



USDA Authorizes Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Signup

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP) is reminding agricultural producers and private landowners to apply for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Enrollment opened January 12 and applications will be accepted on a first come, first served basis until July 31, 2024, or until the acreage cap is met.

CREP is a state and federally funded land management resource for landowners and producers wanting to set aside agricultural land located along streams, lakes, and wetlands from production. By enrolling in CREP, landowners benefit from the financial incentive and flexible nature of the program and have reduced financial risk by mitigating issues such as nutrient loss and crop damage from frequent flooding on their marginal agricultural lands.

The program offers two different conservation practice options: 15-year agreements and perpetual easements. Those in 15-year agreements receive upfront and annual rental payments with the ability to re-enroll when their contract expires. Land enrolled in perpetual easements receive a significantly higher upfront payment in addition to annual payments, with potential for selective land use activities to be allowed for 15 years. Additionally, there is no minimum acreage enrollment requirement, giving landowners the ability to implement conservation practices and maintain the agricultural property tax benefits on these enrolled portions while keeping the rest in production.

In 2023, an estimated total of 75,986 lbs. of phosphorous, 40,882 lbs. of nitrogen, and 37,706 lbs. of sediment runoff were reduced from Wisconsin waters because of the 654 miles of stream and shoreline buffered by CREP. This contributed to the overall environmental health of the state and allows producers to improve the land, water, and wildlife habitat quality on their property. Since the program’s inception in 2001, the state has contributed a total of \$21.9 million to landowners in cost-share and incentive payments. The majority of CREP eligible counties in Wisconsin had their federal soil rental rates increase this year, resulting in higher federal and state payouts to landowners who enroll land in CREP in 2024.

The Wisconsin CREP project area consists of all or part of 53 Wisconsin counties. Lands within these areas are eligible for enrollment if they were actively cropped or grazed for four out of the six years prior to 2019 and are within 150 feet of an eligible waterbody, or within 1,000 feet for the Northern and Southern Grassland project areas.

Additional information about eligibility and enrollment can be found on [DATCP’s website](#). To apply, contact your county land conservation department or local Farm Service Agency office.

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