United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

October 2005

Conservation Security Program:
Self-Assessment Workbook

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Helping People Help the Land

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Introduction

About the Conservation Security Program
The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a unique program that goes beyond the past approach of repairing on-farm conservation problems. Instead, CSP offers rewards to those who have been good stewards of the soil and water resources on their working agricultural land. It also offers incentives for those who wish to exceed the minimum levels of resource protection and enhance the natural resources on the land they manage. By rewarding land stewardship, CSP will ensure that our Nation's private and Tribal agricultural lands remain viable working enterprises.

The program is available in designated watersheds of all 50 states, the Caribbean area and the Pacific Basin area. The number of watersheds selected for participation in any year depends on funds allocated by Congress. To be eligible for CSP, a majority of your agricultural operation must be within one of the selected watersheds. For more information about the watersheds selected, contact your local NRCS office, or go to the NRCS Web page: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/.

The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers regardless of the size of the operation, crops produced, or geographic location. NRCS will establish and publicly announce application sign-up periods each year.

About this Self-Assessment Workbook
This self-assessment is required for all CSP applications and must be completed by the applicant prior to the published application evaluation period cut-off date for the application to be considered for funding. This workbook is also available on-line at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/. The interactive site allows you to log on and off at your convenience to complete the workbook at your own pace.

As you go through this workbook and answer questions about your operation, you will get a good idea about whether you are eligible for CSP at this time. You will answer "yes," "no," or "not applicable (NA)" if the question covers a topic or management technique that is not relevant to your operation. In the benchmark inventory section, you will be asked to record the conservation practices and activities that are ongoing on your operation. This benchmark inventory will serve as the basis for your stewardship plan.

Records and Record Keeping
Records for two out of the last three years are required for eligibility in CSP. Applicants will be required to certify in writing that their records preceding the sign-up period and documentation are available upon request by NRCS during the sign-up and throughout the life of the CSP contract.

