



FACTS ABOUT THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP) IN GEORGIA¹

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Introduction

USDA recently announced the next general signup for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) **May 5 to May 30, 2003**. With this in mind, interested producers and landowners are encouraged to call their local USDA-FSA office as soon as possible to schedule an appointment.

Important Changes From Previous CRP Signups

- Participants will be able to hay or graze up to 1/3 of their CRP acreage every year. This haying or grazing cannot occur during the nesting period (May-August 31). Payment will be reduced according to the economic value of the haying or grazing by an amount **Up To but Not More Than** the annual rental payment.
- Required cropping history changed from 3 of previous 5 to 4 of previous 6

What is CRP?

CRP is a voluntary program offered to producers and landowners to help them protect environmentally sensitive land. In exchange for planting long-term resource-conserving covers such as native grasses, improved grasses, and trees; participants receive an annual rental payment from USDA. The length of the agreement is 10-15 years. In addition to the annual rental payment, participants may also qualify for up to 50 percent cost-share on approved practices.

Eligible Land

Eligible land includes:

- CRP land that has a contract scheduled to expire this year
- Cropland (including field margins) that was planted or considered planted 4 of the previous 6 years from 1996 to 2001 and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. *Included in this description is conserving use land that is planted/established in alfalfa and other multiyear grasses and legumes or summer fallow.*
- Certain marginal pastureland that is enrolled in the Water Bank Program

Payments

Participants can receive up to 4 different type payments

1. Rental Payment – Participants receive an annual payment from USDA for enrolling in the CRP. This payment is for a specified rate per acre for the number of acres enrolled.
2. Maintenance Incentive Payments – Participants receive an additional \$5 per acre for performing certain maintenance obligations. This \$5 is automatically added to the rental payment.

¹ Sincere appreciation is expressed to Mr. Clark Weaver, Section Chief –Price Support/Conservation/Compliance, USDA-FSA for his review and input into this publication.

3. Cost-share Assistance – participants who establish certain approved covers may receive up to 50 percent cost-share for the establishment of these covers. This cost-share assistance is a one-time payment.
4. Management Payments – Participants are also eligible for cost share payments for any required management practice that may be required during the life span of the practice.

Signing Up

To enroll in the program potential participants make an offer to FSA where they specify the property (farm, tract, and/or field) to be enrolled in the program along with the rental rate and any cost-share assistance. In essence, participants tell FSA how much money they will accept for enrolling the land in the program. FSA then accepts or rejects the offer based on the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI), rental rate, and amount of cost-share.

PARTICIPANTS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE THEIR CHANCES OF ACCEPTANCE BY:

1. **Offering the property at less than the maximum rental rate**
2. **Reducing or eliminating the level of cost share**
3. **Maximizing the EBI**

The Environmental Benefits Index is the primary way offers are ranked in order for FSA to determine if the offer is accepted. Possible practices that can help participants receive the maximum points are given below. **Interested participants should consult with their local FSA office for the full list of alternatives and points available.**

1. Wildlife 0-100 points
 - a. Wildlife Habitat Cover 0-50 points. Participants get the most points (50) for planting:
 - i. Softwood pines (slash or loblolly) at 500-550 per acre depending on the site index (50 points) AND planting a mixed stand (minimum of 4 species) of the following: at least 2 shrub or tree species and at least one grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed.
Or,
 - ii. Mixed stand (3 or more species) of hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area (50 points). Or,
 - iii. Longleaf pines planted at rates appropriate for the site (50 points).
Or,
 - iv. Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least three native grasses and at least one shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in area or 5 or more species: big bluestem (1 lb. PLS²), Indiangrass (1 lb. PLS), little bluestem (1 lb. PLS), and Southeastern wildflower mix (0.25 lbs.). Or,
 - v. Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least three native grasses and at least one shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in area or any native prairie restoration mix of 5 or more species: little bluestem (1 lb. PLS), switchgrass (1/4 lb. PLS), Indiangrass (1 lb. PLS), partridge pea (2 lbs.) or annual lespedeza (2 lbs., common,

2 PLS = Pure Live Seed

kobe, or korean lespedeza), wild plum (clumps or strips no more than 1/10 of field, clumps 20 foot diameter or 15-20 foot wide strip), or bicolor or Amquail lespedeza (0.1 ac/10 ac., only in a strip 15 feet wide). Or,

- vi. Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least three native grasses and at least one shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in area or any native prairie restoration mix of 5 or more species: switchgrass (1/4 lb. PLS), Atlantic Coastal panicgrass (1 lb. PLS), little bluestem (1 lb. PLS), partridge pea (2 lbs.), annual lespedeza (2 lbs., common, kobe, or korean), and Southeastern wildflower mix (1 lb.). Or,
 - vii. Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least three native grasses and at least one shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in area or 5 more species: little bluestem (1 lb. PLS), Indiangrass (1 lb. PLS), switchgrass (1/4 lb. PLS), Maximillian sunflower (2 lbs.), and plum or crabapple (clumps or strips no more than 1/10 of field, clumps 20 foot diameter or 15-20 foot wide strips). Or,
 - viii. Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least three native grasses and at least one shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in area or 5 or more species: switchgrass (1/4 lbs. PLS), little bluestem (2 lbs. PLS), Eastern gamagrass (2 lbs. PLS), and 1/3 of field naturally seeded native forbs and legumes, 1/10 of field plums, or crabapple, or blackberry, American beautyberry, or similar type native shrubs (this can be a mixture) established in clumps or strips no more than 1/10 of the field, with clumps 20 feet in diameter or a 15-20 foot wide strip. Or,
 - ix. Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least 2 shrub or tree species and predominately 2 native grass species including grasses, forb, or legume, shrubs, or trees planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited for various wildlife species in the area.
- b. Wildlife enhancement 0,5, or 20 points. Participants can receive 20 points for conversion of primarily a monoculture of relatively low wildlife habitat to native species that provide enhanced wildlife benefits.
 - c. Wildlife priority area 0 or 30 points. Participants can receive the 30 points if the offered tract is located in a specified wildlife priority area. In Georgia, counties located in the Longleaf Pine Initiative area are eligible to receive these 30 points.
2. Water Quality Benefits from Reduced Erosion, Runoff, and Leaching 0-100 points. These points are determined by the watershed location of the tract in the state and the soil type and leaching indices of the property offered.
 - a. Location 0 or 30 points. If 51 percent of the offered property is located in a state identified Hydrologic Unit Area (HUA) then 30 points are awarded. A map of HUAs in Georgia is given below.
 - b. Groundwater quality 0-25 points
 - c. Surface water quality 0-45 points
 3. Erosion Factor 0-100 points. More erodible soils receive higher scores.

If the offer is accepted, then the participant enters into a formal agreement with FSA. If the offer is rejected the participant can modify either one or all of the property offered, the rental rate, and the level of cost-share and “re-offer”.

Limitations

The above description of the application and ranking process is intended as a guide only. Interested landowners and participants should consult with their local USDA-FSA office for additional information and clarification.

Additional Information

Conservation Reserve Program Sign-up 26 May 5- May 30, 2003. USDA-FSA Fact Sheet available at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/html/crp26sign03.htm>

Figure 1
Hydrologic Unit Areas (HUA) in Georgia

