

A FARMER'S VIEW: A LOOK AT THE CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



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WITH SUPPORT FROM ANNA JOHNSON
CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS



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A farmer's view: a look at the Conservation Stewardship Program

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FIGURE 1. STATES SURVEYED



Producers in these five states were surveyed by the Center for Rural Affairs, to examine the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). These states were selected based on their high rates of CSP contracts and acres enrolled in the program, as well as their role as agriculture-centric states.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the efficacy of the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. These states were selected based on their high rates of CSP contracts and acres enrolled in the program, as well as their role as agriculture-centric states. Through surveying participants in these regions, we acquired valuable data from farmers and ranchers regarding their enrollment and satisfaction with the program.

The survey results showed many farmers and ranchers value the opportunity CSP offers to build upon their existing conservation efforts. Whether through implementation of new farming techniques, developing a better understanding of how the actions on their farms impact natural

resources, or through upgrading technology, participants are finding the program enhances their conservation efforts. Many farmers and ranchers also reported that after enrolling, they were able to see positive benefits and improved conditions on their land. The majority of farmers and ranchers who responded reported a high level of satisfaction with the program and stated CSP should be prioritized in the 2018 farm bill.

For decades, the Center for Rural Affairs has advocated for policy that supports healthy farms and rural communities, and conservation has been a central pillar of our work. We seek to ensure our conservation programs continue to provide strong support to farmers and ranchers for their environmental stewardship. The findings of this report point to widespread support for CSP and emphasize the need to preserve and support the program in the 2018 farm bill.



Conservation Stewardship Program enhances land stewardship. This field features contour farming and cover crops as important conservation practices used to improve soil health. | Photo by Cody Smith

II. INTRODUCTION

Farmers and ranchers work the land for production purposes. Beginning more than 80 years ago with the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, there has been an understanding between the federal government and farmers and ranchers on the value of stewarding land to preserve the health of natural resources for future generations. The 1985 farm bill was the first to include a Conservation Title by creating the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program. In 1996, the first working lands conservation programs were created, which seek to support farmers and ranchers in maintaining production on their land while also enhancing their abilities to steward natural resources. This report focuses on the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), originally called the Conservation Security Program when created in 2002, and modified to its current name in 2008.

CSP is the largest federal conservation program by acreage that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers. CSP differs from other working lands programs in that it rewards farmers and ranchers for performing conservation and also provides a path for them to increase levels of conservation for their entire operations. In doing so, CSP provides benefits for farmers, ranchers, and the nation’s natural resources.

The Center for Rural Affairs has been at the forefront in advocating for conservation programs that support farmers and ranchers, rural communities, and our natural resources. In our commitment to this work, we regularly seek input from farmers and ranchers to inform our policy priorities. Therefore, in 2017, the Center for Rural Affairs surveyed farmers and ranchers participating in CSP in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota,

and South Dakota. Most of these states lead in total CSP acres and contracts throughout the country and/or new enrollments.¹

This report provides an overview of how CSP works and how it was created to address natural resource concerns. Our survey findings follow and demonstrate what farmers in the Midwest are actually saying about the program.

III. WHAT IS CSP?

CSP is designed to accomplish two main goals. First, it rewards farmers and ranchers who meet high standards of conservation management on their operations. Second, it provides incentives for farmers and ranchers to implement additional practices enhancing conservation on their land.² In providing this support, the program is a widely-used land management tool, encompassing more than 70 million total acres of productive agricultural and forest land nationally.³

To participate in CSP, farmers and ranchers must prove they are addressing priority resource concerns on their land, and agree to implement and install additional conservation enhancements with the guidance of NRCS personnel. This program requires NRCS and farmers and ranchers to consider conservation activities and impacts across the entire farming operation, making it the most comprehensive conservation program available. CSP is available not only for cropland, but also for associated agricultural land, forest land, pasture, pastured cropland, and rangeland.⁴ The inset on page 3 has more detail about how the contracts work.

