

Farm, ranch and forest land operators have until Jan. 7, 2011, to apply for the Conservation Stewardship Program.

The current signup for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) will end Jan. 7. The Natural Resources Conservation Service administers CSP and is reminding operators to apply soon.

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary conservation program designed to encourage agricultural and forestry producers to adopt additional conservation practices and improve, maintain and manage existing ones. In return for their stewardship, producers will receive a payment.

CSP pays participants for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment. Producers get credit for conservation measures they have already implemented and for new measures they agree to add.

CSP is offered statewide through a continuous sign-up, with announced cut-off dates for ranking and funding applications.

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 Natural Resources Conservation Service office. 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 Natural Resources Conservation Service offices or online at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html.