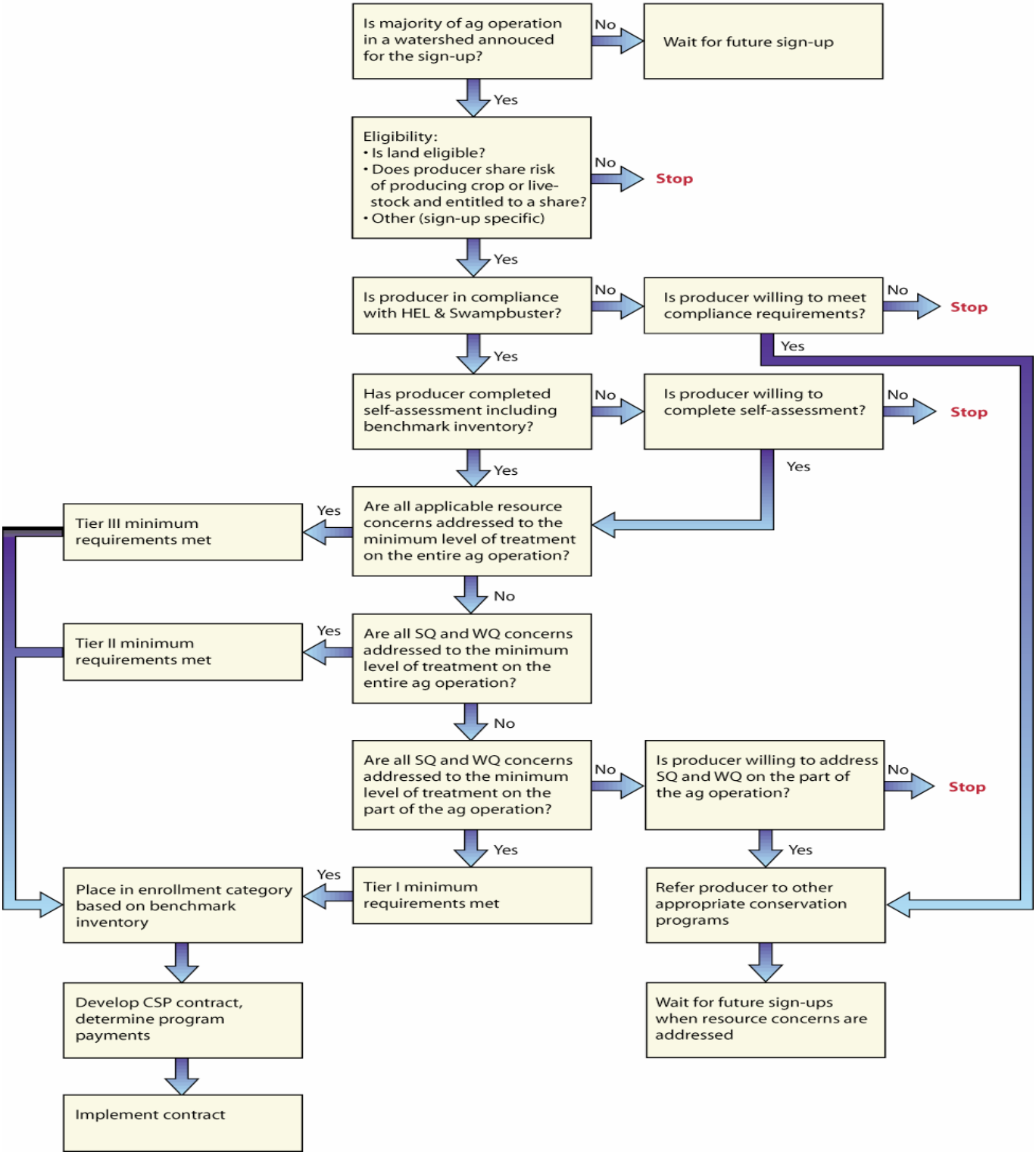
About the Application Process

After you complete this Self-Assessment Workbook you will have a good indication of whether CSP is the right program for you at this time. If you believe your operation is eligible for CSP, the next step will be for you to schedule an interview with your local NRCS office. During the interview, the NRCS staff will review your Self-Assessment Workbook, documents and records to verify the information and clarify any questions.

If NRCS determines that your application meets the basic eligibility requirements and sign-up criteria, your application will be placed in a tier as described in the “Application Process Next Steps” section of this workbook. Your tier placement will establish the length of your contract, final stewardship payment rate and contract payment limits.

Your application will then be placed into an enrollment category for funding consideration based on the criteria specified in this sign-up notice. You may choose to be placed into the highest enrollment category for which your application qualifies. It is likely that you will have several tier and enrollment category options from which to choose. NRCS cannot make this decision for you, nor predict if funding will be available for any specific category. The NRCS staff will explain the requirements and payments of the different options available to you so that you can make the right decision for your operation.

CSP Application Process



INSERT YOUR STATE MAP

CSP Watersheds – FY-2006

STEP 1: Land and Producer Eligibility

YOUR NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

List the location of the land, or portion of land, you wish to enroll in CSP.

NAME of LAND: _____
(Example – Smith Farm)

ZIP CODE: _____

WATERSHED: _____

LOCATION:
(township, range, section,
parish, etc.) _____

_____

Signature **Date**

Land and Producer Eligibility Questions

1.	Do you share in the risk of producing crops or livestock on this operation? Note: Landlords who receive only cash payments for renting the land are not currently eligible to apply for CSP on that acreage.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
2.	Are you entitled to share in the crop or livestock available for marketing from the agricultural operation?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
3.	Do you have control of the land you intend to enroll in CSP for the life of the proposed 5- to 10-year contract period? Note: A lease is not required, but tenants must be able to provide written evidence or assurance of control from the landowner(s). You may use the "Control of Land Certification" form in *Appendix A* to provide this evidence.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
4.	Is your average adjusted gross income less than or equal to $2.5 million, or if greater than $2.5 million, did 75% come from farming, ranching, or forestry? Note: To participate in CSP, your average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) for the 3 tax years immediately preceding the year the contract is approved cannot exceed $2.5 million, unless at least 75 percent of the income was derived from agriculture. You must complete the AGI determination form "CCC-526, Payment Eligibility Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification" in *Appendix B*, prior to application.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

5. Are you in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill as amended? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

Note:

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, requires that persons who produce agriculture commodities protect all cropland classified as being highly erodible from excessive erosion and all wetlands from conversion. The provisions have been amended in the 1990, 1996, and 2002 Farm Bills.

