

# Conservation Reserve Program

## 62nd General Signup Period Environmental Benefits Index (EBI)



### Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is conducting a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general enrollment from March 4 through 29, 2024.

CRP is a federally-funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead is devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality, and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. Approved contracts for the general CRP signup period will begin Oct. 1, 2024.

CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 and was reauthorized by the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). The 2018 Farm Bill was extended by the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22). FSA administers CRP, while other USDA agencies and partners provide technical support. More detailed information on CRP is available in the FSA fact sheet, "**Conservation Reserve Program 62nd General Signup Period**, March 4 through 29, 2024."

### Ranking CRP Offers

FSA will rank offers submitted by landowners for the 62nd general CRP signup period according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each EBI factor based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered.

EBI rankings are unique for each tract of land offered for general CRP.

FSA assigns each offer a score based on the offer's relative environmental factors. Each offer competes with all other offers. FSA determines the acceptability of the offer based on the ranking results.



For the 62nd general CRP signup period, FSA will use the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered, as follows:

- ◆ Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acres (N1);
- ◆ Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching (N2);
- ◆ On-farm benefits from reduced erosion (N3);
- ◆ Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period (N4);
- ◆ Air quality benefits (N5) and;
- ◆ Cost (N6).

### For More Information

For more information on FSA programs, eligibility and related information, visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov). To locate your local FSA office, visit: [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

*This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions or requirements may apply. Consult your local FSA office for details.*



## N1 - Wildlife Habitat Cover Benefits: (0 to 100 Points)

Factor N1 is an evaluation of the expected wildlife benefits of the offer and is comprised of three subfactors (N1a-c). The formula for N1 = N1a + N1b + N1c.

### ◆ N1a - Cover (0 to 50 points)

This subfactor is an evaluation of the wildlife habitat cover offered. FSA assigns points for cover practice planting mixtures based on the potential value to wildlife within each state. FSA awards higher scores for cover types that are more beneficial to wildlife. Local USDA Service Centers have a list of approved planting mixes and the assigned point scores for each cover mix. Point scores are based on the weighted average score for cover mixes the producer selects. Native mixes of diverse species generally receive the highest point scores. Eligible cover practices under the N1a criteria are in Table 1.

*(Producers should note that wildlife habitat cover selection is the most critical factor impacting wildlife benefits. Optimum cover types significantly increase the point score for this factor).*

### ◆ N1b - Wildlife Enhancement (0, 5 or 20 points)

This subfactor provides up to 20 points for actions producers take to enhance the wildlife benefits for the offered acres. Enhancement to the acres is necessary to receive the points. For example, to receive 20 points, producers may offer to establish a

minimum of 10 percent of the acres offered to pollinator habitat N1b criteria provided in Table 2.

### ◆ N1c - Wildlife Priority Zones (0 or 30 points)

FSA consulted with farm, commodity, wildlife, and environmental groups to develop high-priority wildlife areas that would benefit from being enrolled in CRP. For land located within this defined geographic area, points are awarded for planting cover mixes to benefit wildlife species. This subfactor provides 30 points if at least 51 percent of the offered acres are located within the wildlife priority zone and the weighted average N1a score is greater than or equal to 40 points.

## N2 - Water Quality Benefits from Reduced Erosion, Runoff, and Leaching (0 to 100 Points)

One of CRP's main goals is to reduce the amount of sediment, nutrients and pollutants that enter our nation's waterways. Factor N2 is an evaluation of the potential impacts that CRP may have on both surface and groundwater quality. N2 is comprised of three subfactors (N2a-c). The formula for N2 = N2a + N2b + N2c.

### ◆ N2a - Water Quality Zones (0 or 30 points)

This subfactor is an evaluation of the benefits of improving ground or surface water quality impaired by crop production. States have identified water

quality zones for protection. At least 51 percent of the acres offered must be within an approved water quality zone to receive 30 points. Local USDA Service Centers have detailed maps of the approved water quality zones.

