

# Workshop Offers CRP Information, Opportunities

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been substantially enhanced since its creation, said Jerry Iles, watershed agent at the south district office of Ohio State University Extension.

"More land is eligible for CRP now than when it was initially created," Iles said. "Now nearly any land that borders a stream or river and could be enhanced by having a buffer strip or some other form of best management practice put in may be eligible."

Farmers, other landowners, watershed planners and natural resource professionals who would like to learn more about CRP should attend a Conservation Reserve Program Workshop scheduled Thursday, Feb. 22, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Ohio State University Extension's South District office in Jackson.

Anyone who owns or farms acreage along streams, rivers, or lakes should consider attending, Iles said.

"CRP is constantly changing and this is a way for people to get up-to-date and learn more about the program in general," he said. "Participants will learn the details of CRP such as eligibility requirements, incentive payments, fencing cost share opportunities, water source development and more."

The Conservation Reserve Program is a federal program established under the Food Security Act of 1985 to assist private landowners in converting highly erodible cropland to vegetative cover for 10 years. Since its creation, it has been expanded to include more land and offer longer-term contracts.

Under the current program, enrolled land must be highly erodible, contribute to a serious water quality program, or provide substantial environmental benefits if devoted to certain specific conservation uses. In return for voluntarily retiring environmentally sensitive cropland, landowners receive rental payments from the USDA.

In Ohio, there are about 280,000 acres of land enrolled in CRP and receiving an average annual rental payment of \$76.73 per acre. Nationwide, the program pays an average of \$4,833 per farm and \$45.17 per acre on more than 462,855 contracts and 293,857 farms. There are nearly 30 million acres enrolled in CRP.

"The program is administered by the USDA's Farm Service Agency and is the federal government's single largest environmental improvement program on private lands," Iles said. "It is a unique way of forming conservation partnerships between landowners and government by using cash incentives for landowners to use best management practices."

Through the program, USDA shares the cost of establishing approved conservation practices. For example, it will help pay to install fencing and alternate water sources to keep cattle out of a stream, Iles said. It also will help pay to plant grass or forested buffer strips along streams. Buffer strips stabilize stream banks, shade water, enhance wildlife habitat, and absorb nutrient and other runoff from fields before it reaches the waterway.

The featured speaker at the workshop will be Robert Cole,

chief agricultural program specialist for conservation and price support programs for the U.S. Farm Service Agency. Cole has a vast knowledge of CRP and is ultimately the person who answers questions and interprets the specifics of the program, Iles said. Cole will give an overview of CRP and the related Conservation Reserve Enhancement

Program (CREP).

Other topics planned for the workshop are an overview of the benefits of streamside forests, the Lake Erie Buffer Initiative, Lake Erie CREP, eligibility requirements and county soils comparison, Natural Resource Conservation Service technical requirements and assistance, and conservation impacts of

grazing lands.

Participants also may find helpful a scheduled panel discussion between farmers currently enrolled in CRP, Iles said.

"It clears up a lot of misconceptions when you actually have local people participate in a panel and share their experiences," he said.

Registration for the Conser-

vation Reserve Program Workshop is \$12 and includes lunch. Preregistration is preferred but not required.

For registration or more information about the CRP Workshop, those interested should contact Iles at Extension's South District office, (740) 286-2177, or e-mail Iles.9@osu.edu.

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