If you have not participated in a USDA program, you must complete a "Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification" form AD-1026 in *Appendix C* and submit it to your local USDA Service Center.

6. Is the land you wish to enroll in CSP currently in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) or Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

Note:

Land enrolled in CRP, CREP, WRP, WREP or GRP cannot be a part of the CSP contract but should be included in your agricultural delineation. In addition, land accepted in a recent CRP sign-up for contract development is not eligible.

For example: You would like to enroll a 40-acre parcel that has a 2-acre CRP buffer. You will include all 40 acres in your delineation. However, only the 38 acres that are not enrolled in CRP will be eligible for payment in a CSP contract.

7. Is the land you wish to enroll private agricultural land or Tribal land? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

Note:

Public land (owned by federal, state or local government) is not eligible for CSP payments but should be included in your delineation if the land is under your control.

Answers

Land and Producer Eligibility

1.	YES	You must share in the risk of producing the agricultural product to be eligible.
2.	YES	You must be entitled to share in the crop or livestock available for marketing. If no product was produced or available for market, you must demonstrate that you would have shared had the crop or livestock been produced or available.
3.	YES	You must be able to certify that you have control of the land.
4.	YES	You must be in compliance with the AGI provision of the 2002 Farm Bill.
	or NA	Recognized Indian Tribes and program participants who are reservists, military personnel called to active duty as the result of Operation Iraqi Freedom and other similar military operations are EXEMPT from the AGI provision and may answer NA, not applicable. If you answer NA, you will need to verify that you qualify for this exemption.
5.	YES	You have completed a Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification form and are in compliance (Appendix C). Note: If you answered NO, you are still eligible to apply for CSP but you MUST complete a Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification form (Appendix C) for your application to be considered.
6.	NO	The land you wish to enroll in CSP is not currently in CRP, CREP, WRP, WREP or GRP.
	or NA	You do not have any land in CRP, CREP, WRP, WREP or GRP.
7.	YES	If you are unsure, refer to the definition of agricultural land.

IF YOUR ANSWERS DIFFER, you may not be eligible for CSP at this time. Please review your responses and answer only for the land, or portion of land, that you wish to enroll in CSP.

You may want to identify a smaller portion of your operation, by taking out the lands that are not eligible, and answer the questions again.

Delineating your Agricultural Operation

The applicant will delineate the agricultural operation as the initial step in the application process.

When you delineate your agricultural operation, you should include all agricultural land under your control and other land, such as farmsteads, feedlots, headquarters and incidental forest lands. The operation should constitute a cohesive management unit that is operated with equipment, labor, an accounting system, and management that is substantially separate from any other land. The land within the operation may be contiguous or noncontiguous. The minimum size of an agricultural operation is a field.

In delineating your operation, you may elect to use the Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm boundaries or you may use whatever term (or number) you choose to describe the land.
If you decide to use FSA farm boundaries in your application, the entire farm area must be included within the delineation. You may offer one farm or aggregate farms into one agricultural operation.

Your delineation should include all land under your control, including land that is ineligible for CSP payments, such as:

- Land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) or Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- Public land
- Forest land

Although the lands mentioned above are not eligible to receive payments, the conservation work on this land may be used to determine your eligibility for the program.

What to include in your delineation:

√ Agricultural land

√ Incidental parcels – including, but not limited to, pivot corners, field borders, linear areas, turn rows, intermingled wet or riparian areas

√ Other lands – such as farmsteads, ranch sites, barnyards, feed lots, equipment storage areas, materials handling areas, greenhouses and other such developed areas. The amount of “other lands” cannot exceed 10% of the total acreage enrolled.

√ Land in CRP, CREP, WRP, WREP and GRP

√ Public land under your control

√ Forest land

STEP 2: Minimum Treatment for Land Use Types

Land Use Designations

In order to be eligible for CSP, your land must be considered private agricultural land. Agricultural land means cropland, rangeland, pastureland, hayland, and other land on which food, fiber, and other agricultural products are produced. This "other land" includes land of varying cover types, such as cropped woodland and cropped marshes, managed primarily for the production of food, fiber or other agricultural products, through a low input system. Areas used for strip-cropping or alley-cropping and silvopasture practices will be included as agricultural land. The land use designations for CSP are listed below. Check all of the land types you wish to enroll in CSP. You will be asked to answer minimum treatment questions for the land uses you wish to enroll.

