



# Expiring Conservation Reserve Program Options

## What will you do?

In the next five years, over two million acres of CRP will come out of contract in Colorado, causing landowners and producers to reconsider the management of these lands. While some fields may return to cropland, many acres of CRP are environmentally sensitive and not suited to annual crop production.

### The Next Steps

As a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract nears its end, landowners will be making decisions on what to do next with their land.

Before deciding what to do when a CRP contract expires, it is important to consider several factors including soil productivity and limitations, past yields, commodity prices, production, conversion or renovation costs and other required investments.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service encourages landowners to visit their local NRCS field office to develop a comprehensive conservation plan prior to making a decision on expired CRP contracts.

An NRCS-approved conservation plan is critical and is developed by first understanding the resource needs and a landowner's desired land use goals, then based on sound, scientific practices.

For more information, contact your local conservation district, NRCS office or visit [www.co.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov)

*consider these options:*

## Conversion to Grazing Land

### Requirements and Options

- ◆ Develop a conservation plan that outlines grazing management and development needs
- ◆ Install identified conservation measures for proper grazing distribution
- ◆ If using Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds to install identified practices producer **MUST WAIT UNTIL CRP CONTRACT EXPIRES**
- ◆ May be able to locate and use other funds to begin some work prior to contract expiration
- ◆ Conservation Easements
- ◆ Grassland Reserve Program (grazing land only)
- ◆ Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (crop and grass lands)

## Conversion to Cropland

### Requirements and Options

- ◆ Develop a conservation plan to maintain compliance and program eligibility
- ◆ Identified measure must be installed within the first year
- ◆ Must address Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Concern
- ◆ Current policy allows some work to begin up to six months prior to expiration of contract
- ◆ Will be at least until July 2010 before income begins
- ◆ Will again be subject to market and weather changes, both negative and positive.

To guide you through the decision process when your Conservation Reserve Program contract expires, review the following questions. Some are more general while others are specifically related to potential land use(s) you may be considering. Feel free to discuss these questions or issues with the staff at your local NRCS field office.

## Land Use Decision Checklist

### Enroll eligible acres into Continuous CRP

- Is the entire contract eligible for a Continuous CRP practice?
- Is a portion of the contract eligible for a Continuous CRP practice?
- How many years will your CRP contract be enrolled for?
- What is the new CRP rental rate?
- What enhancements or renovations will be needed if the land is enrolled in Continuous CRP? (More species diversity, weed control, brush removal, mid-contract management, etc.)

### Return to a cropland

- How will you convert existing vegetation to cropland?
- Can you apply a burn-down herbicide the fall before planting?
- Do you plan to farm or rent the land for cropland?
- What is the planned crop rotation and expected yields?
- Do you have a current soil test?
- Can you maintain soil quality by using a no-till system to initiate cropping?
- What conservation practices will be required for conservation compliance on HEL fields?
- Are you considering planting winter wheat or spring planted crop in the year of expiration?
- Are there more productive soils on the farm that are more practical to crop?

### Utilize or enhance existing forage for pasture or hayland

- If you don't own livestock would you consider leasing the CRP as pasture(s) to another operator?
- Would you need additional cattle to make a grazing system economical?
- Is there an adequate source of water available?
- What type of fencing would you use? Are current fences adequate?
- Is there a noxious weed problem on the fields?
- Is the existing forage (grass and legumes mix) adequate for grazing and or haying?
- Would you use any of the pasture for hay?
- What management activities (renovation, fertilization, weed control, prescribed grazing, etc.) are required to maintain or improve the existing stand?
- Is there cost-share available for fencing and water development (EQIP, CACDs, etc.)

### Manage the expired CRP for wildlife

- Do you plan to build a home or some other structure on the site someday?
- Which species of wildlife do you want to support?
- Can managed grazing to maintain a healthy plant community enhance the area for wildlife?
- What improvements are needed for desired wildlife species?
- Other income or cost-share sources? (fee hunting, CACDs, RMBO, DOW, etc.)

### Potential contract extension or re-enrollment in general CRP

- Is this option available or when would it be available?
- What type of vegetative enhancements would be required (e.g. native grasses and forbs)?
- How will the land be managed in the interim (fee hunting, wildlife habitat, pasture, hayland)?

For assistance, contact your local NRCS office for assistance and continuous CRP options.