1 “Analysis of CSP Enrollment in FY 2017.” National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, December 2017, sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/FY17-CSP-Data-Special-Report.pdf. Accessed April 9, 2018.

2 “Conservation Security Program.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/alphabetical/csp/. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

3 “Conservation Stewardship Program.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

4 Ibid.

CSP explained

Farmers and ranchers who want to enroll in CSP must first prove their current conservation practices meet or exceed a minimum conservation stewardship threshold, defined by NRCS as addressing two priority resource concerns. Once established, local NRCS personnel work with farmers and ranchers to determine what additional conservation “enhancements” would work best to address natural resource concerns on their land. To maximize the environmental impact, NRCS personnel work with farmers and ranchers to combine a variety of enhancements, called “enhancement bundles.” Then, farmers and ranchers enter into a CSP contract.

Conservation practice

A conservation practice is an activity a farmer or rancher is doing to manage, maintain, or improve natural resources on the land prior to enrollment in CSP. Prescribed grazing, contour farming, and buffer strips are examples of conservation practices farmers and ranchers may use to protect soil and water on their land.

Priority resource concerns

Priority resource concerns are natural resource concerns or problems, determined by NRCS.⁵ Because these concerns vary, each NRCS state conservationist sets priority resource concerns for their state, either for the entire state or for a particular geographical region within the state. They do this in consultation with state technical committees and local working groups.⁶ See Table 1 on page 4 for examples.

Enhancement

The term “enhancement” describes additional conservation practices a farmer or rancher installs or adopts on their land under CSP contract terms.

After a farmer or rancher demonstrates their current practices meet the minimum stewardship level, they work with NRCS personnel to choose enhancements fitting the unique needs of their land and addressing the natural resource concerns identified in their region.

CSP enhancements must exceed the minimum stewardship threshold, and they are designed to help the farmer or rancher achieve a higher level of conservation and create a greater benefit for natural resources.

Enhancement bundle

An enhancement bundle is a suite of three or more conservation enhancements implemented together to address priority resource concerns in a comprehensive and cost-effective way.⁷ Farmers and ranchers work one-on-one with NRCS personnel to bundle enhancements that fit the unique needs of their operations.

CSP contract

A farmer or rancher may enter into a CSP contract after they demonstrate control of their land, meet and agree to maintain the minimum stewardship threshold, and intend to install or adopt additional conservation practices. Farmers and ranchers have the option to renew a contract if they successfully fulfill initial contract requirements and agree to address additional conservation objectives in coordination with NRCS personnel.

5 “7 CFR 1470.3 - Definitions.” Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/7/1470.3. Accessed April 9, 2018.

6 “Conservation Stewardship Program – Payment for Performance.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcs143_008316. Accessed March 13, 2018.

7 “CSP Enhancements and Bundles.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcseprd1288624. Accessed March 13, 2018.

TABLE 1. NRCS PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERNS BY STATE (AGRICULTURAL LAND AND NON-INDUSTRIAL PRIVATE FOREST)

State	Priority resource concerns
Iowa	Soil quality degradation, soil erosion, water quality degradation, fish and wildlife-inadequate habitat, and livestock production limitation
Kansas	Animals (wildlife and domestic), plants, soil erosion, soil quality, water quality, and water quantity
Nebraska	Soil erosion, insufficient water, water quality degradation, fish and wildlife-inadequate habitat, livestock production limitation, soil quality degradation, air quality, degraded plants, and inefficient energy
North Dakota	Animals, plants, energy, soil erosion, soil quality, water quality, and water quantity
South Dakota	Soil erosion, soil quality degradation, water quality degradation, degraded plant condition, and fish and wildlife-inadequate habitat

To participate in CSP, a farmer and rancher must submit an initial application to their local NRCS field office. Applications may be submitted year round. To be eligible for the program, farmers and ranchers must demonstrate they meet a stewardship threshold for at least two of their region’s priority resource concerns, and agree to address a minimum of one additional priority resource concern during the contract period.⁸ They work with NRCS personnel to evaluate current and planned conservation practices and how the practices relate to priority resource concerns in their region.⁹

NRCS selects CSP applications on a ranking system based on environmental benefits provided by conservation activities. If the application is

8 Ibid.

9 “Apply for CSP.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcseprd1288620. Accessed Feb. 1, 2018.

approved, the farmer or rancher and NRCS personnel discuss which conservation enhancements would best help achieve the goals of the contract.

