



Conservation Title: Working Lands Programs

Amanda R. Smith¹ and Wes L. Harris²

¹Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics,

²Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development,
The University of Georgia

AGECON-FB-08-09

Revised March 2009

Introduction

Working lands programs within the conservation title are programs where farmers or ranchers are provided incentive payments or cost share funds to encourage the maintenance and adoption of conservation practices on eligible agricultural lands to improve soil, water and air quality, wildlife habitat and other environmental resource concerns. The two main working lands programs in the conservation title are the Conservation Stewardship Program, formerly Conservation Security Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. A short summary of both programs and the changes that will occur as a result of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) are summarized for each program in the following paragraphs.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), formerly known as the Conservation Security Program, allows an eligible farmer or rancher (*producer* through the rest of this fact sheet) to enter into a contract to receive technical and financial assistance to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining and managing existing conservation activities.

Changes to the CSP:

- The Conservation Security Program is terminated.
 - New security contracts may not be renewed/entered into after September 30, 2008.
 - The terms and conditions of the conservation security program shall continue to apply to all running conservation security contracts.
- The Conservation Stewardship Program is authorized during fiscal years 2009 through 2012.
- Eligible cropland must have been planted 4 of 6 years preceding enactment of the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Eligible producers must meet the stewardship threshold for at least one resource concern and meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional priority resource concern by the end of the contract.
- Contract length is 5 years with an option to renew for one additional five-year period.
- Three to 5 priority resource concerns in a particular watershed or other appropriate region within a state will be identified.
- Producers may initiate organic certification while participating in a CSP contract.
- Outreach and technical assistance must be made available to specialty crop and organic producers.
- An additional 12,769,000 acres for each fiscal year shall be enrolled.
- The national average target payment rate should be \$18 per acre, including the costs of all financial and technical assistance.
- Payments will be for installing and adopting additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing any conservation activities already in place on the land.

- Adds payments to producers that adopt resource-conserving crop rotations.
 - Defines a resource-conserving crop rotation as one that provides natural resource conservation and production benefits.
- Payment limits are \$200,000 during any 5-year period, regardless of the number of contracts entered into under the program by the producer.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) allows a producer to enter into a 1 to 10 year contract to receive technical and financial assistance to install and maintain conservation practices that sustain food and fiber production while enhancing soil, water, and related natural resources, and conserving energy on eligible agricultural land.

Changes to the EQIP:

- Reauthorizes the EQIP through fiscal year 2012.
- Adds conservation planning activities, such as developing a nutrient management plan, as eligible practices.
- Maintains that 60 percent of funds shall be targeted at practices relating to livestock production.
- Producers can receive payments for water conservation or efficient irrigation practices.
- Producers can receive payments for conservation practices related to organic production and the transition to organic production.
 - Payments may not exceed \$20,000 per year, or \$80,000 during any 6-year period, for organic production and transition to organic production.
- Adds criteria during application evaluation to ensure that national, state and local conservation priorities are effectively addressed.
- Payment limits are reduced to \$300,000 during any six-year period, except in contracts for projects of special environmental significance (i.e. methane digesters) the limit may be waived to \$450,000 during any six-year period.
- The Conservation Innovation Grants are continued.
 - Adds an Air Quality Concerns program to address air quality concerns from agricultural operations and to meet Federal, State, and local regulatory requirements.
 - Funded at \$37.5 million for each fiscal year 2009-2012.
- Creates an Agricultural Water Enhancement Program to encourage producers to enhance water use efficiency and water conservation.
 - Eligible activities include a water conservation plan, converting to less water intensive agricultural commodities or dryland farming, enhancing irrigation efficiency and system improvements, and activities designed to mitigate the effects of drought.
 - Funding is \$73 million for fiscal years 2009-2010, \$74 million for fiscal year 2011 and \$60 million for fiscal year 2012 and each fiscal year thereafter.
- Overall funding for the EQIP during fiscal years 2009-2012 is \$7.325 billion.

The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Fort Valley State University, US Department of Agriculture, and counties of the state cooperating. The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Cooperative Extension Service offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, gender, or disability.

An equal opportunity / affirmative action organization committed to a diverse work force.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and US Department of Agriculture cooperating.

**J. Scott Angle, Dean and Director
Beverly Sparks, Associate Dean for Extension**