

## CONVERTING FROM CRP TO CROPLAND

### OVERVIEW

Many landowners decide to put a portion of their expired CRP acres into cropland. This requires decision-making based on soil and wind erosion, the types of vegetation on your land, your soil nutrient levels, and conservation compliance. If converting to cropland is part of your strategy, here are several important considerations to take into account.

### COMPLIANCE PLANS

USDA conservation compliance includes provisions protecting highly-erodible lands and wetlands. These provisions reduce soil loss on erosion-prone lands and protect wetlands for the multiple benefits they provide (clean water, wildlife habitat, flood control, etc). These provisions apply to all land that is considered highly-erodible or a wetland, and that is owned or farmed by people voluntarily participating in USDA programs (unless USDA determines that an exemption applies).

If you plan to return CRP acres to crop production for a commodity crop, and if you plan to participate in any USDA government program, you must have a conservation compliance plan approved by your local field office and local Soil and Water Conservation District before planting the first commodity crop.

Please note that converting CRP acres is not considered sod-busting, but required treatment levels will vary from county to county.

To comply with these provisions, producers must fill out and sign a form AD-1026 certifying that they will not:

- Plant or produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land without following an NRCS approved conservation plan or system;
- Plant or produce an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland; or
- Convert a wetland which makes the production of an agricultural commodity possible.

In addition, producers planning to conduct activities that may affect their compliance, for example removing fence rows, conducting drainage activities, or combining fields, must notify FSA. NRCS will then provide highly erodible land or wetland technical evaluations and issue determinations if needed.

### EROSION POTENTIAL

Consider the time of year. Normally in the Pacific Northwest, water erosion occurs between December and March and wind erosion occurs from February through May. Your soil erosion conservation practices must be in place during these times. Before taking the land out of CRP, consider some form of erosion protection such as grass residues, terraces, waterways or filter strips. Note that some installed structure structures may have exceeded their expected lifespan and may not meet the standards and specifications of the original NRCS design.

## SOIL TYPES

Erosion is influenced by soil type, slope gradient and length. Sandy and very fine sandy loam soils have a high potential for wind erosion. Silt loam soils in rainfall zones with more than 12 inches of annual rainfall face water erosion potential. The steeper the slope, the higher the potential.

## VEGETATION TYPE

Vegetation characteristics play an important role in your decision to convert to cropland. Bunch grasses such as crested or Siberian wheatgrass and big bluegrass will be easier to remove than a sod-forming grass like pubescent wheatgrass. In high precipitation areas, grasses such as orchardgrass, smooth brome and intermediate wheatgrass may form a dense vegetation. Many grass species may require multiple chemical treatments to achieve control.

In addition, many fields in high precipitation zones (more than 16 inches of annual rainfall) may have been dominated by young pine trees (10 feet or more in height). This scenario would make conversion to cropland much more expensive and would likely require more stringent conservation compliance requirements.



Siberian Wheatgrass

## FERTILITY LEVEL & PESTS

USDA strongly recommends that you get your soil tested in your CRP fields so that you can plan the proper amounts of nutrients required for the succeeding crop. You will need higher levels of fertility in the first year of crop production. Various pests (weeds and diseases) may be at high levels. Cephalosporium Stripe may be at epidemic levels. Consider spring cropping and alternative crops resistant to this disease, such as canola, peas, or spring grains, especially barley. Consider control methods for weeds (such as cheatgrass, wild oats or rye) early-on in your planning.

## CROP RETURN SCHEDULE

Consider the timing of getting the field back into a crop rotation. Adjoining fields, even-odd rotations, the balance of total cropped acres on a farm operation, and wildlife considerations may all influence the time frame of take-out.

Returning to crop production during the same year of a CRP contract expiration, or even in the following year, may not be possible due to limited soil moisture and residue management.

The best possible scenario under the current policy (with CRP take-out initiated 90 days before the contract expires) is in high precipitation zones where a full year of summer fallow will be necessary.

## METHODS OF TAKE-OUT

Your selection of tillage equipment will depend on many factors. USDA recommends that all vegetative growth be returned to the soil. It may be necessary to remove overstory vegetation and dense growth for your tillage equipment to work effectively. You could also use other methods of residue management, such as haying or grazing, after the contract has expired. If burning, follow prescribed burning techniques. The choice of fall versus spring burning depends on the risk factors for fire escape, weather conditions, and the amount of fuel present. Follow all laws and regulations when burning an agricultural field, including obtaining the necessary permits.

The following are some possible scenarios for converting CRP lands to cropland. For specific recommendations in your area, contact your local USDA Service Center.

PRECIPITATION RANGE	ALTERNATIVE 1	ALTERNATIVE 2	ALTERNATIVE 3
<b>Examples of Low Rainfall Area (Less than 12")</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall chisel</li> <li>• Spring herbicide</li> <li>• Spring disc followed by reduced tillage practices</li> <li>• Fall seed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall herbicide</li> <li>• Fall mow</li> <li>• Chemical fallow</li> <li>• Fall seed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall herbicide</li> <li>• Fall mow</li> <li>• Spring herbicide</li> <li>• Legume intensive spring cover crop</li> <li>• Herbicide termination</li> <li>• Early fall direct seed</li> </ul>
<b>Examples of High Rainfall Area (More than 12")</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall chisel</li> <li>• Spring herbicide</li> <li>• Conventional summer fallow</li> <li>• Early fall seed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall herbicide</li> <li>• Fall mow</li> <li>• Vertical tillage</li> <li>• Chemical fallow</li> <li>• Early fall seed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall herbicide</li> <li>• Fall mow</li> <li>• Spring herbicide</li> <li>• Legume intensive spring cover crop</li> <li>• Herbicide termination</li> <li>• Early fall direct seed</li> </ul>



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