Finally, the payment levels for the contract are determined. CSP provides an incentive to farmers and ranchers to enact conservation on working lands through payments over the course of the five-year contract period. At the end of five years, farmers and ranchers are eligible to re-enroll once in CSP, and must demonstrate that, under the second contract, they will further increase their level of conservation.

This one-on-one consultation process to establish a final contract provides producers with foundational knowledge and funding to implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns on their land. Farmer and rancher interest in CSP remains high: each year NRCS has a backlog of applications.

IV. ADDRESSING NATURAL RESOURCE CONCERNS

The purpose of CSP is to build upon a producer’s existing conservation efforts to improve the country’s priority resource concerns. However, these concerns vary by region – one area may have problems with water quality, while another may have concerns about soil erosion. To support farmers and ranchers in addressing the main conservation concerns in their region, CSP requires that individual states identify specific priority resource concerns. This process is lead by NRCS state conservationists with input from their respective state technical committees.¹⁰ The 2014 farm bill required each state to select a minimum of five priority resource concerns out of eight identified by NRCS headquarters.¹¹

The priority resource concerns of Iowa,¹² Kansas,¹³ Nebraska,¹⁴ North Dakota,¹⁵ and South Dakota¹⁶ have many similarities and are listed in Table 1 on page 4.

10 “Farmers Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program.” National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, 2015, sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CSP-Farmers-Guide-2015-final.pdf. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

11 Ibid.

12 “Conservation Stewardship Program (Iowa).” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/programs/financial/csp/. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

13 “Kansas Priority Resource Concerns and Ranking Pools.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/ks/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcs142p2_032892. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

14 “Conservation Stewardship Program (Nebraska).” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ne/programs/financial/csp/. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

15 “Conservation Stewardship Program (North Dakota).” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/nd/programs/financial/csp/. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

16 “Conservation Stewardship Program (South Dakota).” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2018, nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/sd/programs/financial/csp/. Accessed Jan. 15, 2018.

TABLE 2. SURVEYS SENT AND RESPONSES BY STATE

State	Surveys sent	Survey responses
Iowa	1,122	233
Kansas	1,108	177
Nebraska	298	80
North Dakota	1,136	169
South Dakota	1,135	170
Total	4,799	829

V. CSP EVALUATED THROUGH SURVEYS

Center for Rural Affairs conducted a survey of farmers and ranchers who currently participate in CSP to examine perspectives on the program. The survey was designed to collect information regarding motivation to apply; conservation enhancements implemented; satisfaction with the program; and, lastly, intent to renew CSP contracts.

Center for Rural Affairs staff mailed surveys to 4,799 farmers in North Dakota, South Dakota, eastern Nebraska, western Iowa, and west central Kansas. Due to budgetary limitations, key legislative districts with a strong agricultural presence were targeted. There were 829 valid responses¹⁷ received, which were kept anonymous. Table 2 shows the geographical breakdown.

17 We only used responses from those who live in the states we surveyed and from those who had existing CSP contracts.

VI. RESULTS

Survey respondents told us why they chose to apply for CSP and what benefits they have seen as a result of participation in the program. In addition, many voiced their opinions of the program. These results are expressed below.

A. MOTIVATION TO ENROLL

We asked farmers and ranchers why they chose to apply to CSP. Three major themes emerged. First, respondents expressed widespread value for conserving soil and water resources, and saw CSP as an avenue to help them do that.