### ◆ N2b - Groundwater quality (0 to 25 points)

This subfactor is an evaluation of the predominant soils, the potential leaching of pesticides and nutrients into groundwater, and the impact to people who rely on groundwater as a primary source of drinking water. Point scores are based on the weighted average leach index for soils offered for enrollment and the population that utilizes groundwater for drinking.

### ◆ N2c - Surface water quality (0 to 45 points)

This subfactor is an evaluation of the amount of sediment (and associated nutrients) that may be delivered into streams or other water courses. This factor is determined by potential water erosion in the watershed in which the offer is located. The Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation version 2 (RUSLE2) determines the water erosion of the offer.

## N3 - On-Farm Benefits of Reduced Erosion (10 to 100 Points)

CRP helps maintain the long-term productivity of the land for future generations. Factor N3 is an evaluation of the potential for the land to erode as the result of either wind or water erosion. This factor is measured using an

Erodibility Index (EI). FSA awards points for the weighted average of the higher value of either the wind or water EI, based on the results from Table 3.

## N4 - Enduring Benefits (0 to 50 Points)

Factor N4 is an evaluation of the likelihood for certain practices to remain in place beyond the CRP contract period. N4 values are determined by calculating the weighted average score for all practices in Table 4.

## N5 - Air Quality Benefits (3 to 45 Points)

Factor N5 is an evaluation of the air quality improvements by reducing airborne dust and particulate caused by wind erosion from cropland. In addition, this factor has points for the value of CRP land that provides carbon sequestration. This factor is comprised of four subfactors (N5a-c). The formula for  $N5 = N5a + N5b + N5c$ .

- ◆ **N5a - Wind Erosion Impacts (0 to 25 points)**

FSA will determine the potential for the site to have wind erosion damage. FSA will award points based on potential wind erosion and the amount of population that may be impacted by the erosion. The wind erodibility index is using the Wind Erosion Prediction System (WEPS) to determine potential wind erosion for the offer.

- ◆ **N5b - Air Quality Zones (0 or 10 points)**

FSA awards a maximum of ten points if at least 51 percent of the acres offered is located in an air quality zone that contributes to nonattainment of air quality standards and the calculated weighted wind EI is equal to or greater than three.

- ◆ **N5c - Carbon Sequestration (3 or 10 points)**

The subfactor is an evaluation of the benefits of sequestering greenhouse gases by practice over the expected life of the practice. FSA awards points based on a weighted average of carbon sequestration benefits for all practices using the value in Table 5.

## N6 - Cost

Factor N6 is designed to optimize the environmental benefits per dollar for CRP rental payments. Factor N6 is comprised of two subfactors (N6a and N6b). The formula for  $N6 = N6a + N6b$ .

- ◆ **N6a - Cost (point value determined after end of enrollment based on actual offer data)**

Offers with lower per acre rental rates may receive more N6a points and have increased chances of being accepted.

- ◆ **N6b - Offer Less Than Maximum Payment Rate (0 to 25 points)**

Offers equal to the maximum payment rate will receive 0 points. Offers below the maximum payment rate will receive points according to the value in Table 6.

## EBI Threshold for Acceptance

After the 62nd general CRP signup period ends March 29, 2024, FSA will analyze and rank all eligible offers. The Secretary of Agriculture will then determine the EBI threshold used to accept offers. Because CRP is a highly competitive program, producers who would have met EBI during previous enrollment periods are not guaranteed an offer acceptance under the 62nd general CRP signup period.

## Making CRP Offers More Competitive

Maximum CRP enrollment authority is 27 million acres by 2024. As such, the demand to enroll land in CRP is expected to be high.

To make offers more competitive, producers should consider the following:

- ◆ The single most important producer decision involves determining which cover practice to apply to the acres offered. Planting or establishing the highest scoring cover mixture is the best way to improve the chances of offer acceptance.
- ◆ Offering the most environmentally sensitive land increases the likelihood of the offer being accepted. Where possible, subdividing fields to include only the most sensitive acres can substantially increase the point score for erosion and improve the water quality score and/or air quality score. Producers should consider enhancing covers for the benefit of wildlife or establishing pollinator habitat. In addition, producers may plant and manage hardwood or softwood trees that increase wildlife habitat values or restore certain rare and declining habitats. These potentially increase the EBI score in subfactors N1a and N4
- ◆ Producers should consider accepting a lower payment rate than the maximum amount FSA is willing to offer.

