

## News Release

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### **NRCS TO ACCEPT CONTRACT MODIFICATION REQUESTS FROM 2004 AND 2005 CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM CONTRACT PARTICIPANTS**

**Jackson, Mississippi, July 31, 2006**—The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will accept requests from Aug. 1 through Sept. 15 from 2004 and 2005 Conservation Security Program (CSP) participants who want to add conservation enhancements or newly acquired land to their original contracts.

“Our 2005 participants have demonstrated their interest in completing additional conservation practices, proving that voluntary, incentive-based programs on working lands encourage landowners to achieve the highest level of conservation stewardship,” said Homer Wilkes, State Conservationist for NRCS in Mississippi.

This request period applies to CSP participants in Lower Big Black and Coastal Streams watershed(s) who wish to advance tiers. Those who currently hold 2005 Tier III contracts may also add enhancements or newly acquired land to their stewardship plan. All affected producers were sent a letter informing them of the upcoming request period.

Lower Big Black watershed has 32 contracts in Hinds, Holmes, Madison, Warren and Yazoo counties with over 32,600 acres eligible. Coastal Streams watershed in southern Mississippi has one contract in Hancock County with 73 acres eligible.

Producers will receive payment for approved contract modifications in Fiscal Year 2007 if enough appropriated funds are available. The exact amount of funding for approved requests will not be known until Congress appropriates the agency’s program budget in Fiscal Year 2007. NRCS will pro-rate or fully fund the approved additions based on the available funding.

NRCS field office staff work with producers to develop a CSP stewardship plan when they first sign a contract with the agency. Often, these plans include new enhancements and/or additional acres for coverage in future years. Once the conservation practice requirements for a tier are met, the participants may request to modify their contracts to advance to a higher tier and receive additional funds associated with the increased stewardship and/or acres covered. The improvements must be completed and operational before payments are awarded.

Following is a list of the contract modifications that will be accepted during this CSP modification request period:

- advancing tiers on land already identified in the original contract that is still under the operator’s control;

- adding newly acquired land to Tier III contracts or those advancing to Tier III during the modification request period; and

- adding enhancements that have been established or planned for Tier III contracts or those advancing to Tier III. Common enhancements can include soil quality improvements, use of precision farming and managing wildlife habitat.

CSP participants are paid based on a three-tiered system, with Tier III recognizing the highest level of conservation. Contracts run from five to 10 years and are capped annually at \$20,000 for Tier I, \$35,000 for Tier II and \$45,000 for Tier III. Tier I requires a producer to address all soil and water quality issues on the part of agricultural working land to be enrolled in CSP. Tier II requires the producer to address soil and water quality issues on all eligible land uses on the entire agricultural operation. The producer also must address an additional natural resource concern by the end of the contract period. To enroll in Tier III, the producer must address all resource concerns on all eligible land uses on the entire agricultural operation including riparian zones.

All land added to a contract by modification must meet the minimum level of conservation practice requirements and the criteria for the lowest enrollment category funded in the sign-up announcement from the year the contract was approved.

CSP is a voluntary program that supports ongoing conservation stewardship on private agricultural working lands and enhances the condition of the nation's natural resources. Under this program, the agency rewards producers who practice good stewardship on their agricultural lands and offers incentives for those who want to do more.

Producers may contact their local NRCS office to receive information about the CSP contract modification procedures.

For more information about CSP in Mississippi, please visit <http://www.ms.usda.gov/MissCSP>. For information about CSP nationally, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.

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