“We were already using no-till practices and were looking for additional ways to help the natural environment.”
– Iowa producer

“To help sustain natural resources on the ranch.”
– South Dakota producer

“[CSP] helped pay for equipment to reduce spray drift and our use of chemicals.”
– Kansas producer

In addition, many farmers and ranchers wrote of their desire to continue conservation practices they had already implemented on their land, but struggled to continue due to low commodity prices. They sought CSP contracts as a way to carry on these practices.

“With the close margins on commodities, it allows you to do the enhancements you would like to do without hurting your bottom line as much and being able to try new ideas and techniques.”
– Kansas producer

“I am very committed to conservation. Good conservation has costs as well as benefits. CSP helps compensate for some of the costs of good conservation practices.”
– North Dakota producer

“[CSP] gave me the money to help implement some of the conservation practices I wanted to try.”
– Kansas producer

Finally, respondents shared that they sought out CSP to help purchase new technology to better implement conservation practices, such as no-till equipment or low-drift nozzles. With the financial support of CSP payments, farmers reported being better equipped to improve and further develop conservation efforts on their land, despite a challenging farm economy.

“Without programs like CSP, it would be very difficult to integrate new technology and practices that help enhance conservation efforts on our farm.”
– North Dakota producer

“[CSP allowed me to] invest in technology to reduce overlap and over-application of chemicals.”
– Iowa producer

“The payments helped us purchase needed equipment to use variable rate technology.”
– North Dakota producer

“We were able to take the payments and apply [the payments] to cover crop seed and modifications to our sprayer to reduce drift and overlap.”
– South Dakota producer

B. PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

The survey asked farmers and ranchers to report how CSP allowed them to enhance conservation on their land.

Respondents described benefits from a variety of conservation practices. For example, as a result of cover crop and no-till implementation, many reported significantly less soil erosion on their land and improved soil health. Others shared that implementing changes to their nitrogen management, through the use of nitrate testing in plants and soil, precision nitrogen application, or rescheduling nitrogen application, had decreased nutrient pollution in surrounding waters. Many livestock producers reported improved pastures as a result of grazing management techniques, such as rotational grazing. Additionally, many farmers and ranchers noted appreciation for increased wildlife on their land as a result of CSP enhancements.

Positive changes reported

Farmers and ranchers reported positive changes on their land as a result of enrolling in CSP. Here are some of the things they shared:

“By changing grazing and watering habits of my livestock, my grasses were more capable of holding soil erosion and water runoff.”

– Iowa producer

“We are learning how much nitrogen our ground needs. Our irrigation sprinkler monitors help us water more efficiently.”

– Kansas producer

“Planting grass borders along cultivated ground aids in soil erosion and provides cover and protection for wildlife.”

– Kansas producer

“[CSP helped] to improve water and air quality on my entire operation.”

– Kansas producer

“[CSP] has helped to reduce erosion as well as increase the ability of the soil to hold nutrients for future and prior crops.”

– Nebraska producer

“We no longer attempt to farm marginal soils. The grass we have seeded is improving the soil and preventing erosion.”

– North Dakota producer

“It has increased our pheasant population. It has improved our hay yield on years when there is adequate moisture without using fertilizer.”

– North Dakota producer

“We have been managing our soil fertility and soil health more effectively.”

– South Dakota producer

C. SUPPORTING CSP IN THE 2018 FARM BILL

“[CSP] is a high priority program that offers financial incentives to help conserve our soil, water, and wildlife that otherwise might not be done.”

– Nebraska producer

The survey asked farmers and ranchers to rate their satisfaction with CSP on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very high satisfaction and 1 indicating low satisfaction. More than 86 percent of respondents, or 426 responses, reported a high or very high level of satisfaction with their contracts, as shown in Figure 2 on page 8. In addition, 87 percent of respondents, or 730 responses, stated that CSP should be supported as a priority in the next farm bill. See Figure 3 on page 8.

