CC160 Facts About the Great Plains Conservation Program

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1. **What is the Great Plains Conservation Program?**

It is a voluntary program to assist farmers and ranchers in the Great Plains region to develop, finance and carry out long-range land use, cropping and conservation plans on their farm and ranch units.

The purpose of the program is to encourage better adjustment to Plains conditions and to bring about greater stability in the farming and ranching of the area. It is a federal program established by Public Law 1021 of the 84th Congress. This program was cooperatively developed by agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture and will be handled at the local level under the leadership of the Soil Conservation Service.

2. **Does it apply to all counties in Nebraska?**

No, it will apply only to counties in the Plains proper as recommended by the State Program Committee and designated by the Secretary of Agriculture. Counties eligible for recommendation include all counties west of the heavy north-south line shown on Figure 1. Counties cross-hatched on the map have been recommended on the basis of climatic and erosion hazards, local interest in and leadership for the program; and have been designated by the Secretary of Agriculture for starting work in this program.

3. **Are all farmers and ranchers in designated counties eligible to participate?**

Any farmer or rancher who controls (owns or rents) land considered as an operating unit (farm or ranch) can take part in the program. A landowner whose tract is being operated as part of such a unit cannot participate unless the entire farm or ranch is included.

4. **What does a farmer or rancher have to do to take part in this program?**

**Step 1:** File an application for assistance on GP Form 1. These forms may be obtained at County Extension, FHA, USDA and SCS offices. Completed applications will be transmitted to the local SCS office.

**Step 2:** Develop a "plan of operations" for his farm or ranch as a basis for a cost-sharing contract. Each plan of operations must meet SCS standards for farm and ranch conservation planning.

**Step 3:** Sign a cost-sharing contract (GP Form 2) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture as prepared by the local Work Unit Conservationist and based upon the farmer’s or rancher’s plan of operations.

**Step 4:** Carry out the changes in land use, cropping systems and conservation practices as provided in his plan of operations and cost-sharing contract. Receiving cost-sharing payments depends upon satisfactory performance of these provisions as rapidly as weather and individual financial resources permit.

**Step 5:** Apply for cost-sharing payments at his local SCS office. After the application has been made, the Work Unit Conservationist will visit the farm or ranch to look over the completed part or parts of the plans of operation. He will also check to see that no practices have been adopted which tend to defeat the purposes of the program.

5. **What should a "plan of operations" include?**

A plan of operations developed for a farm or ranch will include at least the following:

1. Name of the farmer or rancher and location of the operating unit (farm or ranch).

2. A conservation-plan map of the farm or ranch with each field clearly marked for identification; conservation practices and changes in land use and cropping systems can be indicated on this map.

3. A brief statement for each conservation treatment unit in the farm or ranch describing how the land will be used and treated. A conservation treatment unit is a field or part of the farm or ranch with common characteristics and requirements as to land use, management and conservation practices. This statement should include the field identification, acreage involved, conservation practices to be applied, and cropping or grazing plans.

4. A time schedule (GP Form 3) for each conservation treatment unit showing amount and kinds of practices to be applied each year. These practices should be listed in order of priority for application or installation.

5. Can a farmer or rancher get help in preparing a plan of operations?

SCS will provide technical help in developing and carrying out a plan of operations on his farm or ranch. He can also get information and advice on the management practices and problems, and on the expected net income from different crop and livestock systems from his County Agricultural Agent, the local Work Unit Conservationist, and the State Forester.

6. **What does the "cost-sharing contract" involve?**

The cost-sharing contract is a written agreement between the farmer or rancher and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In this contract the producer agrees to make land use changes and to apply conservation practices according to his plan of operations. The U.S.D.A. agrees to share in the cost of establishing these practices.

When the tenant on a rented farm or ranch wishes to take part in this program, he must provide satisfactory evidence, such as a written lease or rental agreement, that he will have control over the operating unit for the contract period.
How long do these contracts run?

The period of the contract is not less than 3 years and not more than 10 years. Under the present law, all contracts will end not later than December 31, 1971. Within these limits, the contract period should be for the least time needed to apply and establish the necessary conservation practices included in the plan of operations which involve cost-sharing.

9. Can contracts be amended, transferred, or ended during the contract period?

Amendment of a contract is possible when necessary by: (1) loss of control of part of the farm or ranch or acquiring of additional land; (2) change in the time schedule of land use and practice application; failure to carry out a provision of the plan because of weather or other circumstances which do not justify ending the contract.

