

Applications will be accepted through Jan. 7, 2011.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has extended the ranking period cut-off date for producers to apply for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to Jan. 7, 2011.

CSP is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones on their operations.

NRCS Chief Dave White said, "We're extending the deadline for applications to CSP to provide agricultural producers more time to complete their applications.

This will help farmers, ranchers and forestry producers by giving them more time and hopefully allow even more producers to participate in this program."

CSP has been a very successful program for Nebraska's farmers and ranchers, according to Steve Chick, NRCS state conservationist.

"So far, Nebraska has 1,106 CSP contracts covering over 1.8 million acres. The average contract earns \$18,200 a year," said Chick. "CSP participants receive an annual land use payment for the environmental benefits they produce on their operation. Under CSP, participants are paid for conservation performance—the higher the operational performance, the higher their payment."

CSP is available statewide. The program provides many conservation benefits including improvement of water and soil quality, wildlife habitat enhancement and adoption of conservation practices that address the effects of climate change.

Producers are encouraged to apply for CSP at their local NRCS office.

The program, authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill, offers payments to producers who maintain a high level of conservation on their land and who agree to adopt higher levels of stewardship.

Eligible land includes cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

Additional assistance is available to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if CSP is suitable for their operation.

The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, contract obligations and potential payments.

It is available from local NRCS offices or online at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html.