FSA also encourages producers to consult with local USDA experts on steps to take to maximize EBI points and increase the likelihood that an offer will be accepted.

<b>Table 1 – Cover Practices (CP) for the N1a Criteria</b>		<b>Point Score</b>
<b>CP1 Permanent introduced grasses and legumes</b>		
Existing monoculture (1 species) stand of an introduced grass.		0
Existing stand of 2 to 3 species or planting new stand of 2 to 3 species of an introduced grass species.		10
Existing stand or planting mixture (minimum of 4 species) of at least 3 introduced grasses and at least 1 forb or legume species best suited for wildlife in the area.		40
<b>CP2 Permanent native grasses and legumes</b>		
Existing monoculture (1 species) stand of a native grass.		0
Existing stand (minimum 2 to 3 species) or planting new mixed stand (minimum of 3 species) of at least 2 native grass species and at least 1 forb, or legume species beneficial to wildlife.		20
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of at least 3 native grasses and at least 1 shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in the area.		50
<b>CP3 Tree planting (general)<sup>2</sup></b>		
Southern Pines (Softwoods) - Solid stand of pines/softwoods (existing according to State-developed standards or planted at more than 550 trees per acre).		10
Northern Conifers (Softwoods) - Solid stand of conifers/softwoods (existing according to State-developed standards or planted at more than 850 trees per acre).		
Western Pines (Softwoods) - Solid stand of pines/softwoods (existing according to State-developed standards or planted at more than 650 trees per acre).		
Southern Pines (Softwoods) - Pines/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 500 to 550 per acre depending upon the site index (State-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.		50
Northern Conifers (Softwoods) - Conifers/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 750 to 850 trees per acre depending upon the site index (State developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.		
Western Pines (Softwoods) - Western Pines (softwoods) - Pines/softwoods existing planted at a rate of 550 to 650 per acre depending upon the site index (State-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.		
Opening for Southern and Western Pines are not to be less than a minimum of 2 acres or a maximum of 5 acres in size for fields of 20 acres and larger.  For smaller fields will be based upon percentage. Opening in Northern conifers will be one-half to 2 acres in size. Opening may include buffers on the interior of the field. Field edges (borders) may be used if they are irregular in shape and average 30 feet in width.  Natural regeneration of native herbaceous or shrubby vegetation with required maintenance may be permitted within open areas if it is consistent with NRCS technical standards and concurred with by State FWS or U.S. FWS Officials.  Open areas of native grasses and/or shrub planting best suited for wildlife in the area shall be considered CP3 for EBI scoring and contract purposes.		50
<b>CP3A Hardwood tree planting<sup>2</sup></b>		
Existing or planting solid stand of nonmast producing hardwood species		10
Existing or planting solid stand of a single hard mast-producing species		20
Existing or planting mixed stand of hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area		30
Existing or planting mixed Stand (3 or more species) of hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area		50
Existing or planting longleaf Pine or Atlantic White Cedar - Planted at rates appropriate for the site index.		50

Table 1 – Cover Practices (CP) for the N1a Criteria—continued	Point Score
<b>CP4D Permanent wildlife habitat</b>	
Existing or planting mixed stand (minimum of 4 species) of grasses, trees, shrubs, forbs, or legumes planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.	40
Existing or planting mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of either of predominately native species including grasses, forbs, legumes, shrubs, or trees planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited to providing wildlife habitat. <b>Only native grasses are authorized. Introduced grasses are not authorized and shall not be included in cover mixes for 50 point N1a scores for CP4D.</b> A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.	50
<b>CP12 Wildlife food plot<sup>3</sup></b>	
Wildlife food plots are small non C/S plantings in a larger area. Wildlife food plots will never be the predominant cover.	NA
<b>CP25 Rare and declining habitat restoration<sup>4</sup></b>	
Existing stand or seeding or planting will be best suited for wildlife in the area. Plant species selections will be based upon Ecological Site Description data.	50
<b>CP42 Pollinator habitat</b>	
Existing stand or planting (minimum of .5 acres) of a diverse mix of multiple species suited for pollinators	50

<sup>1</sup>Cover that is existing or will be established must accomplish the purpose of the practice.