☐ **CROPLAND**

A land cover/use category, either irrigated or non-irrigated, that includes areas used for the production of adapted crops for harvest, including but not limited to land in row crops or close-grown crops, forage crops that are in a short or long term rotation with row or close-grown crops, permanent hayland, horticultural cropland, orchards, vineyards and field grown ornamentals.

> **Hayland**: land managed for the production of forage crops that are machine harvested. The crop may be grasses, legumes, or a combination of both.
>
> **Cropped Woodland and Marshes**: where at least 50% of the area is actively managed to produce an agricultural product. The crop may be grown symbiotically within the system, such as ginseng and wild rice, or harvested directly from the trees, such as maple syrup. For maple syrup production, the number of tapped trees will be used to determine the production area. Once established, the agricultural product is harvested annually. Plants are selectively removed as needed to control disease and insect pests or to prevent overcrowding of the desired species. If utilized, nutrient applications follow University recommendations for the desired crop.

Note: To be eligible for payment, the land must have been planted, considered to be planted, or devoted to crop production, as determined by NRCS, for at least 4 out of the 6 years from May 13, 1996 to May 13, 2002.

☐ **PASTURELAND**

A land cover/use category of land managed primarily for the production of introduced forage plants for grazing animals and includes improved pasture and silvopasture. Pastureland cover may consist of a single species in a pure stand, a grass mixture, or grass-legume mixture. Management usually consists of cultural treatments: fertilization, weed control, reseeding or renovation, and control of grazing.

☐ **RANGELAND**

A land cover/use category on which the climax or potential plant cover is composed principally of native grasses, grass-like plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing, and introduced forage species that are managed like rangeland. The term would include areas where introduced, hardy and persistent grasses are planted and practices such as deferred grazing, burning, chaining, and rotational grazing are used, with little or no chemicals or fertilizer being applied.

Minimum Treatment for Land Use Types

The following questions will help determine if the land you wish to enroll in CSP meets the minimum program requirements. Each question pertains **only** to the land you intend to enroll in CSP. If a question is not applicable to your operation, mark “NA.”

Please answer all of the questions for each land use type you wish to enroll. The answers are provided at the end of each land use section. If your answers differ, you may identify a smaller portion of your operation, by taking out the lands that are not eligible, and answer the questions again.

Nutrients and Pesticides

In the following questions, the term **nutrient** includes organic and inorganic forms from all sources, such as commercial, animal waste, sludge, compost or agricultural by-products. **Pesticide** refers to insecticides, fungicides, miticides, rodenticides and herbicides. **Pest** refers to insects, plant diseases, rodents and weeds.

1.	Have you taken soil samples and tested soils to determine the level of plant available nutrients in the soil?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
2.	If you apply fertilizers, do you use a schedule or a Nutrient Management Plan to apply fertilizers, animal manure, or agricultural by-products? Note: A Nutrient Management Plan provides recommendations on the amount, form, placement and timing of plant nutrients to obtain optimum yields while minimizing the risk of surface and groundwater pollution. The plan should address all sources of nutrients utilized.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
3.	If you apply pesticides, do you use a schedule or a Pest Management Plan to conduct pest control activities on your cropland? Note: A Pest Management Plan provides recommendations on the chemical (pesticides), biological (beneficial insects, controlled grazing), or cultural (brush management, burning), control of pests (insects, weeds, plant diseases or rodents). It outlines the use, amount, form, timing and application of the control method to obtain optimum yields while minimizing the risk of surface and groundwater pollution.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
4.	Do you have two years of written records or documentation of your nutrient and pest management activities? Note: Records should include crop type, projected yields, soil analysis, dates and application rates of all nutrients used. Records should also include the target pest, crop type and type of pesticide used, dates and application rates or the cultural or biological control method used and dates implemented, including spot treatments.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

