United States Department of Agriculture

Conservation Stewardship Program

Your Stewardship Goals. Our Assistance.

Have you ever looked across your property and thought about some land management goals you would like to take to the next level? Maybe we can help.

No one knows more about your land than you do, and no one knows more about conservation than we do. Together we can develop a plan tailored to your land and your goals to help you increase productivity and protect the value of your land.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop yields, or develop wildlife habitat, we can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. We can help you schedule timely planting 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.

Sustainable Production

CSP is for working lands. It is the largest conservation program in the United States with 70 million acres of productive agricultural and forest land enrolled in CSP. Thousands of people have chosen to enroll in the program because it helps them enhance natural resources and improve their business operation.

CSP participants are seeing real results. Some of these benefits include:

- Increase in cattle gains per acre
- Increase in crop yields
- Increase in wildlife populations
- Decrease in producer inputs
- Greater resilience to impacts of weather extremes

Through CSP, we can help you build your business while implementing conservation practices that help ensure the sustainability of your entire operation. Good land stewardship not only conserves the natural resources on your farm, ranch or forest, it also provides multiple benefits to local communities, including better water and air quality and wildlife habitat, as well as food and fiber.

Management Makes a Difference

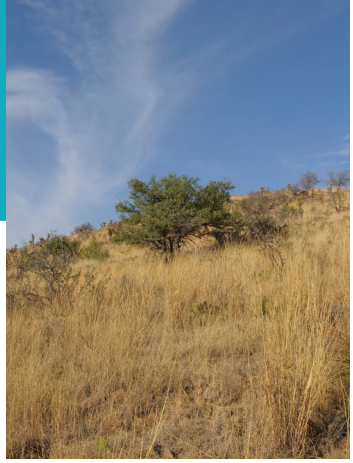
Every piece of property is unique with opportunities to improve natural resources and address any areas of concern. Human activities contribute to the condition of natural resources on the land -- they can help improve them or contribute to their decline, which can result in what we refer to as a “resource concern.” We can help you recognize the resources on your land and develop a management plan to improve them. Examples of CSP management activities that can improve resource concerns are:

- Grazing management to improve wildlife habitat
- Extend filter strips to reduce excess sediment, nutrients and chemicals in surface water

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

www.nrcs.usda.gov

Conservation Stewardship Program



- Plant cover crops to reduce wind and water erosion
- Plant range grasses to improve soil health and wildlife habitat

How does CSP Work?

Most agriculture producers approved to participate in CSP have already been implementing conservation practices on their land. CSP steps in and offers enhancements for those practices. For example, if you have been practicing prescribed grazing, CSP would give you options to enhance that practice with activities such as grazing management to improve plants for wildlife, or grazing management to reduce soil compaction, or grazing management to improve riparian function, just to name a few.

If you decide to enroll in 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. Then the NRCS conservation planner will present a variety of CSP enhancement alternatives for you to consider implementing on your land, based on existing conservation practices. The variety of CSP practices that are offered give you a lot of freedom to select enhancements that help you meet your management goals. These improvements work naturally with your land to bring out your land's best potential.

Once you choose the enhancements that best fit your operation, CSP offers annual incentive payments for installing these practices on your land. If you want to take it even a step further, CSP also offers bundles where you can select a suite of enhancements to implement and receive an even higher payment rate.

Investment in the Future

From enrollment to planning and implementation, many CSP participants feel the process of working with their NRCS conservation planner helps build an awareness about the resources on their land and helps them look at their land in a more comprehensive and engaging manner. Most participants find that the reporting and tracking that they do in CSP gives them valuable information to refine their operation and make management adjustments that have a positive outcome on their land and their bottom line.

CSP Contracts

The program represents a genuine commitment to conservation – CSP contracts are for five years, with the option to renew if you successfully fulfill the initial contract and agree to achieve additional conservation objectives. An NRCS conservation planner will work closely with you throughout the entire process.

Contract payments are based on two components:

- payments to maintain the existing conservation based on the operation type and number of resource concerns that are meeting the stewardship level at the time of application and
- payments to implement additional conservation activities.

All CSP contracts will have a minimum annual payment of $1500.

You will be required to maintain the stewardship level of the resource concerns you are already meeting plus meet or exceed at least one additional resource concern in each land use by the end of the contract. If the objectives of the initial CSP contract are achieved, you may be eligible to re-enroll for an additional 5 year contract if you agree to adopt additional conservation activities to meet or exceed two additional priority resource concerns.

Am I eligible for CSP?

To participate in CSP, you must be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements, and have current farm records with USDA Farm Service Agency. You must have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract, be actively engaged in the day-to-day management of the agricultural operation and share in the risks associated with agricultural production. You must also be meeting the stewardship threshold for at least two resource concerns at the time of application. Contact your local NRCS office to learn more about the program and determine if you meet these requirements.

How do I apply?

If you feel like you are ready to take your conservation efforts to the next level – we are here to help. You can apply for CSP any time throughout the year but there will be announced cutoff dates for ranking and funding opportunities. For more information on applications visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp or visit your local Service Center.