



USDA Opens CRP Land

The USDA authorizes conservation--or Conservation Reserved Program (CRP)--acreage for haying and grazing.

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By Stephanie Staton

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has authorized more than 24 million acres of land enrolled in the Conservation Reserved Program (CRP) for use as hay and forage.

Eligible Land

According to the USDA's CRP Critical Feed Use Fact Sheet, eligible land meets the following criteria:
Land must be dedicated to one of the following CRP categories: CP1, CP2, CP4B, CP4D, CP10, CP18B or CP18C
Critical feed use cannot start until after the primary bird nesting or brood-rearing season and must end by Nov. 10, 2008. (Download a map of primary nesting season dates and durations.)
No more than 50 percent of the eligible CRP acreage can be used for hay.
Based on the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) recommended stocking rates, eligible land can be used for grazing at 75 percent stocking rate on 100 percent of the land or at 100 percent stocking rate on 75 percent of the land.

Land that is ineligible for haying and foraging includes:

Wetlands
Buffers
Filter strips
Useful life easements, as determined by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)
Land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent body of water

How to Participate

To participate, CRP enrollees place a request to the CCC to modify their CRP contracts for critical feed use. Enrollment opened June 2, 2008. The modification for feed use is only available in 2008 and ends on Nov. 10, 2008. CRP participants can use their land for feed use or lease the privilege to another individual.

In addition to the voluntary modification, enrollees in the program must obtain a modified conservation plan for haying and grazing management that meets the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide's haying and grazing standards.

Fees for Participation

While the USDA is not imposing a payment reduction on contracts being used for critical feed use, participants are required to pay a \$75 fee to modify their CRP contracts.

Cattlemen Concerns

The decision to waive a reduction in government payments for CRP contract holders—which it previously enforced in similar situations—has caused concern for some members of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. The Association is worried that the decision may inadvertently damage the hay market and put non-CRP landowners at a disadvantage, but concedes that it supports managed haying and grazing of CRP acreage.

For more information on the USDA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=copr&topic=landing

About the Author: Stephanie Staton is managing editor for the Popular Farming Series and associate editor for Hobby Farms and Hobby Farm Home.

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