

NRCS awards CSP contracts

By PAULA MOHR

OVER the past few weeks, 850 farmers and landowners have been receiving notices from the Minnesota USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office, informing them that they have been awarded contracts for the new Conservation Stewardship Program.

Key Points

- Conservation Stewardship Program is NRCS' premiere working lands program.
- About 850 farmers in Minnesota were accepted into the new program.
- Some farmers will receive a maximum of \$200,000 during the five-year contract.

ardship Program.

Paul Flynn, state resource conservationist, says that 1,700 applications from across the state were received during the initial sign-up period that ran from early August through September. From those applicants, more than 1,200 completed the stewardship sign-up process, which included an Extension evaluation

and interview of the applicants' current and intended conservation activities.

Farmers selected for the program on average will receive \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year during

the contract's five-year duration. Some recipients will receive the maximum \$40,000 per year. Projects total \$9.6 million per year. Contract payments will begin later this fall.

The new CSP, formerly called the Conservation Security Program and retooled by Congress in the 2008 Farm Bill, offers a more expansive conservation program by accepting applications from all eligible participants instead of specific designated watersheds.

CSP remains a voluntary program that encourages farmers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities while improving, maintaining and managing existing conservation activities. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to eligible producers. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, rangeland, agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe, and other private agricultural land (including cropped woodland, marshes and agricultural land used for the production of livestock). CSP payments are determined for each land use on a conservation performance basis and are not dependent on the successful implementation of specific conservation actions.

The annual national CSP goal is to enroll nearly 13 million acres into the program throughout the duration of the farm bill. Each state has been given a CSP acreage allocation based on the proportional amount of eligible lands.

In Minnesota

Minnesota's CSP acre allocation was 372,744 acres of ag lands and 34,909 acres of forestland. Approved applicants will immediately begin to implement the conservation actions associated with their contracts. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis and will be annually evaluated for funding at the time of an announced application period. Flynn expects that to be in this fiscal year, probably around April, May or June.

"With this being the newest program, it received the least amount of recognition," Flynn says. "We hope that more farmers find out about it, and more will be interested in the next sign-up. With CSP, USDA recognizes the benefits of working lands to protect our natural resources. CSP is the premiere working lands program."

For more information, visit www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp2/index.html or your local NRCS field office.



PAUL FLYNN

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