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## Facts About the Great Plains Conservation Program in South Dakota

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# Questions and Answers On the Great Plains Conservation Program In South Dakota

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## **1. What is the Great Plains Conservation Program?**

This is a new, voluntary program to assist Great Plains farmers and ranchers to speed up their planned land use adjustments and soil and water conservation measures on their farms and ranches. It assures long range cost-sharing for systematic development of farms and ranches to help modify climatic hazards and make the Great Plains a better place to live and earn a living.

## **2. What is the purpose of this program?**

This new conservation tool is intended to help stabilize agriculture by encouraging better adjustment to Great Plains conditions. The goal is to fit land use and treatment to the capabilities of the land recognizing the severe climatic variations of the area.

## **3. Why is there a need?**

Extreme climatic variations have caused wet and dry years in the Great Plains which contribute to economic failure, human suffering, and untold damage to land. Better land use, better cover of vegetation, and feed reserves could, in many cases, have effectively reduced economic losses and land damage during drought periods.

The Great Plains Conservation Program is designed to help producers plan better long range use of land and protection of soil and water resources. To accomplish these stabilizing benefits, producers require time and money.

Cost sharing is provided through contracts for periods of 3 to 10 years rather than on an annual basis.

## **4. Does it apply to all counties in South Dakota?**

No, it applies only to those counties west of the heavy north-south line shown on the map on this circular. This represents the Plains area as recommended by the State Program Committee and designated by the Secretary of Agriculture. Counties within the Plains area crosshatched on the map have been recommended on the basis of climatic and erosion hazards, local interest in and leadership for the program; and have been designated by the Secretary of Agriculture for starting work in this program.



Counties outside the Plains area having conservation needs similar to those designated within the area, may request consideration by the State Program Committee. Two steps are involved, however, before such counties can be designated. First, the Plains area boundary must be shifted to include the counties. Once a county is included within the Plains area the second step should be initiated—that of requesting designation for eligibility by the State Program Committee. Both steps require approval from the Secretary of Agriculture.

**5. Are all farmers and ranchers in designated counties eligible to participate?**

Any farmer or rancher who controls land considered as an operating unit can take part in the program.

**6. What lands are eligible or must be included?**

Privately-owned lands are eligible for cost sharing. All land in a single operating unit must be included in the plan. A landowner having leased lands comprised as a part of his operating unit is eligible providing the leased lands are controlled for the duration of the contract.

**7. What does a farmer or rancher have to do to take part in this program?**

**Step 1.** File an application for assistance on GP Form 1. These forms may be obtained at County Extension, FHA, ASC, and SCS offices. Completed applications will be transmitted to the local SCS office.

**Step 2.** Develop a "plan of operations" for his farm or ranch as a basis for a cost-sharing contract. Each plan of operations must meet SCS standards for farm and ranch conservation planning.

**Step 3.** Sign a cost sharing contract (GP Form 2) with the U .S. Department of Agriculture as prepared by the local Work Unit Conservationist and based upon the farmer's or rancher's plan of operations.

**Step 4.** Carry out the changes in land use, cropping systems and conservation practices as provided in his plan of operations and cost-sharing contract. Receiving cost-sharing payments depends upon satisfactory performance of these provisions as rapidly as weather and individual financial resources permit.

**Step 5.** Apply for cost-sharing payments at his local SCS office. After the application has been made, the Work Unit Conservationist will visit the farm or ranch to look over the completed part or parts of the plans of operation. He will also check to see that no practices have been adopted which tend to defeat the purpose of the program.

**8. What should a "plan of operations" include?**

A **plan of operations** developed for a farm or ranch will include at least the following:



(1) **Name** of the farmer and location of the operating unit (farm or ranch).

(2) A **conservation-plan map** of the farm or ranch with each field clearly marked for identification; conservation practices and changes in land use and cropping systems can be indicated on this map.

(3) A **brief statement** for each conservation treatment unit in the farm or ranch describing how the land will be used and treated. A conservation treatment unit is a field or part of the farm or ranch with common characteristics and requirements as to land use, management and conservation practices. This statement should include the field identification, acreage involved, conservation practices to be applied, and cropping or grazing plans.

(4) A **time schedule** (GP Form 3) for each conservation treatment unit showing amount and kinds of practices to be applied each year. These practices should be listed in order of priority for application or installation.

### **9. Where can a farmer or rancher get help in preparing a plan of operations?**

SCS will provide technical help in developing and carrying out a plan of operations on his farm or ranch. He can also get information and advice on the management practices and problems, and on the expected net income from different crop and livestock systems from his County Agent. Information on establishing shelterbelts and windbreaks can be obtained from the State Forester.

### **10. What does the "cost-sharing contract" involve?**

The cost-sharing contract is a written agreement between the farmer or rancher and the U. S. Department of Agriculture. In this contract the producer agrees to make land use changes and to apply conservation practices according to his plan of operations. The USDA agrees to share in the cost of establishing these practices.

When the tenant on a rented farm or ranch wishes to take part in this program, he must provide satisfactory evidence, such as a written lease or rental agreement, that he will have control over the operating unit for the contract period.

