

# USDA Issues Interim Rules For Erodible Lands, Wetlands

**HARRISBURG** — The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced interim rules to implement sections of the 1985 Farm Bill designed to remove inconsistencies between soil conservation goals and traditional farm commodity program benefits.

Effective immediately, producers who fail to meet the interim rules will not be eligible for commodity price support and other program payments, disaster payments, crop insurance under the Farm Crop Insurance Act, FmHA loans, farm storage facility loans and other farm program benefits.

USDA's action is designed to reduce soil loss due to wind and water erosion; protect the nation's long-term capability to produce food and fiber; reduce sedimentation and improve water quality; assist in preserving the nation's wetlands; and lessen the incentives to produce agricultural commodities on highly erodible farmland.

With regard to highly erodible land, farmers will have a grace period to implement a conservation plan on land that was cultivated in any of the years 1981-1985. Many will be able to develop and apply a conservation plan that will allow them to plant highly erodible land to grasses or trees either on their own or in conjunction with the Conservation Reserve Program.

Before January 1, 1990, or until two years after USDA's Soil Conservation Service prepares soil maps for a particular area, producers will not lose eligibility under the highly erodible land conservation provisions for farm program benefits as the result of production of an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land that was: (a) cultivated to produce any of the 1981 through 1985 crops of an agricultural commodity; or (b) set-aside, diverted or otherwise not cultivated under a program administered by the secretary of agriculture for any such crops to reduce production of

an agricultural commodity. These exemptions allow affected persons to continue the production of agricultural commodities on highly erodible land through January 1, 1990, (or until two years after the Soil Conservation Service maps the land) without having to actively apply a conservation plan to retain program eligibility.

The provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, which the interim rules implements, are commonly referred to as conservation-compliance, sodbuster and swampbuster provisions. Sodbuster provisions apply to any highly erodible land cultivated for crop production since December 23, 1985. Swampbuster provisions apply to the conversion of wetland after December 23, 1985, for the purpose of producing agricultural commodities.

However, farmers who cultivated highly erodible land or converted wetlands after December 23, 1985, and planted a crop before the date the interim rule is published will remain

eligible for USDA program benefits for the 1986 crop year. To retain eligibility for subsequent crop years, however, the farmer must apply an approved conservation system on the highly erodible land. With regard to wetlands converted after December 23, 1985, the farmer cannot, except under limited circumstances, produce agricultural commodities on such lands after the date of publication of the interim rule and retain eligibility for farm program benefits.

There are an estimated 345 million acres of highly erodible

agricultural land in the United States, of which 118 million acres are existing cropland and five million acres are wetlands with a medium-to-high potential for conversion to agricultural use. Pennsylvania has 3.8 million acres of highly erodible cropland out of a total cropland acreage of six million. Another 4.8 million acres of agricultural land would have a high to medium potential for conversion to agriculture. A total of 651,500 acres of wetland would be included in the program regulations. Total land in Pennsylvania affected by the program is 9.3 million.

## Water Quality a Theme At Delaware

**NEWARK, Del.** — Water quality is one of the themes of the upcoming Agricultural Resources Day, August 9, at the University of Delaware Research and Education Center in Georgetown. There will be exhibits on the Inland Bays, on-site wastewater management, and water conservation in the home, as well as nitrogen management in

crop production systems and its relationship to groundwater quality. University personnel will be on hand to answer questions on water quality.

Agricultural Resources Day replaces Farm and Home Field Day, which traditionally was held on Wednesday. The event has been renamed to better reflect current research and extension programs at the university and has been scheduled for a Saturday so that more people will be able to attend.

Besides water quality, highlighted topics will include hi-tech agriculture, management for farm profitability, plants and the environment, and food for fun and fitness. The event will last from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.



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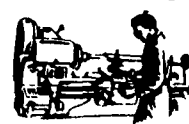


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