Contracts as such cannot be transferred. If an owner or tenant transfers his right of interest in the farm or ranch during the contract period, the contract ends so far as he is concerned. He then loses the right to any further cost-share payments. He would also have to refund all payments made previously under the contract. These payment losses and refund provisions do not apply if the new owner or tenant enters into a contract to carry out a plan of operations under this program.

Contracts can be ended before the expiration date: (1) by mutual consent of the farmer or rancher and the U.S. Department of Agriculture; (2) for substantial violation of the contract by following practices which tend to defeat the purposes of a contract. When all the provisions of the contract have been met and the contract period is over, the contract ends by expiration.

10. What happens if a contract is violated?

If the violation is such as to warrant ending the contract, the farmer or rancher forfeits all rights to further cost-share payments and shall be required to refund all payments made previously.

If the violation does not justify ending the contract, the farmer or rancher may be required to accept payment adjustments or to refund part or all of cost-share payments received under the contract.

Generally speaking, the purposes of the contract would be defeated by knowingly or negligently destroying or breaking up a conservation practice in the plan of operations unless written approval has been obtained from SCS.

11. What payments are made to farmers and ranchers who participate in this program?

Cost-sharing payments of up to 80% of the established rates for applying or installing approved conservation practices according to the plan of operations will be made after these practices are satisfactorily completed. (See Question 4, Step 5).

Payments will be issued by the state SCS office to farmers and ranchers receiving certificates of performance. Payments will be divided among the individual contract signers according to their contributions in performing the practices. Furnishing land or the right to use water will not be considered as such a contribution. It will be possible to earn cost-share payments for some practices under the regular ACP program. Payments cannot be earned from both the ACP and this program for the same practice. No income or rental-type payments will be made under this program. There is no limit on the cost-share payment to anyone farmer or rancher except that cost-sharing in excess of $2,500 will not be made for constructing, enlarging, deepening or lining dams or for irrigation.

12. Which conservation practices are eligible for cost-sharing?

Since eligible practices may vary from county to county, the list of practices for a specific county should be obtained from the local SCS or County Agent’s Office.

The upkeep and maintenance of any practice of installation under this program is the farmer’s or rancher’s responsibility. No cost-sharing will be available for such maintenance after a practice is completed either during or after the contract period.

13. Will participation in this program reduce farm acreage allotments?

The law (P.L. 1021) provides assurance that farm acreage allotments will not be reduced during the contract period because of changes in the use of cropland required by the contract.

14. Can land placed in conservation treatment units under this program be grazed or harvested during the contract period?

Yes, grass or other crops can be grazed or harvested from land in this program provided such use is consistent with good management. The basic purpose of this program is to increase and more stable net farm income through land use and conservation, not production control.

15. Does this program replace the acreage allotment, soil bank, and agricultural conservation programs?

No, the Great Plains Conservation Program is an additional program designed to meet special needs and problems of farmers and ranchers in the Plains region. Farmers and ranchers who take part in this program will be encouraged to use other programs that contribute to the objectives of greater agricultural stability in the Great Plains.

16. Will it pay to take part in the Great Plains Conservation Program?

Since no two farms or ranches or family situations are alike, each farmer or rancher will need to decide whether the program will increase and stabilize his net income in future years. The program provides for financial and technical assistance in developing and carrying out long-range plans for best land use, cropping system, and water conservation and other management practices under Great Plains conditions.

In reaching his decision, the farm or ranch operator might consider the following advantages and disadvantages:

Adantages:

(1) Financial assistance in making land use changes and in applying well-planned conservation practices;

(2) Technical assistance from state and federal agricultural agencies in working out plans and putting plans into use;

(3) More stable and possibly greater net farm income and therefore greater stability in the Plains economy generally;

(4) Flexibility to permit adjustment to variations in weather and farm income conditions;

(5) Participation on a voluntary basis;

(6) Flexible contract period (3-10 years) based on time needed to carry out the land use plan.

Disadvantages:

(1) Entire farm or ranch operating unit must be included in the plan of operations;

(2) Contract of 3-10 years with possible refund of payments if practices followed which tend to defeat contract purposes;

(3) Uncertainty of length of tenure on rented farms and ranches with problems of landlord-tenant relationships if owner or tenant should change during contract period;

(4) Farm and ranch planning and management is made more complicated by adding another program to consider;

(5) Individual farm or ranch approach may not be adequate for problems affecting several farms or ranch units or larger areas, such as black blight and flooding.

For More Information

(1) Attend meetings in your area to explain this program;

(2) Visit your county SCS, Extension or ASC office;

(3) Watch for circular letters, news releases and radio and television programs.