D. RENEWING CONTRACTS

“The renewal contract gave me the incentive and confidence to implement additional practices that I may not have done without CSP.”

– Iowa producer

Farmers and ranchers were asked about their plans to renew their CSP contract(s). Table 3 on page 8 shows the overwhelming majority of respondents in all five states were interested in renewing for an additional five years or had already renewed their contract.¹⁸

18 Not all respondents answered this question.

FIGURE 2. FARMER AND RANCHER LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH CSP CONTRACTS

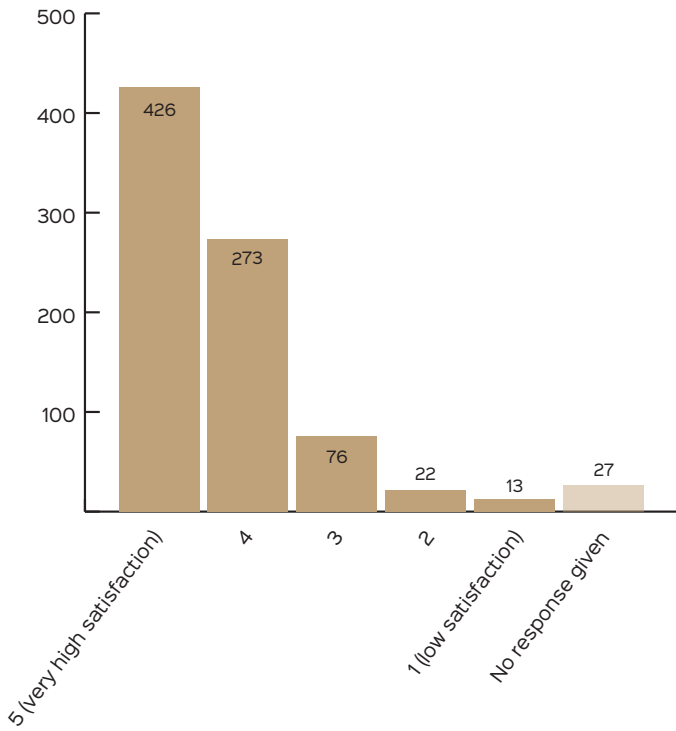


FIGURE 3. RESPONSES TO: “SHOULD CSP BE SUPPORTED AS A PRIORITY IN THE NEXT FARM BILL?”

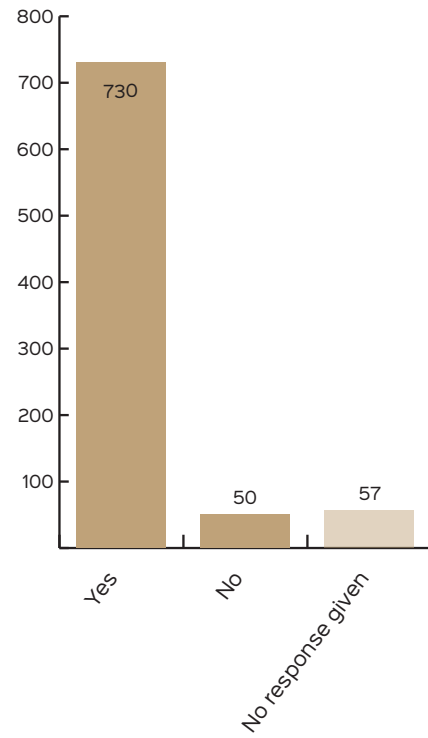


TABLE 3. CSP CONTRACT RENEWAL

State	I would like to renew at least one CSP contract for an additional five years	I have already renewed at least one CSP contract for an additional five years	I am not planning to renew my CSP contract(s)	Number of responses
Iowa	41%	61%	10%	226
Kansas	44%	51%	17%	174
Nebraska	30%	67%	15%	79
North Dakota	52%	51%	6%	168
South Dakota	58%	37%	10%	163

E. PROMOTION OF CSP IS CRITICAL

Because an important part of CSP participation is farmer and rancher knowledge of the program, those surveyed were asked how they learned of CSP. The results are shown in Figure 4. Most respondents reported learning about the program from a local agency, such as NRCS or their Soil and Water Conservation District.