<sup>2</sup>State Conservationist may revise FOTG on planting rate to be consistent with CRP.

<sup>3</sup>CP12 acreage is not included in the weighted average point score. For example, a 50-acre offer with a 45-acre CP25 planting and a 5-acre food plot calculates the weighted average using only the 45 acres of CP25 planting.

$$45 \text{ acres} \times 50 \text{ points (CP25 point score)} = 2250 \text{ points}$$

$$2250 \text{ points divided by } 45 \text{ acres} = 50 \text{ points}$$

<sup>4</sup>Technical practice standards for the selected habitat type must meet applicable standards and be approved by DAFP at least 30 calendar days before the beginning of signup.

Table 2 – Practices for the N1b Criteria						Points
Establishment of pollinator habitat CP42 that remains in the location of CRP-1. The habitat size, shape, and composition must meet the following requirements.						20
CRP Acreage Offered Size	Habitat Size Requirement					
Less than 10 acres	At least 1 acre of pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least .5 acre.					
10 acres or greater	At least 10 percent of acreage offered in pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least .5 acre.					
Annual or permanent food plot (CP12) that remains in the same location for the contract length or rotated food plot for which the location changes during CRP-1 length. CP12 food plots must be consistent with NRCS FOTG up to 10 percent of a field, not to exceed 5 acres per field.						5
Example: A producer would like to enroll 200 acres. Field 1 is 120 acres, Field 2 is 45 acres, and Field 3 is 35 acres.						
Field	Size	NRCS FOTG Limit	10 Percent Limit	5 Acres	Limited CP12 Acres	
1	120	12	12 acres	5	5.0	
2	45	4.5	4.5 acres	5	4.5	
3	35	3.5	3.5 acres	5	3.5	
					13.0	
Note: CP12 the NRCS FOTG standard, is limited by the lessor of either 10 percent of the field size or 5 acres/field for the food plot. The 5 acres of food plot may be either one 5 acre food plot or 2 or more food plots where the cumulative total would be ≤ 5 acres. Expiring CRP land with trees loses its cropland status after the expiration of the contract.						

Table 3 – Erodibility Index Points							
EI – Sheet and Rill or Wind	Points	EI – Sheet and Rill or Wind	Points	EI – Sheet and Rill or Wind	Points	EI – Sheet and Rill or Wind	Points
0	10	6	22	12	37	18	97
1	10	7	22	13	46	19	98
2	10	8	25	14	56	20	99
3	16	9	25	15	67	21+	100
4	16	10	25	16	79		
5	22	11	29	17	92		

Table 4 – Practices for the N4 Criteria	Points
New hardwood tree (CP3A), longleaf pines, or Atlantic White Cedar plantings or CP25 where the plant community is existing or will be established to primarily trees	50
Existing or enhanced stand of hardwood Trees, Longleaf pine, and/or Atlantic White Cedar (CP3A)	40
New pine/softwood tree (CP3)	30
CP25 where the plant community is existing or will be established to a primarily grass and/or shrub complex or CP42.	25
Existing pine/softwood tree (original contract signed as CP3)	20
All other conservation practices not listed (CP1, CP2, CP4D)	0

Table 5 – N5c Carbon Sequestration	
Practice	Points
CP3, CP3A, CP25 (primarily trees)	10
CP25 (primary grass complex), CP42	5
CP4D	4
CP1, CP2	3
CP12	0

Table 6 – N6b Offer Less than Maximum Payment Rate	
Percent Below Maximum Payment Rate	N6b Points
1	2
2	4
3	6
4	8
5	10
6	12
7	14
8	16
9	18
10	20
11	21
12	22
13	23
14	24
>=15	25