5.	Have you taken adequate steps to safeguard ground water from contamination by properly protecting active or abandoned wells? Examples of measures to protect wells: • Install sanitary well caps, tightly secured with a screened vent • Use pitless adaptors (a special pipe fitting that connects a water line to a well casing and provides a sanitary and frost-proof seal) • Prevent surface runoff from reaching the area immediately surrounding the well	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
6.	Have you taken adequate steps to safeguard ground and surface water from contamination by properly protecting fertilizer or pesticide mixing and loading sites? The following are examples of measures that may be taken: • Ensure the mixing/loading site is located a safe distance from wells and surface water areas such as streams, rivers, ponds, lakes canals and drainage ditches. • Use secondary containment on highly permeable or sandy soil • Properly dispose of rinse water from cleaning fertilizer/pesticide application equipment • Properly dispose of used pesticide/fertilizer containers	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
7.	If the cropland is periodically grazed, are you managing livestock to adequately protect surface and ground water from contamination by implementing the following steps: • Manage livestock access to rivers, streams, and other water courses • Prevent livestock direct access to sinkholes and other direct paths to ground water • Identify periods of grazing, rest and other treatments	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

Sediment

8. Have you protected surface waters from additions of sediment caused by direct runoff from your cropland? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

   Note:

   Soil erosion includes sheet and rill, ephemeral and classic gullies and is the leading way nutrients and pesticides attach to soil particles and move from cropland. The following structural, vegetative and management practices are used to control erosion:

   - Terrace, diversion and waterway conservation systems
   - Reduced tillage and contour farming practices
   - Buffers, filter strips, field borders, vegetative barriers and critical area plantings

Drift

9. Do you take measures to control the drift of agri-chemicals by managing the timing or method of applications or by installing windbreaks or buffers? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

Volatilization

10. Do you manage the timing and method of nutrient and pesticide applications, incorporate when feasible, or use urease inhibited or urea based fertilizer compositions? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

Salinity

11. Do you monitor salinity levels and use techniques to manage salinity? ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

    The following are techniques to manage salinity:

    - Irrigation and drainage water management
    - Deep tillage
    - Reduce time land is left fallow
    - Use soil amendments, such as gypsum
    - Plant salt-tolerant crops
    - Well and/or surface water testing

CROPLAND Questions

Soil Quality

12.	Do you grow high-residue crops, such as corn, small grains, canola, or mint at least 1 in 3 years in rotation?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
13.	Do you maintain a ground cover between the rows of your vineyard, orchard or field grown ornamentals?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
14.	Do you include any of the following in your crop rotation? • No-till, strip-till, direct seeding, or mulch-till • Perennial sod or hay in rotation • Add organic soil amendments such as manure or compost • Grow cover and green manure crops If none of the above, do your soil tests indicate an increase in organic matter?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
15.	Do you take measures to control soil compaction by avoiding tillage when soils are wet, utilizing permanent access roads, reducing tillage operations or growing deep rooted cover crops?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

Irrigation

16.	Do you adjust your irrigation rates for nutrient and pesticide applications?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
17.	Do you control irrigation-induced erosion by using a cover crop, perennial cover, polyacrylamide (PAM), residue management, or irrigation water management?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
18.	Do you apply irrigation water at rates that avoid water loss due to surface runoff or deep percolation?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

Answers

Minimum Treatment Requirements for CROPLAND

1.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** to questions 1-4, if you DO NOT apply nutrients or pesticides on the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP. Remember, the term nutrient includes organic and inorganic forms from all sources such as commercial, animal waste, sludge, compost or agricultural by-products. The term pest includes insects, weeds, plant diseases and rodents.
2.	YES	
3.	YES	
4.	YES	
5.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have any active or abandoned wells on the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP.
6.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have any fertilizer or pesticide mixing and loading sites on the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP.
7.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT periodically graze the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP.
8.	YES	
9.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT use agri-chemicals on the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP.
10.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT use nutrients or pesticides on the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP.
11.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have saline soils.
12.	YES	
13.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have a vineyard, orchard or field grown ornamentals.
14.	YES	
15.	YES	
16.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** to questions 16-18, if you DO NOT irrigate the cropland you wish to enroll in CSP.
17.	YES	
18.	YES	

IF YOUR ANSWERS DIFFER, you may not be eligible for CSP at this time. Please review your responses and answer only for the land, or portion of land, that you wish to enroll in the CSP.

