



Questions & Answers for Farmers

1. What is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program?

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program or CREP (pronounced "krep") is a federal and state conservation partnership designed to address agriculture-related environmental concerns. Participants receive financial incentives from USDA to voluntarily enroll environmentally sensitive cropland or pastureland in contracts for a period of 10 to 15 years. In return for annual rental payments and financial incentives, participants convert the land to native grasses, trees and other conservation vegetation.

2. What are the environmental benefits of CREP?

The New York CREP will help farmers address erosion and nutrient runoff within New York's high priority watersheds. CREP's aim is to remove environmentally sensitive cropland planted on steep slopes or bordering streams, creeks and lakes.

Retiring highly erodible cropland and planting it to protective vegetation will enhance water quality, while providing shelter, nesting areas and food for wildlife. Buffers planted along stream banks will filter phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment from runoff before it enters the waterways.

3. What areas in New York are included in the program?

CREP is available in specified watersheds throughout the state. Eligible watersheds were selected because the NYS Priority Waterbody List indicates that they are negatively impacted due to agricultural activities. USDA and NYS's aim to place 40,000 of the most environmentally sensitive acres into the program.

Public wellhead protection areas, as designated by the NYS Department of Health, are also eligible for enrollment within these watersheds. CREP will remove cropland acreage surrounding wellheads from crop production, thereby reducing the potential for contaminants to affect the water supply.

4. What are the goals of the New York CREP?

The goals of the New York CREP are:

- Reduce nutrient loading of
 - phosphorus from 145,284 pounds per year to 72,642 pounds per year
 - nitrogen from 77,376 pounds per year to 38,688 pounds per year
 - sediments from 175,316 tons per year to 70,126 tons per year
- Reduce the potential for pathogens to enter identified waterbodies.
- Establish riparian buffers adjacent to 4,598 stream miles and 473,457 acres of surface waters.
- Establish conservation vegetation on areas that serve Environmental Protection Agency approved wellhead zones.

5. What type of cropland is eligible for CREP?

Eligible cropland must have been cropped four of the six years between 1996 and 2001. Additionally, the land must be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as a buffer practice.

6. What conservation measures are applicable?

- Field boundaries and marginal pastureland adjacent to surface water are the primary focus of the program. These acres would be planted to grass or a combination of grasses, shrubs and trees.
- Whole fields may be enrolled, but to qualify the slope of the acreage must be highly erodible and 50 percent of the acreage must be within 1,000 feet of a surface water source. These fields may be planted to grasses, trees, wildlife habitats and/or wetlands.
- Fields located in wellhead protection areas can be planted to grasses and trees as well.

7. What will producers earn under CREP?

New York CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of USDA payments:

- **Annual Rental Payments:** all producers will receive an annual rental payment based on the soil's pre-determined rental rate. This rate will then be **increased by an additional 145 percent** as an incentive to enroll in the program (Example: A \$40 rental rate plus the 145% incentive payment (\$58) equals a \$98/acre annual rental payment.). Annual rental payments are issued in October.
- **Annual Maintenance Payment:** To offset any cost incurred by the producer for preserving the conservation practice, a maintenance payment of \$5 to \$10 dollars per acre will be added into the annual rental payment.
- **Cost-Share Assistance:** USDA will reimburse farmers up to 50 percent of the eligible costs for installing conservation practices.
- **Practice Incentive Payment:** As an incentive to establish certain practices, a one-time payment equal to 40 percent of the installation cost will be issued. This payment is in addition to the cost-share assistance and issued upon completion of the practice.
- **Signing Incentive Payment:** Eligible producers will also receive a one-time payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for land enrolled in a grass waterway, riparian buffer or filter strip practice. This payment is made after the contract has been signed and approved.

In addition, New York will offer:

- **Cost-Share Assistance:** Producers may be eligible to receive additional cost-share assistance through New York State on a competitive basis.

8. Are there other benefits to enrolling in CREP?

Establishment of riparian buffers and other CREP practices is a visible way to demonstrate your commitment to environmental stewardship. Neighbors and community members often notice and appreciate these efforts toward protecting water quality and wildlife.

Participation in CREP can also help ensure a safe drinking water supply for your livestock by reducing contaminants entering surface water. If livestock are fenced out of streams altogether, an alternate water supply may be installed to provide fresh drinking water.

9. When will CREP sign-up begin?

The CREP agreement between USDA and New York State was signed on October 29, 2003. Enrollment will be on a continuous basis through December 31, 2007. Each contract is for a 10 to 15 year period. Farmers and landowners can enroll at their local Farm Service Agency office or Soil & Water Conservation District office.

10. Where can I get more information about the program?

More information on the New York CREP is available from local Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service or Farm Service Agency offices and on FSA's Web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov.

NYS CREP is a partnership between:

United States Department of Agriculture
New York State Soil & Water Conservation Committee
New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets