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## **SIGN-UP ANNOUNCED FOR NEW CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**

INDIANAPOLIS, August 6, 2009—Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan announced today that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will begin continuous sign-up for the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) on August 10, with the first sign-up period cutoff scheduled for September 30, 2009. CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones on their operations.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) authorizes CSP, which is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Congress renamed and revamped the former Conservation Security Program completely to improve its availability and appeal to agricultural and forestry producers. Eligible lands now include cropland, grassland, improved pastureland, and non-industrial private forestland (a new land use for the program), and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

“With CSP in continuous sign-up, we are able to offer producers greater opportunity to enroll their eligible acreage in the program,” said NRCS State Conservationist Jane Hardisty. “We encourage producers to use the self-screening checklist first to determine whether the new program is suitable for them and their operation. The checklist is available on the NRCS CSP Web site and at our local NRCS field offices.”

Producers then need to submit an application (form NRCS-CPA 1200) to their local NRCS district conservationist. Forms are available at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/forms/index.html> by typing the form number in the search box. NRCS staff will determine the land and producer’s eligibility. If eligible, the next step for a potential participant is to schedule an appointment with their local NRCS staff to enter the producer’s current and proposed conservation practices in the conservation measurement tool (CMT). This tool estimates the level of environmental performance to be achieved by a producer implementing and maintaining conservation activity. NRCS uses the estimates and the state’s predetermined resource concerns to rank applications. NRCS staff will then conduct on-site field verifications of information obtained from the CMT. When the potential participant has been field verified and approved for funding, the participant must develop a conservation stewardship plan.

USDA is finalizing the program's policies and procedures. The CSP interim final rule, published in the Federal Register, is open for public comment through September 28, 2009.

For more information about CSP, including the self-screening checklist and the CSP activity list, visit [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new\\_csp/csp.html](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html) or contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center. USDA Service Center locations can be found at: [http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory/field\\_offices.html](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory/field_offices.html).

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