

74. GOVERNMENT CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

We support:

1. Conservation programs with a focus on protecting environmentally sensitive areas with filter strips, buffers, and other beneficial practices while reducing overall program costs.
2. Legislation which ensures that both tenant and landlord interests will be fairly protected.
3. Limitations on participation rates so as not to adversely affect local farm land rental rates.

FSA Programs

We support:

1. The continued funding of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through current methods, plus private sources or contributions (e.g. conservation groups, hunting groups, and environmental groups) to remove fragile lands from production.
2. Basing the judging criteria for CRP enrollment upon the land's erosion potential as cropland and not on its current erosion status.
3. An expansion of the continuous sign up CRP acreage to include:
 - A. Filter strips along waterways.
 - B. Greater widths of waterways, filter strips, field borders, and riparian buffers.
 - C. Setbacks at road intersections.
 - D. Crop protection product setbacks around tile inlet structures.
 - E. Up to one acre filter strips around standpipes and other intakes where surface water enters directly into subsurface water.
 - F. Grassed terraces.
 - G. Buffers around villages, timbered areas, irrigation reservoirs, ponds, and stormwater retention basins.
 - H. Expanding the statewide allocations on field borders and upland restoration projects.
 - I. Approving a 20 percent incentive for all projects using native prairie grasses, forbs, shrubs, or trees.
 - J. Allowing enrollment of and acceptance of "infeasible to farm" acres (an area that is too small or isolated to be economically farmed).
 - K. Farms declared not insurable in the crop insurance program because of wildlife crop damage to be eligible to be enrolled in the CRP.
4. The practice of planting vegetative filter strips along both sides of ditches and waterways to improve water quality. Strips of variable widths should be eligible for the CRP.
5. Programs being made available to give farmers viable economic options to traditional crop production following expiration of CRP contracts.
6. The ability of all drainage district easements to be included in the CRP filter strip program.
7. Provisions that would allow farmers and landowners to terminate participation in the CRP if the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) cannot meet the agreed contractual payment amount within 30 days of its due date or is forced by budget constraints to reduce the annual payment amount as set forth in the CRP contract. If the farmer opts out of the CRP all past due monies will be paid with accrued interest.
8. Continuation of CRP on fragile and environmentally sensitive lands formerly enrolled in CRP if the CRP is not continued at current levels. Qualified land areas should be determined by county Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
9. Encouraging the USDA to give adequate credit during CRP sign ups for areas throughout the nation that experience wind erosion on sandy soils.
10. The broadening of criteria for enrollment or re-enrollment of land in CRP. Examples of the criteria include but are not limited to:
 - A. Land with the highest Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).
 - B. Land targeted based on type of CRP cover or conservation practice, with priority given to land in trees, alley cropping, or with special conservation attributes.
 - C. Land targeted based on water quality, air quality, soil quality, and wildlife.

- D. Land that, if cultivated, would be most damaging to the environment. For example, land that would likely opt out of farm programs and conservation compliance due to high compliance costs.
11. The elimination of the Erodibility Index as an exclusionary consideration for concentrated CRP sign up.
 12. Wildlife habitat improvement, especially on CRP acreage.
 13. The Conservation Reserve Program's State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practice that provides financial incentives to producers.
 14. Recognition in the EBI that qualifying established cover practices on acreages being re-enrolled in the CRP provide certain benefits over destroying existing stands to plant preferred species.
 15. The evaluation of all CRP property by the county NRCS office staff to ensure that previously recommended Best Management Practices (BMPs) have been maintained before the property can be re-enrolled in CRP.
 16. Haying and grazing of CRP acres at the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture in weather-related or other emergency situations in a timely manner.
 17. Each state Farm Service Agency (FSA) office determining CRP rates and acreage qualifications as opposed to the national USDA office.
 18. Increasing the enrollment of filter strips in the CRP and offering incentives for re-enrollment.
 19. The continuation and expansion of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) with full funding.
 20. Any increase to national CRP acreage cap that prioritizes continuous sign up selection of most environmentally sensitive ground and limit acres for future sign up.

We oppose:

1. Any effort to allow the public to automatically use or have access to private property that is enrolled in CRP.
2. Further changes in CRP which would allow conservation acreage to be brought back into permanent production before the ten-year contract expires.
3. The use of CRP land for biomass fuel production without a corresponding reduction in CRP payments.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Programs

We support:

1. Allowing an exemption to the NRCS manual for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) money to be used for streambank stabilization practices prior to the adjacent land's expiration in a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract or a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contract.
2. The continuation and expansion of the EQIP and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with full funding, as long as these programs complement - but do not replace - programs in the new farm bill.
3. Providing a clear explanation of the CSP that would create interest and help more farmers qualify for this program.

State of Illinois Programs

We support:

1. The Illinois Department of Agriculture creating and implementing conservation programs for Illinois farmers.