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USDA Accepting Applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will make available \$100 million this year through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and although applications are accepted all year, farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners should submit applications by February 27, 2015, to ensure they are considered for this year's funding.

"CSP is a way of encouraging farmers, ranchers, and private forest managers who maintain a high level of conservation on their land and agree to adopt higher levels of stewardship," said Eric B. Banks, NRCS State Conservationist in Kansas. "By focusing on multiple resource concerns, landowners are able to achieve a sustainable landscape and maintain or increase the productivity of their operations."

Through CSP, participants take additional conservation steps to improve the resource conditions on their land, including soil, air and habitat quality, water quality and quantity, and energy conservation.

The 2014 Farm Bill brought changes to CSP including an expanded conservation activity list that will offer participants greater options to meet their conservation needs and protect the natural resources on their land. These conservation activities, called enhancements, include cover crops, intensive rotational grazing, and wildlife-friendly fencing.

CSP will also help broaden the impacts of NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives through a new pilot effort, which accelerates private lands conservation activities to address particular goals, such as creating habitat for at-risk species and conserving water. In Kansas, they include the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative and the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative.

Applications should be submitted to local NRCS offices. As part of the CSP application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land, which will help determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. To be eligible for this year's enrollment, eligible landowners and operators in Kansas must have their applications submitted to NRCS by the February 27, 2015, closing date.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements, and payment types.

For the checklist and additional information, visit the CSP Web site

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/>

or visit your local USDA NRCS office. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.