

Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018

Summary of EQIP, CSP and CRP

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, more commonly known as the Farm Bill, made changes to conservation programs that provide funding for technical assistance; help farmers and ranchers maintain, improve and expand activities to benefit natural resources; and made changes to the Conservation Reserve Program, such as allowing nonprofits to be eligible partners in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVE PROGRAM (EQIP)

Funding

- Funded at the following levels: \$1.75 billion in fiscal year 2019, \$1.75 billion in fiscal year 2020, \$1.8 billion in fiscal year 2021, \$1.85 billion in fiscal year 2022 and \$2.025 billion in fiscal year 2023.

Policies

- Authorizes soil testing and soil remediation as EQIP practices.
- Authorizes new conservation activity plans, including conservation planning assessment, soil health planning, resource conserving crop rotation planning and precision conservation management planning.
- Allows advance payments for certain producers.
- Authorizes increased payments for “Incentive practices” that address one or more priority resources concerns.
- Lowers livestock set-aside to 50 percent.
- Raises wildlife set-aside from 5 percent to 10 percent and allows longer-term contracts.
- Allows irrigation districts and acequias to participate in certain EQIP projects.
- Raises organic EQIP payment limit.
- Allows for progressive implementation of nutrient management plans.
- Authorizes On-Farm Conservation Trials and Soil Health Demonstrations Under Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGs).

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

Funding

- Funded at the following levels: \$700 million in fiscal year 19, \$725 million in fiscal year 20, \$750 million in fiscal year 21, \$800 million in fiscal year 22, \$1 billion in fiscal year 23.
- Monetized CSP and created a separate pot of money.
- Eliminated the \$18-per-acre payment rate and automatic renewals.

Policies

- Expands the definition of conservation activities by adding: a comprehensive conservation plan; soil health planning, including planning to increase soil organic matter; and activities that will assist a producer to adapt to, or mitigate against, increasing weather volatility.
- Redefines key term “stewardship threshold” to use more defined criteria including predictive analytic tools and models to more accurately measure conservation improvement.

- Changes ranking of application section to focus on natural resources conservation and environmental benefits.
- Changes contract renewal to focus on new and improved activities and demonstrating continued improvement.
- Further changes contract renewal section to lower standard for renewal from exceeding the threshold to improving conservation activities to achieve higher levels of performance.
- Gives a special payment rate (125 percent of the normal rate) to cover crop activities.
- Adds advanced grazing management to eligibility of supplemental payments.
- Gives special payment rate (150 percent of normal rate) to resource-conserving crop rotations and advanced grazing management.
- Sets special payment rules for comprehensive conservation plans.
- Sets special funding allocation rules for organic certification and transition to organic operations.
- Authorizes the secretary to streamline and coordinate EQIP and CSP.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

- Raises CRP cap from 24 million acres to 27 million acres from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2023, while reforming the program to be more cost effective.
- Mandates that at least 2 million grassland acres must be enrolled by fiscal year 21.
- Mandates that at least 8.6 million acres of continuous practices must be enrolled by 2023.
- Authorizes the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR) and reserves 40 percent of continuous acres for CLEAR practices.
- Codifies in statute Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and allows non-government organizations to be eligible partners. This may be something land trusts will want to monitor.
- Authorizes a pilot program, Clear 30, which authorizes 30 year contracts.
- Provides additional haying and grazing flexibility.
- Authorizes 50,000-acre pilot program, Soil Health and Income Protection Pilot, within CRP to offer short-term CRP contracts.
- Rental rates reduction to 85 percent of county rental for general enrollment or 90 percent of county rental rate for continuous.
- For multiple enrollments, annual rental payment will be 85 percent for general or 90 percent for continuous.
- Cap seed cost at 50 percent of the total cost of the seed mixture.
- Cost share payment when combined with all other funding sources cannot exceed 100 percent of total cost of installing practices.
- Practice incentives payments are allowed but can't exceed 50 percent of cost of establishing those practices.
- Allows farmers to transition into EQIP or CSP at the end of their contract.