### **11. How long do these contracts run?**

The period of the contract is not less than three years and not more than 10 years. Under the present law, all contracts shall end not later than December 31, 1971. Within these limits, the contract period should be for the least time needed to apply and establish the conservation practices included in the plan of operations which involve cost-sharing.

### **12. Can contracts be amended transferred or ended during the contract period?**

Amendment of a contract is possible when made necessary by: (1) loss



of control of part of the farm or ranch or acquiring of additional land; (2) change in the time schedule of land use and practice application; (3) failure to carry out a provision of the plan because of weather or other circumstances which do not justify ending the contract.

Contracts as such cannot be transferred. If an owner or tenant transfers his right of interest in the farm or ranch during the contract period, the contract ends so far as he is concerned. He then loses the right to any further cost-sharing payments. He would also have to refund all payments made previously under the contract unless the new owner or tenant enters a contract to carry out a plan of operations under this program.

Contracts can be ended before the expiration date: (1) by mutual consent of the farmer or rancher and the U. S. Department of Agriculture; (2) for substantial violation of the contract by following practices which tend to defeat the purposes of a contract. When all the provisions of the contract have been met and the contract period is over, the contract ends by expiration.

### **13. What happens if a contract is violated?**

If the violation warrants ending the contract, the farmer or rancher forfeits all rights to further cost-sharing payments and shall refund all payments made previously.

If the violation does not justify ending the contract, the farmer or rancher may be required to accept payment adjustments or to refund part or all of cost-share payments received under the contract.

Generally speaking, the purposes of the contract would be defeated by knowingly or negligently destroying a conservation practice in the plan of operations without prior written approval.

### **14. What payments are made to farmers and ranchers who participate in this program?**

Cost-sharing payments of up to 80 per cent of the established rates for applying approved conservation practices according to the plan of operations will be made after these practices are satisfactorily completed.

It will be possible to earn cost-share payments for some practices under the regular ACP program. Payments cannot be earned from both the ACP and this program for the same practice. No income or rental-type payments will be made under this program. There is no limit on the cost-share payment to any farmer or rancher except irrigation dams which have a cost-share limitation of \$2,500.

### **15. Which conservation practices are eligible for cost-sharing?**

Since eligible practices may vary from county to county, the list of practices for a specific county should be obtained from the local SCS, ASC or County Extension office.

Dependent on the need of the county, measures eligible for cost-sharing



may include: establishing permanent plant cover, field or contour strip cropping, contour cultivation, improving range cover, planting trees or shrubs for windbreaks or shelterbelts, establishing waterways, building terrace systems, furrowing or pitting rangeland, improving dams or ponds for irrigation, constructing wells for livestock, installing fencing and controlling brush.

The upkeep and maintenance of any practice of installation under this program is the farmer's or rancher's responsibility.

**16. Will participation in this program reduce farm acreage allotments?**

The law (P.L. 1021) provides assurance that farm acreage allotments will not be reduced during the contract period because of changes in the use of cropland required by the contract.

**17. Can land placed in conservation treatment units under this program be grazed or harvested during the contract period?**

Yes, grass or other crops can be grazed or harvested from land in this program provided such use is consistent with good management. The basic purpose of this program is larger and more stable net farm income through improved land use and conservation, not production control.

**18. Does this program replace acreage allotment, soil bank, and agricultural conservation programs?**

No, the Great Plains Conservation Program is an additional program designed to meet special long term needs and problems of farmers and ranchers in the Plains region. Farmers and ranchers who take part in this program will be encouraged to use other programs that contribute to the objectives of greater agricultural stability in the Great Plains.

**19. Will it pay to take part in the Great Plains Conservation Program?**

Since no two farms or ranches or family situations are alike, each farmer will need to decide whether the program will increase and stabilize his net income in future years. The program provides for financial and technical assistance in developing and carrying out long-range plans for best land use, cropping system, soil and water conservation and other management practices under Great Plains conditions.

In reaching his decision, the farm or ranch operator might consider the following advantages and disadvantages:

**Advantages:**

- (1) Participation on a voluntary basis.
- (2) Long term financial assistance in making land use changes and in applying well-planned conservation practices.
- (3) Funds necessary to complete the practices included in the plan are set aside at the time the contract is signed.



(4) Technical assistance from state and federal agricultural agencies in working out plans and putting plans into use.

(5) More stable and possibly greater net farm income and therefore greater stability in the Plains economy generally.

(6) Flexibility to permit adjustment to variations in weather and farm income conditions.

(7) Flexible contract period (3-10 years) based on time needed to carry out the plan of operations.

**Disadvantages:**

(1) Entire farm or ranch operating unit must be included in the plan of operations.

(2) Contract of 3-10 years with possible refund of payments if practices are followed which tend to defeat contract purposes.

(3) Uncertainty of length of tenure on rented farms and ranches with problems of landlord-tenant relationships if owner or tenant should change during contract period.

(4) Farm and ranch planning and management is made more complicated by adding another program to consider.

(5) Individual farm or ranch approach may not be adequate for problems affecting several farm or ranch units or larger areas, such as soil blowing and flooding.

**For More Information**

(1) Attend meetings in your area to explain this program.

(2) Visit your county SCS, ASC, FHA or Extension offices.

(3) Watch for circular letters, news releases and radio and television programs.

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