You may want to identify a smaller portion of your operation, by taking out the lands that are not eligible, and answer the questions again.

PASTURE and RANGELAND Questions

1.	Do you follow a Grazing Management Plan that includes a grazing schedule and rest periods for all acres grazed? Note: A Grazing Management Plan provides the kind, class and number of animals that are supported based on the available forage supply. The grazing plan includes deferment, timing and duration of grazing.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
2.	Do you have an adequate grazing and roughage supply to meet your livestock needs on a monthly basis?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
3.	Do you have a grazing management contingency plan to adjust livestock numbers for changes in forage production due to drought, flooding, wildfire, and other natural events?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
4.	Are you using watering facilities, salting locations, fences or herding techniques to improve grazing distributions within pastures?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
5.	Do you have two years of written documentation or records of your grazing activities? Note: Records should include: Total grazing acres, forage production per pasture, number of livestock, grazing schedules, existing fences and watering facilities.	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
6.	Are you managing livestock access to rivers, streams and other water courses?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
7.	Are livestock prevented access to sinkholes and other direct paths to groundwater to protect water quality?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
8.	Do you manage access roads, stock trails and other critical areas to limit surface water runoff and to prevent erosion?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
9.	Have you taken adequate steps to safeguard ground water from contamination by properly protecting active or abandoned wells? Examples of measures to protect wells: • Install sanitary well caps, tightly secured with a screened vent • Use pitless adaptors (a special pipe fitting that connects a water line to a well casing and provides a sanitary and frost-proof seal) • Prevent surface runoff from reaching the area immediately surrounding the well	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

Nutrients and Pesticides

In the following questions, the term **nutrient** includes organic and inorganic forms from all sources, such as commercial, animal waste, sludge, compost or agricultural by-products. **Pesticide** refers to insecticides, fungicides, miticides, rodenticides and herbicides. **Pest** refers to insects, plant diseases, rodents and weeds.

10.	Have you taken soil samples and tested soils to determine the level of plant available nutrients in the soil?	☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA
11.	If you apply fertilizer, do you use a schedule or a Nutrient Management Plan to apply fertilizers, animal manure, or agricultural by-products? Note: A Nutrient Management Plan provides recommendations on the amount, form, placement and timing of plant nutrients to obtain optimum yields while minimizing the risk of surface and groundwater pollution. The plan should address all sources of nutrients utilized.	☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA
12.	If you apply pesticides, do you use a schedule or a Pest Management Plan to conduct pest control activities on your pasture and rangeland? Note: A Pest Management Plan provides recommendations on the chemical (pesticides), biological (beneficial insects, controlled grazing), or cultural (brush management, burning), control of pests (insects, weeds, plant diseases or rodents). It outlines the use, amount, form, timing and application of the control method to obtain optimum yields and forage quality while minimizing the risk of surface and groundwater pollution.	☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA
13.	Do you have two years of written records or documentation of your nutrient and pest management activities? Note: Records should include forage type, projected yields, soil analysis, dates and application rates of all nutrients used. Records should include the target pest, forage type and type of pesticide used, dates and application rates or the cultural or biological control method used and dates implemented including spot treatments.	☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NA

Irrigation

14.	Do you adjust your irrigation rates for nutrient and pesticide applications?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
15.	Do you apply irrigation water at rates that avoid water loss due to surface runoff or deep percolation?	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA
16.	Do you monitor salinity levels and use techniques to manage salinity? The following techniques can be used: • Irrigation and drainage water management • Use soil amendments, such as gypsum • Plant salt-tolerant forages	☐ YES	☐ NO	☐ NA

Answers

Minimum Treatment Requirements for PASTURE and RANGELAND

1.	YES	
2.	YES	
3.	YES	
4.	YES	
5.	YES	
6.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have any rivers, streams or other water courses on the pasture or rangeland you wish to enroll in CSP.
7.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have sinkholes or other direct paths to groundwater on the pasture or rangeland you wish to enroll in CSP.
8.	YES	
9.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have any active or abandoned wells on the pasture or rangeland you wish to enroll in CSP.
10.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** to questions 10-13, if you DO NOT apply nutrients or pesticides on the pasture or rangeland you wish to enroll in CSP. Remember, the term nutrient includes organic and inorganic forms from all sources such as commercial, animal waste, sludge, compost or agricultural by-products and the term pest includes insects, weeds, plant diseases and rodents.
11.	YES	
12.	YES	
13.	YES	
14.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** to questions 14-15, if you DO NOT irrigate the pasture land you wish to enroll in CSP.
15.	YES	
16.	YES	You may answer **"NA"** if you DO NOT have saline or sodic soils.

