



2008 Farm Bill: Wisconsin Focus Title II: Conservation¹



Key Features

The 2008 Farm Bill expands some existing conservation programs, strengthens others, and continues long established conservation programs like: Conservation Reserve; Wetlands Reserve; Grassland Reserve; Farmland Protection; and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).

Program Revisions and Enhancements

The *Conservation Reserve Program* (CRP) was first authorized in the 1985 Farm Bill. The enrollment limit has been gradually increased to the current 39.2 million acres. The new Farm Bill reduces that limit to 32 million acres in 2010.

The *Conservation Stewardship Program* is a new conservation program created by the 2008 Farm Bill. This program is really new in name only because it is a modified version of the Conservation Security Program from the 2002 Farm Bill. This stewardship program provides incentives for adopting, improving, and maintaining practices that have positive impacts on the environment. In order to be eligible for the program, producers have to already be addressing one priority environmental concern. Producers then have to agree they will address a second priority resource concern.

Only 12.77 million acres can be annually enrolled nationwide in the Conservation Stewardship Program through 2012. Priority will be given to funding conservation activities that yield the greatest environmental benefits. Funding for the program is \$1.1 billion is greater than what was authorized under the old Conservation Security Program.

The *Environmental Quality Incentives Program* (EQIP), another program which compensates producers for adopting conservation practices, received a substantial increase in funding in the new farm bill. Nearly \$3.4 billion of new funding is being added to the \$12.5 billion of EQIP funds authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill. This boost in EQIP funding will make more conservation funds available to more U.S. farmers. Producers will continue to be eligible to receive up to \$300,000 of EQIP funds over any six year period. For projects with special environmental significance, producers can receive an additional \$450,000 of payments.

The eligibility requirements and procedures for valuing property have been revised to facilitate the enrollment of more fragile wetland areas in the *Wetlands Reserve Program*.

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Funding of \$1.3 billion has been authorized to enroll about 750,000 acres of wetlands over the next five years such that a total of 3 million acres of wetlands will be in the program by 2012.

Payment Limitations

Persons with average adjusted gross non-farm income of \$1 million or more are ineligible to participate in conservation programs unless 2/3 of their income comes from farming, ranching, or related activities. There is no limit as to the amount of farm income persons can earn and still qualify for conservation programs.

The new farm bill sets a \$50,000 payment limitation for: Conservation Reserve; Agricultural Management Assistance; Grassland Reserve (short term contracts and restrictions agreements); Wildlife Habitat Incentive and Wetlands Reserve restoration agreements. In addition Conservation Stewardship program payments are limited to \$200,000 over any five year period. No limits are placed on payments for easements under Wetlands Restoration, Grassland Restoration, and Farmland Protection.

How is Wisconsin Affected?

According to Farm Service Agency reports, nearly \$43 million in CRP Payments were made to Wisconsin farmland owners in 2007. Those payments were made on about 608,000 acres.

Reauthorization of the CRP program means these conservations payments should continue to flow into Wisconsin at approximately the same rates they have in recent years if expiring contracts are renewed. There will be a slight reduction in CRP payments beginning in 2010, however, because of the nationwide reduction in acres eligible for CRP enrollment in that year.

Losses of CRP payments could be offset by expanded participation in Farmland Protection, Wetland Reserve, or Conservation Stewardship Programs.

Where can I get more information?

You may want to review a number of USDA Farm Service Agency Fact Sheets that provide an overview of the Conservation Reserve Program. These fact sheets were generated before the 2008 Farm Bill and will be updated when USDA updates this material.

- [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (May '07)
- [Conservation Reserve Program – Wisconsin Enhancement Program](#) (Oct. '01)

You can refer to the [Conservation Title](#) of the 2008 Farm Bill for the specific language used in this legislation.