In addition, many farmers and ranchers shared the explicit value they saw in technical expertise provided by NRCS personnel. The quotes below demonstrate the ways in which respondents appreciated and benefited from working with NRCS personnel.

“My NRCS office encouraged me to enroll [in CSP].”

– Iowa producer

“Working with NRCS on CSP was educational to me on ways to improve my land. I believe there has been a resurgence of both pheasants and bobwhite quail on my farm because of the habitat restoration.”

– Iowa producer

“I appreciate the assistance of our county NRCS conservationists in completing annual accounting and record completion.”

– Kansas producer

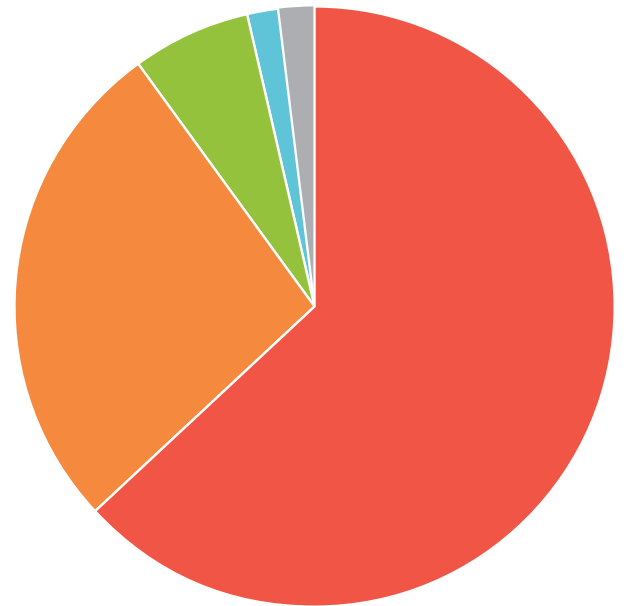
“[I] wanted financial and technical assistance to improve rangeland and wildlife habitats on my land with sound expert technical assistance from NRCS.”

– Kansas producer

VII. DISCUSSION

With more than 70 million acres enrolled, CSP remains a widely popular program among farmers and ranchers. These survey results explain the source of that popularity and confirm the program’s value and benefit. The figures point to the ultimate natural resource benefits of the conservation practices that CSP supports, and re-emphasize the importance of NRCS personnel in effective program implementation. However, given the importance of

FIGURE 4. HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT CSP?



- Local agency (for example, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); Soil and Water Conservation District) (70%)
- Friend or family member (30%)
- Newspaper or other media source (7%)
- Local co-op, crop advisor, or technical service provider (2%)
- Conservation group (for example, Pheasants Forever or the Nature Conservancy) (2%)

the program and the high demand, strong funding for CSP is essential for continuing the positive benefits of its comprehensive approach to conservation.

The survey results show with CSP, farmers and ranchers can access greater levels of conservation, see advantages of those practices, and value the education and financial support to help achieve these conservation benefits. This demonstrates the reassuring conclusion that CSP is working as it should.



CSP recognizes prescribed grazing as a conservation practice farmers and ranchers can use to protect soil and vegetation on their land. Survey results showed many livestock producers reported improved pastures as a result of grazing management techniques. | Photo by Kylie Kai

These outcomes are particularly important when considering the current agricultural economy. According to USDA Economic Research Service, the farm sector has experienced three consecutive years of decline.¹⁹ Net farm incomes have dropped significantly since 2013,²⁰ and median farm income in 2017 was negative: at least half of farms had incomes of \$1,000 in the red. Many American farmers find themselves losing money and looking for off-farm work.²¹ In this context, the majority of farmer and rancher respondents unsurprisingly expressed appreciation for the financial support CSP provides.