IF YOUR ANSWERS DIFFER, you may not be eligible for CSP at this time. Please review your responses and be sure to answer only for the land, or portion of land, that you wish to enroll in the CSP.

You may want to identify a smaller portion of your operation, by taking out the lands that are not eligible, and answer the questions again.

STEP 3: Benchmark Inventory

The Benchmark Inventory will be the foundation of your CSP stewardship plan. It is important that you provide as much information about your operation as possible. You will be asked to describe your management system, such as your crop rotation and associated tillage, or your pasture rotation and associated grazing management activities. You will also be asked to describe any conservation work or practices you have already completed and identify any resource concerns you may have.

Remember to only include the land you wish to enroll in CSP

examples

Name of Agricultural Operation: Benchmark Farms		Name of Applicant: Joanne Smith
Land Use: crop	Field Name or #: 2	Acres: 33
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address
Corn/soybean/winter rye rotation;	nutrient management, pest	would like to improve habitat for quail
no-till corn into rye stubble. Disk corn	management, scouting, split application	
residue once prior to planting	of nitrogen on corn, grass field border	
soybeans into corn stubble		

Name of Agricultural Operation: Benchmark Ranch		Name of Applicant: John Smith
Land Use: range	Field Name or #: north end	Acres: 245
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address
2 pasture switchback	watering sites, spring burn, fencing,	Invasive weeds from neighboring sites
	salt placement, brush management	starting to come into property

BENCHMARK INVENTORY for the Conservation Security Program		
Name of Agricultural Operation:		Name of Applicant:
Land Use:	Field Name or #:	Acres:
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address
Land Use:	Field Name or #:	Acres:
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address

BENCHMARK INVENTORY for the Conservation Security Program		
Name of Agricultural Operation:		Name of Applicant:
Land Use:	Field Name or #:	Acres:
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address
Land Use:	Field Name or #:	Acres:
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address

BENCHMARK INVENTORY for the Conservation Security Program		
Name of Agricultural Operation:		Name of Applicant:
Land Use:	Field Name or #:	Acres:
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address
Land Use:	Field Name or #:	Acres:
Crop Rotation/Tillage or Pasture Rotation/Grass Management	Conservation Work or Practices Already Installed or In Use on this Field	Resource Concerns, Problems or Opportunities You Would Like to Address

Application Process Next Steps

Completing the self-assessment should have provided you with a good indicator of whether CSP is the right program for you at this time. CSP is one of several conservation programs and services available to help you meet your objectives. The first step towards achieving your conservation goals is to develop a Conservation Plan on your farm or ranch if you do not already have one. Contact your local NRCS office for technical assistance, program information and help in developing or implementing your conservation plan.

If you believe your operation is eligible for CSP, the next step is to schedule an interview with your local NRCS office. During the interview, the NRCS staff will review your Self-Assessment Workbook, documents and records to verify the information and clarify any questions.

If NRCS determines that your application meets the basic eligibility requirements and sign-up criteria, your application will be placed in a tier. Your tier placement will establish the length of your contract, final stewardship payment rate and contract payment limits. CSP is offered at three tiers of participation. Some payments are adjusted based on the tier, and some payments are tier-neutral. The following are the minimum tier eligibility and contract requirements:

CSP Tier I - documenting the kind of land (land use) and the existing condition and the conservation work done so far (the benchmark condition inventory) demonstrates to the satisfaction of NRCS that the applicant has addressed the nationally significant resource concerns of water quality and soil quality to the minimum level of treatment for any eligible land use on **part of the agricultural operation**. Only the acreage meeting such requirements is eligible for stewardship and existing practice payments in CSP.

