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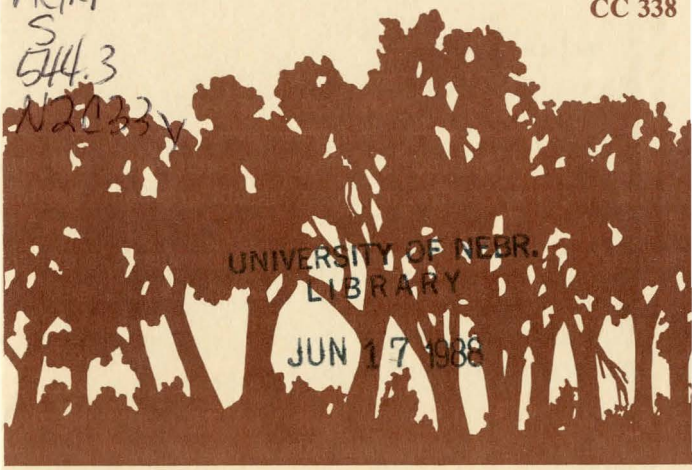
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Trees and Shrubs in the Conservation Reserve Program

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What Is the Conservation Reserve Program?

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program designed to reduce soil erosion by retiring highly erodible land from crop production. Associated benefits include reduction of lake and stream sedimentation, enhancement of wildlife habitat, increased supply of forest products, reduced production of surplus commodities, and stabilization of farm income.



How Does It Work?

Highly erodible cropland is eligible for the CRP if it was cultivated two of the last five years.

During a CRP signup period, landowners bid for the amount they will accept (on an annual basis) to retire an area of land. If the bid is accepted, annual payments will be made for a 10-year contract period, with a maximum $50,000 annual payment for any landowner. Payments will be made annually by the ASCS after October 1.

Land accepted in the CRP must be planted to permanent vegetative cover (trees, shrubs, or grass). This cover cannot be grazed or harvested during the contract period.

Cost sharing for establishing permanent cover will be provided by USDA at a rate of 50% of eligible costs.

Why Trees?

Land enrolled in the program must be protected from erosion through planting of permanent vegetative cover such as trees, shrubs, grasses, or a combination of all three. Most land enrolled in Nebraska will be planted to grass, but trees are also a good way to protect against soil erosion. Trees offer other benefits as well. Trees are inexpensive to establish, easy to plant, and require little maintenance. At the end of the contract period, the landowner will have a well-established stand of trees—a bonus in terms of potential economic benefit. Trees also provide protection from wind, improve air quality, and increase the recreational value of land. Mixed with other types of plants for diversity, trees are excellent sources of food and shelter for many wildlife species.

Tree and shrub planting is included in three CRP practices: Tree Planting (CP3), Permanent Wildlife Habitat (CP4), and Field Windbreak Establishment (CP5).

Tree Planting (CP3)

This practice allows establishment of a stand of trees to control excessive erosion. Other benefits include:

—timber products
—firewood
—wildlife habitat
—recreation and aesthetic values

Christmas tree plantations and orchards are not allowed in the CRP.



Permanent Wildlife Habitat (CP4)

This practice is to establish plantings for wildlife habitat that will also help reduce soil erosion. Trees and shrubs are allowed under this practice, as well as grasses and legumes. Diversity of cover types is the key to good wildlife habitat.

Participants in this practice can charge hunting fees for hunter access to the land. Fee hunting can provide income during and after the contract period.



Field Windbreak Establishment (CP5)

This practice allows establishment of windbreaks to control erosion. Tree and shrub windbreaks can be planted to protect cropland and feedlots. Well designed windbreaks will:

—Reduce soil erosion up to 20 times the windbreak height downwind.

—Control snow deposition.

—Protect livestock and increase their productivity.

—Increase crop yields.

—Increase property values.

—Enhance wildlife habitat.

Other Considerations

Here are some other benefits of trees and shrubs to think about when considering your options for the CRP:

—Even a small area of trees and shrubs can provide many benefits. One or two acres of trees can go a long way toward providing wildlife habitat or wind protection.

—CP3, 4, and 5 are the only CRP practices that can provide income (hunting fees) or products (firewood and fence posts) during the contract period.

—After the 10-year contract period, your trees may be 15 to 20 feet tall and will be steadily increasing in value.

—Trees help diversify a farming operation by providing another source of income.

—Trees have low maintenance costs.

—The cost of many types of grass seed is increasing, making the cost of tree establishment more attractive.

—Some grass seed may be hard to get, whereas trees are readily available.

—Windbreaks established during the CRP will protect crops and livestock long after the contract has expired.



Costs

Tree planting costs will vary depending on labor, equipment, and tree planting design variables. However, if we assume the average tree planting will contain about 400 trees per acre and an average planting cost of 60 cents per tree, the total cost would be $240 per acre. The CRP provides a 50% cost share which reduces landowner

cost to about $120 per acre. Several Natural Resources Districts (NRD's) also provide additional cost-share assistance for tree planting which may further reduce landowner costs.

How Do I Apply?

Contact your local ASCS, SCS, or NRD office for information on land eligibility, conservation planning, sign-up dates, and other program details.

Apply for the program during a sign-up period at your local ASCS office.

Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) foresters and SCS employees will provide technical planning assistance. Tree and shrub planting stock is available from the Nebraska Forest Service and private nurseries.



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