The reported positive changes to soil health, water quality, and other natural resources also indicate the program is working as it should. Conservation enhancements chosen by farmers and ranchers, with the assistance of NRCS personnel, are meant

19 “Highlights from the November 2017 Farm Income Forecast.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, Nov. 29, 2017, ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/highlights-from-the-farm-income-forecast/. Accessed Dec. 14, 2017.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

to address priority resource concerns that are not confined to a single farm or ranch, but rather impact the surrounding region. With enhancements that reduce erosion and prevent water runoff, CSP helps protect our most valued, and shared, resources.

However, this survey was designed only to collect farmers’ and ranchers’ perspectives, and did not include data collection on any natural resource indicators such as soil health, water quality, or biodiversity. NRCS has limited authority to collect this data and track natural resource impacts of conservation programs, and does so by administering the Conservation Effects Assessment Project.²² While producers report CSP benefits natural resources, proving the impact of these conservation practices will require voluntary and systematic collecting of scientific data, which in turn requires passage of policy to support these activities.

22 “Conservation Effects Assessment Project.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/nra/ceap/>. Accessed Dec. 14, 2017.

Ultimately, the data from this survey show farmers and ranchers value the program for its many benefits, and support its preservation in the upcoming farm bill. The contract renewal data provide further evidence of this: the majority of respondents were interested in re-enrolling or had already done so.

Furthermore, survey responses overwhelmingly demonstrated that local NRCS personnel greatly impact the ability of farmers and ranchers to make improvements on their land. Many respondents reported positive relationships with their local NRCS office, and cited they value the support to address problems on their land. These responses demonstrate skill, technical expertise, and staff time within NRCS are critical to the success of CSP. This shows the importance of robust funding for NRCS local offices, which is afforded through annual appropriations under Conservation Technical Assistance. Investing in working lands conservation is critical for the future of our farmers, ranchers, and natural resources.

Finally, it is important to note broader forces at work influencing farmer and rancher adoption of conservation practices. One such barrier is in crop insurance. The Risk Management Agency sets “good farming practices” guidelines for crop insurance, but most NRCS conservation practices are not currently included. A farmer is much less likely to adopt conservation practices if their crop insurance eligibility is threatened. Bringing all NRCS conservation practices under the Risk Management Agency’s “good farming practices” guidelines will help support adoption of conservation practices.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As stewards of the land, farmers and ranchers know their resources best. With guidance from NRCS personnel, and support through working lands conservation programs, producers have the opportunity to effectively address priority resource concerns on their acres. CSP supports farmers and ranchers in

sustainably managing their land and building upon good land stewardship through the implementation and adoption of targeted conservation enhancements on entire farms and ranches.

Due to satisfaction with CSP, many farmers and ranchers stated they want to continue participation in the program, and many plan to renew contracts when eligible to further develop the impact of their conservation efforts. Additionally, an overwhelming majority support CSP as a priority in the upcoming farm bill. Lastly, farmers and ranchers expressed the value of technical expertise from local NRCS personnel. Feedback supports the demand to continue working lands conservation programs, such as CSP.

In the 2018 farm bill, legislators have the opportunity to support farmers and ranchers who value environmental stewardship by maintaining funding for working lands conservation. Furthermore, legislators can apply these perspectives to policy that would build upon or improve CSP, such as the adoption of measuring and reporting standards to further assess USDA programs.

As we work toward the final farm bill, our federal policies must reflect the perspectives of our nation’s farmers and ranchers. The farm bill must incentivize, encourage, and reward land stewardship efforts.

“I feel that conservation and farming need to work together for a holistic approach, so nature and farming can live and thrive for generations in the future.”

– South Dakota producer

“CSP remains most important and beneficial to me and my family in our concerted efforts to maximize conservation practices for accomplishing overall maintenance and improvement of our land.”

– Nebraska producer

About the Center for Rural Affairs

Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