CSP Tier II - documenting the kind of land (land use) and the existing condition and conservation work done so far (the benchmark condition inventory) demonstrates to the satisfaction of NRCS that the applicant has addressed the nationally significant resource concerns of water quality and soil quality to the minimum level of treatment for all eligible land uses on the **entire agricultural operation**. Additionally, the applicant must agree to address another significant resource concern applicable to the watershed to be completed by the end of the contract period. If the applicable resource concern is already addressed or does not pertain to the operation, then this requirement is waived.

CSP Tier III - documenting the kind of land (land use) and the existing condition and the conservation work done so far (the benchmark condition inventory) demonstrates to the satisfaction of NRCS that the applicant has addressed all of the existing resource concerns listed in Section III of the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) with a resource management system that meets the **minimum level of treatment for all eligible land uses on the entire agricultural operation**.

Your application will then be placed into an enrollment category for funding consideration based on the criteria specified in the sign-up notice. You may choose to be placed into the highest enrollment category for which your application qualifies. It is likely that you will have several tier and enrollment category options from which to choose. NRCS cannot make this decision for applicants or advise them on which tier and category combination is most advantageous for their situation, nor predict if funding will be available for any specific category. The NRCS staff will explain the requirements and payments of the different options available to you so that you can make the right decision for your operation.

In addition to a stewardship payment, you may also receive payments for enhancements that you are willing to implement as part of your CSP contract. Enhancements are new or innovative activities, techniques, or methods used to improve resource conditions beyond the minimum level of treatment needed for protection. In general, enhancements provide resource benefits; result in an observable or measurable improvement to the condition of one or more of the soil, water air, plant or animal resources; and provide for more efficient resource use. During your interview, you will be provided with a list of the enhancements available in your watershed.

Please review the Application Checklist on the following page to make sure you have all of the necessary information and documents ready for your interview.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST		
☐	1.	Completed Self-Assessment Workbook
☐	2.	Conservation Plan OR a map delineating your agricultural operation: ☐ An aerial photo, or overlay of the land you wish to enroll showing the land use, acreage, approximate location, and type of practices installed on each field you wish to enroll
☐	3.	Records - You must have at least 2 years of written records for each of the following practices you apply: ☐ Nutrient Management Records should include: yields, soil analysis, dates and application rates of all inorganic and organic fertilizers, including animal waste ☐ Pest Management Records should include: target pest, crop or forage type and the type of pesticide used, dates and application rates or the cultural or biological control method used and dates implemented, including spot treatments ☐ Grazing Management Records should include: total acres, production per acre, number of livestock, grazing schedules, maps showing existing practices, such as fences and watering facilities, and aerial photos showing the condition of the grazing land ☐ Irrigation Schedule/ Water Management Records should include: crop type, rainfall amounts (if appropriate), irrigation dates and amounts applied ☐ Waste Utilization Records should include crop type, projected yields, soil analysis, waste analysis, dates and application rates of all animal waste applied
☐	4.	Tests/Analyses - You must provide a record of the following tests, as applicable: ☐ Soil Test If you are applying nutrients (includes all types), you must provide historical records of a soil test conducted within the last 5 years at a minimum. If you are traditionally applying at or below the recommended rates for your soil and cropping system, this requirement may be waived. ☐ Animal Waste and/or Sludge Analysis If you are applying animal waste or sludge, you must provide records of an analysis conducted within the last 5 years at a minimum
☐	5.	Control of the Land Control means possession of the land by ownership, lease, or agreement; and authority to make decisions about the management and operation of the land
☐	6.	Form CCC-526, Payment Eligibility Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification (Appendix B)
☐	7.	Form AD-1026, Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (Appendix C)
☐	8.	Form CCC-1200, Conservation Program Application/Contract (Appendix D)

CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM (CSP)
Control of Land Certification

Land Unit Description(s)
Farm Name, Number, Tract Number, or other legal description:

For the above described land unit(s) that I own, I hereby certify that my Tenant,

_____,

will have control of this land for the purpose of satisfying the terms and conditions of a Conservation Stewardship Contract, for the proposed contract period of _____ years.

_____ _____
Landowner Signature Date

INSERT

Form CCC-526: Payment Eligibility Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification

INSERT

Form AD-1026 Appendix: Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification

INSERT

Form CCC-1200: Conservation Program Application/Contract

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

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