

Green Payments Are Here, Are you Ready?

The carrot has finally arrived for those who have a history of farming with conservation. That carrot can boost local farm income up to **\$20,000-\$45,000** per year or **\$15-\$40/acre**. The vehicle for this new program is called the Conservation Security Program.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a unique federal program created in the 2002 farm bill that pays farmers for conservation that they are currently doing. The philosophy behind CSP is that it is a way to reward farmers for doing soil and water quality conservation on working farmland, as well as for implementing new practices that further improve land stewardship.

CSP is made available through an eight-year, watershed-based rotation. In 2004, the Blue Earth Watershed was the first to be selected in Minnesota. Five additional watersheds were selected across the state for 2005.

“Although no watersheds have been selected in Nicollet County, we speculate that either the Middle Major or Lower Major Watersheds will be picked in the near future so we are encouraging all producers interested in applying for CSP to start preparing now,” states Kevin Kuehner, Watershed Manager in Saint Peter.

Yamika Stokes, Nicollet County District Conservationist says, “Preparing Nicollet County producers in advance will give them an edge on maximizing the amount of payment that could be received.”

“What’s also great about CSP is that it compliments a host of other conservation programs,” adds Kuehner. Popular programs include the continuous CRP program. This program pays annual rental rates of about \$100-\$155/acre for 10-15 years in return for leaving strips of vegetated filters along drainage ditches and streams, or restoring small wetlands. In addition the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers incentive payments up \$30/acre for switching to conservation tillage or \$8/acre for developing and following a certified nutrient management plan. Interested farmers can use these voluntary programs to help elevate their conservation to a CSP eligible level.

Kevin Kuehner and Yamika Stokes, have developed a Top Ten List of activities that farmers can do now to prepare for CSP.

1. Keep field specific records.
2. Apply commercial and manure fertilizers at University of Minnesota Recommendations.
3. Develop realistic yield goals.
4. Have soil tests taken within the past 4 years and manure analysis within the past year.

5. Practice conservation tillage (leaving at least 30% of the previous crops residue after planting).
6. Install filter strips, grass waterways, or wetlands in marginal or environmentally sensitive cropland areas.
7. Develop and follow nutrient, pesticide and grazing management plans.
8. Obtain longer leases. You need to show you have control of rented property over the length of the 5 or 10 year CSP contract.
9. Complete a CSP self assessment book (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/>)
10. Be ready and gather information. Since the final rules on CSP are still being developed talk to your local NRCS, Extension Service and Watershed staff for up to date program information and changes.

Nicollet County Farmers and Landowners will have the opportunity to learn more about these programs and eligibility requirements at an informational meeting held on Tuesday, March 8, at the Nicollet Conservation Club. There will be two meeting times: 2:00-4:00 p.m. or 6:00-8:00 p.m. For questions contact the Nicollet NRCS office at 507-931-2550, ext 115.