

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Stewardship Program



WHAT IS CSP?

The [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) is for producers who want to take their conservation efforts to the next level. Most CSP applicants have already been applying conservation practices to their land. Through CSP, they have the opportunity to give those practices a boost with conservation activities called "enhancements" or "enhancement bundles." Enhancements take conservation practices to a higher level of stewardship than what may be more commonly associated with programs like the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#).

After determining that they meet the USDA's eligibility criteria bulleted below outlined under "AM I ELIGIBLE?," CSP applicants work one-on-one with an NRCS conservation planner in their nearest USDA Field Office to select enhancements or enhancement bundles that best fit their management goals and that will address [resource concerns](#) on the enrolled operation – in particular, emphasis on CSP contract ranking will be to operations whose resource concerns are also on the [state NRCS' prioritized resource concerns list](#) for that particular land use. *At least one enhancement or practice per land use (i.e. cropland, pastureland, forestland, farmstead, etc.) needs to be selected in CSP.*

Through CSP, producers can choose from over 200 enhancements, enhancement bundles, and/or other specific conservation practice standards to address resource concerns on their operation. Look to [this list of potential "enhancement" and "enhancement bundles" options](#) for more information. You can also look to [this list for conservation practices](#) that may be available in your state's CSP program that stand alone outside of the "enhancement" and "enhancement bundles" options.

CSP contracts are for five years. An NRCS conservation planner will work closely with you throughout the entire process – from applying to CSP, to notifying you if and when your application is ranked and funded, to helping certify your annual payments and selected enhancements and practices through the lifetime of your CSP contract.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

To participate in CSP, you must meet the three eligibility criteria for the [APPLICANT](#), [LAND](#), and [STEWARDSHIP THRESHOLD](#).

Are you an eligible *applicant*?

- Must be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements,
- Must have current farm records with USDA Farm Service Agency for all acreage you own or lease for your operation on file,
- Must have effective control of the land (written lease or similar written documentation) for the CSP contract term – 5 years
- Must be actively engaged in the day-to-day management of the agricultural operation and share in the risks associated with agricultural production

Is all *land* – both owned and leased by your operation - eligible?

- All eligible land (everything operated by entity or individual even if in multiple counties) must be enrolled in CSP. This means under the effective control of the applicant, operated by the applicant with equipment, labor and management and have an established documented management system. You should have Farm and Tracts established before starting planning.

Does your management meet or exceed the CSP *stewardship threshold*?

- At least [two resource concerns](#) on all land uses must have been met at the time of CSP application and these must be identified and confirmed by the NRCS planner the operator is in consultation with.
- For forest land use, forest stands should meet Forestry Tech Note 10 densities.

HOW DO I APPLY?

Step 1: Complete and submit all required USDA paperwork to NRCS & FSA. [View and download](#) the current application packet.

Step 2: Once you are set-up in the system, then an NRCS planner will schedule a site visit to begin the second phase of your CSP application – the planning phase. The NRCS planner utilizes the [9-step conservation planning process](#) to work with you to identify the current challenges and interested enhancements and practices you would like to pursue with CSP. This phase typically takes 1-3 months on the part of the NRCS planner working with you. An initial site visit to your property with potentially a few follow-up visits to confirm and review your planning paperwork will be part of this step.

Step 3: Once you and the NRCS planner have reviewed your planning documentation and you have selected with the planner the CSP enhancements or enhancement bundles you would like to pursue, then your application is submitted to NRCS for ranking and prioritizing. This phase of the application process typically occurs over a period of 3-6 months, oftentimes in the January - Apr–I timeframe, and can vary on each federal fiscal year.

Step 4: You will be notified by your NRCS planner once your application has been [reviewed, ranked](#), and if it has been prioritized for funding. If prioritized, a contract will be presented and explained in detail to you by your NRCS planner. You will be asked to review this in person and only until you sign the contract will you be able to start the official five-year CSP window of enhancement and practice work. Do not start work sooner than a contract being signed between you and NRCS.

Step 5: If you are awarded a contract and you agree to the terms and conditions and sign, then your NRCS planner will work with you to help you implement the agreed upon enhancements and/or practices based on your contract stipulations and timeline. As a reminder, CSP contracts are for a minimum of five years, but some of the enhancements might only occur in a particular time window of that five-year period, dependent on the enhancement or practice. Each contract will be unique to the CSP applicant and will be discussed in great detail during the planning phase Steps 2-4 and prior to the signing of the contract. Your NRCS planner will work with you to ensure that your yearly required documentation per your CSP contract is updated and that you receive your CSP payments based on submission of those documents.

WHAT DOES A CSP CONTRACT PAYMENT LOOK LIKE?

CSP represents a genuine commitment and interest on behalf of the applicant to enhance the stewardship of the natural resources on their land. If a CSP contract is presented to you by NRCS during the ranking process, and if after discussing the details of the contract and timeline with your NRCS planner you decide to sign the contract, then in order to receive the payments listed below, *you will be required to maintain the stewardship level of the resource concerns you are already meeting as addressed in your planning application phase, plus meet or exceed at least 1 additional resource concern per each land use by the end of the contract.*

If the objectives of the initial CSP contract are achieved, you may be eligible to reenroll for an additional five year contract if you agree to adopt additional conservation activities (enhancements, enhancement bundles, or specific conservation practices) to meet or exceed 2 additional [state prioritized resource concerns](#) not already addressed in the first five year contract.

CSP contract payments each year are based on the following:

- *a yearly payment of \$1500 minimum for each of the five years of the contract* (this amount could be higher if you have larger acreages and land uses enrolled in CSP – i.e. crop, pasture, range, forest, farmstead, and associated ag-land - but the yearly payment does not go below \$1500 annually regardless of acreage size of operation), and
- *a yearly payment to maintain the current conservation practices that address a specified number of known resource concerns as determined by your NRCS planner during your CSP application planning phase* (and of those identified, how many are current state prioritized resource concerns that are met), and
- *a one-time payment for implementing additional specific enhancements, enhancement bundles, and/or conservation practices during the five-year CSP contract* (each enhancement, enhancement bundles, and/or conservation practice added to your contract will have a specific monetary amount associated with it based on payment rates defined by the NRCS state office and your own NRCS contract).

CARE TO LEARN MORE AND GET STARTED? Contact your local NRCS Field Office by visiting the [Service Center Locator map](#).

We look forward to working with you!