

- ◆ Schedule timely planting and management of cover crops
- ◆ Develop a grazing plan that will improve your forage base
- ◆ Implement no-till to reduce erosion or manage forested areas in a way that benefits wildlife habitat

If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals.

## How Does CSP Work?

CSP offers opportunities for producers to expand on existing conservation efforts by applying new conservation practices, enhancements, and bundles. These new activities will help enhance natural resources and improve the operation.

For example, if you have been planting a cover crop, you may decide to try an enhancement for a multi-species cover crop or implement a deep rooted cover crop to break up soil compaction.

If you decide to apply for CSP, the local NRCS conservation planner will have a one-on-one consultation with you to evaluate your current management system and the natural resources on your land. You will then work with the NRCS conservation planner to select new CSP conservation activities based on your management objectives for your operation.

Once you choose the conservation practices or activities that best fit, and if your application is selected for funding, CSP offers annual payments for implementing these practices on your land, and operating and maintaining existing conservation efforts.



Want to take it a step further? CSP also offers bundles where you can select a suite of enhancements and receive a higher payment rate.

## How Long is a CSP Contract?

Five years, with the potential to renew for another five-year period if you successfully complete your first contract term, and if your renewal application ranks high enough (CSP renewals are a competitive process).

## CSP Eligibility

### Land Eligibility

#### Q. What lands are eligible for CSP?

A. Eligible lands include private agricultural lands, agricultural Indian lands, nonindustrial private forest land, farmstead, associated agricultural lands and public land that is under the control of the applicant and part of their operation. There is no minimum acreage requirement. CSP enrolls your entire operation into the program, not just one specific field or tract. All land must be in compliance with USDA highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions to be eligible for CSP.

#### Q. I am new to farming? Am I eligible for CSP?

A. Not yet. The land must be actively used for producing an agricultural or forest product. Lands being cleared or prepped for future agricultural production are not eligible for CSP until an agricultural operation has been established and crops, food or fiber have been successfully produced. Be sure to check with your local USDA service center before clearing any land to ensure that you will not violate the highly erodible land conservation or wetland conservation requirements. Failing to have NRCS complete proper determinations may impact your ability to participate in USDA programs.

## Producer Eligibility

### Q. Who is eligible to apply for CSP?

A. Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian Tribes that own or rent and currently manage land for agricultural or forest production. The applicant must have a social security number or employer identification number issued by the IRS and must maintain control of the land for the entire span of the 5-year CSP contract. The applicant must have an adjusted gross income of less than \$900,000. The adjusted gross income requirement does not apply to Indian Tribes.

## Stewardship Threshold Eligibility

### Q. What is the stewardship threshold?

A. Stewardship threshold is a term NRCS uses to determine if a CSP applicant is currently meeting or exceeding an adequate level of conservation criteria for a particular natural resource concern. CSP applicants must currently be meeting the stewardship threshold for at least two priority natural resource concerns on every land use included in the operation. They must also agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional resource concern by the end of the contract on at least one land use. Don't worry if you are unsure of your threshold because an NRCS planner will assist you.

## Practice Enhancements and Bundles

### Q. What is a conservation practice?

A. Conservation practices can improve soil, water, plants, air, wildlife habitat, and related natural resources. Each conservation practice must be performed using NRCS practice standards developed by each state.

### Q. What is an enhancement?

A. Enhancements are conservation activities used to treat resource concerns and improve conservation performance.

**Q. What is a bundle?**

- A. Bundles are land-use specific and consist of at least three enhancements, for which implementation as a group improves conservation performance and addresses multiple resource concerns in a comprehensive and cost-effective manner.

Each bundle has three or more required enhancements, and for some bundles, the applicant has the option to pick additional enhancements from a select list that addresses specific resource concerns.

Producers interested in implementing enhancements or bundles on their property can visit with their local NRCS conservation planner to learn more about them.

**CSP Payments****Q. What types of payments are offered through CSP?**

- A. There are three types of payments available through CSP.
1. **Annual contract payments** which are based on two components:
    - Payments to maintain the existing level of conservation based on the land uses included in the contract
    - Payments to implement additional conservation practices and activities.
  2. **Supplemental payments** for producers willing to implement a resource conserving crop rotation, improve an existing resource conserving crop rotation, or implement advanced grazing management
  3. **Minimum contract payments** for most contracts.

**Q. When are payments made?**

- A. NRCS makes payments as soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous fiscal year and completed before September 30.

**Q. Do I have to pay income taxes on my payments?**

- A. Yes. All payments made to you by NRCS are reported to the Internal Revenue Service and should be reported as income on your tax return for the applicable tax year. You will receive a Form 1099 to report CSP payments on your tax return.

**CSP Application and Evaluation****Q. How do I apply for CSP?**

- A. Contact your local NRCS field office and let them know you are interested in CSP. A conservation planner will work with you to determine your stewardship threshold eligibility.

If you are new to working with USDA, you will need to establish your Farm Record with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Establishing a Farm Record requires several forms and documents, so make an appointment with your FSA office as soon as possible.

In addition to your Farm Record documents, you will also need to submit to NRCS:

1. NRCS CPA-1200-Conservation Program Application
2. A map showing all land uses and acres in the operation.
3. A map or other documentation identifying any known ineligible land and associated acreage amounts.

**Q. How are CSP applications evaluated?**

- A. Once NRCS completes an assessment of your operation and you choose the conservation practices or activities that you want to implement, NRCS will rank your application to determine how well your current and future management system will address national, state, and local natural resource priorities.

NRCS will rank your application against other similar eligible applications in the same ranking pool, with the highest scoring applications receiving contract offers first.

**CSP Grassland Conservation Initiative**

CSP offers the new Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI) that aids eligible producers with protecting grazing lands, conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources, and achieving related conservation values through a five-year grassland conservation contract. Eligibility is limited to producers with recorded grass on their FSA acreage report from 2009 through 2017.