



Protecting Our Environment

Farmers Protect Water Supplies And Wildlife Through Conservation

(NAPSA)—The next time you're on the road and pass a farm, you may want to give a wave of thanks to the farmer who owns that land.

With an innovative new program helping farmers to farm their best land and set marginal land aside for conservation, farmers are protecting our nation's drinking water and restoring wildlife habitat.

The voluntary program, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), was created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and operates differently in each state. CREP combines federal resources with funds and expertise from local government agencies and non-profit partners to address specific conservation needs in the area.

How CREP Works

The program uses financial incentives to encourage farmers and ranchers to remove lands from agricultural production for 10 to 15 years. Through the program, farmers and ranchers make small improvements to their land to prevent runoff into streams and to provide habitat for wildlife. These improvements include buffering streams with native grasses and trees, restoring wetlands and fencing livestock away from waterways.

"If you look at it strictly as a business decision, it's a no-brainer to do it," says Gerald Garber who is enrolled in the Virginia CREP.

More than 309,000 acres of American farmland are now enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. The program has shown documented success in safeguarding topsoil, improving water quality and increasing numbers of wildlife. Avid hunters and conservationists appreciate the returning duck, pheasant, sparrow, meadowlark, elk, deer, and pronghorn. CREP has also brought prairie chickens and grouse to areas long since abandoned.

One of the most ambitious CREP challenges has been to help clean up the Chesapeake Bay.



A WIN-WIN SITUATION for farmers and the environment is a program helping farmers build conservation buffers. The program, CREP, is being called a big success.

Since Maryland signed the first CREP agreement in 1997, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia have all developed CREPs to help protect the Chesapeake Bay.

Even small scale CREP programs can produce big benefits. New York's 5,000-acre program is saving New York City billions of dollars by keeping the city's water supply clean. The alternative would be to build a water filtration plant at an estimated construction cost of \$6 to \$8 billion, plus operating costs of \$1 million a day.

In addition to financial incentives, farmers are drawn to CREP as a new way to continue their legacy as good stewards of the land.

"There is still some work to do in keeping up the habitat, but it's a

labor of love," says Doug Parsons, who is enrolled in the Minnesota CREP. "Sometimes when I come home from work, my wife and I like to take a drive to the wetlands and just sit and watch the wildlife."

Twenty different states have CREP agreements and many more are considering the program to help conserve land, protect water supplies, improve natural habitat, reclaim fisheries and improve the quality of our rivers.

"The ecology guys don't seem to understand that farmers are the original ecology guys," says Ed Jones who is enrolled in the Washington CREP. "We are the ones who have to depend on the ground to return for us and if we abuse it, it doesn't do that."

For more information, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.