

USDA Pays Farmers to Maintain Grassland

Every year, more American grassland is lost to commercial development or converted to cropland. To help prevent this from happening, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) jointly administer a conservation program that provides incentives in the form of annual rental payments or permanent easement payments to producers that agree to keep their land in grass.

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) pays farmers who own grassland or pastureland to ensure that this land will be designated and remain as grassland. This voluntary conservation program is also available to those who have cropland that they are willing to convert into grass. In other words, the land does not have to be currently in grass to participate.

By making the commitment, and enrolling in GRP, farmers can receive an incentive payment for every acre of grass they enroll. For permanent easements, a one-time payment will be made to landowners who agree to let their applicable land remain in grass permanently. Annual rental payments are available through 10, 15, or 20 years contracts with landowners who keep their land in grass for the life of the agreement.

GRP is ideal for landowners with livestock operations who are already grazing. NRCS also provides technical assistance for grazing and will write grazing plans for farmers who are interested. Once enrolled in the program, landowners may continue their grazing, as long as they are grazing in accordance with the grazing plan.

Signups for the program are continuous throughout the year; however, funding is only available until it is exhausted. Applications received by May 29 will be given preference for funding in 2009. Applications received after May 29 will also be accepted and considered if funds are still available for this year.

Don't wait! If you are interested in the program, have questions, or want additional information, NRCS representatives are available to assist. We have offices that service every county, and we will be more than happy to help you. Visit us on the web at www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov or contact the Outreach Coordinator, Travis Watkins at (717) 237-2147 or travis.watkins@pa.usda.gov. Also, ask about our other easement programs including Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Farmland/Ranchland Protection Program.