

*NRCS says Feb. 7 deadline makes it possible for more producers to apply.*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has extended the deadline for new enrollments in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) for fiscal year 2014. Producers interested in participating in the program can submit applications to NRCS through Feb. 7.

CSP is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation practices and adopt new ones in their operations. Eligible land includes cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial forestland and agricultural land under jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

According to NRCS State Conservationist Craig Derickson, the CSP is a popular program in Nebraska.

"Nebraska farmers and ranchers are good stewards of the land. The Conservation Stewardship Program is a good fit for Nebraska producers. It rewards the good conservation actions they've already taken and helps provide incentives to make further improvements to their operations. These actions help make Nebraska's agricultural land more productive and sustainable over the long run, which benefits all Nebraskans," Derickson said.

The program emphasizes conservation performance—producers earn higher payments for higher performance. In CSP, producers install conservation enhancements to make positive changes in soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, animal resources and energy use.

According to the Nebraska NRCS, the Conservation Stewardship Program has been a very successful program for Nebraska's farmers and ranchers. Over 2,500 CSP contracts occur in all 93 counties and cover 4.8 million acres in Nebraska.

Eligible landowners and operators can enroll in CSP through Feb. 7 to be eligible during fiscal 2014. While local NRCS offices accept CSP applications year round, NRCS evaluates applications during announced ranking periods. To be eligible for this year's enrollment, producers must have their applications submitted to NRCS by the closing date.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements and payment types.