

The Conservation Security Program

By now you've probably heard plenty about the Conservation Security Program—a voluntary 2002 Farm Bill program that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers in designated watersheds for practicing conservation on their working lands. And if you've been following

developments closely, you're probably dizzy from the many twists and turns this program has taken in going from the envisioned entitlement program to the gradual rollout of eligible watersheds. In this newsletter, we've pulled together some information about the current status of the

program, as well as information and resources to help you develop a conservation plan—and keep records of conservation practices—whether or not you're currently farming in an eligible watershed.

2006 Minnesota CSP-Red Lakes watershed eligible

Sign-up for the 2006 Conservation Security Program (CSP) will be held Feb 13, 2006 to March 31, 2006. The Red Lakes Watershed is the only Minnesota Watershed which is available for sign-up. The Red Lakes Watershed is located in Beltrami, Clearwater, Koochiching and Itasca Counties in north central Minnesota. To be eligible for CSP, most of a producer's agricultural operation must fall within the boundaries of a selected watershed. Producers begin the application process by

filling out a self-assessment to determine if they meet the basic qualifications for CSP. Self-assessment workbooks are available at USDA Service Centers within the watersheds, and electronically at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/. You can print off the workbook, or use the new interactive workbook to complete the self-assessment online.

After completing the self-assessment, producers should schedule an appointment

to discuss their application with the NRCS local staff to determine if they meet specific CSP eligibility requirements. For more information about the 2006 CSP Sign-up in the Red Lakes Watershed, contact Larry Voltz, (218) 751-1942 x 3 or larry.voltz@mn.usda.gov, Watershed Coordinator for the Red Lakes Watershed, or the District Conservationist located in your county (go to www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov and click on "Find a Service Center" at the bottom of the left hand column.)

Minnesota 2005 CSP Highlights

In 2005, seven watersheds totaling almost 3.6 million acres were eligible for CSP in Minnesota. They included Blue Earth River, Red Lake River, Redeye, Redwood, Root, Sauk, and Upper Wapsipipicom. Almost 5,000 people requested information. There were 564 eligible

applicants. Typical enhancements used in applications were conservation tillage, energy management, wildlife management, and soil quality. A breakdown of number of Tier I, Tier II and Tier III approved applications in each Minnesota watershed is available on the Minnesota NRCS website

(www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/csp.html scroll down to find "2005 CSP state story")

A CSP fact sheet which describes eligibility for tiers and enhancements can be found at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/pdf_files/csp_fs3_05.pdf

Be Prepared—Conservation Planning

Whether or not you currently farm in an eligible watershed, developing a conservation plan and maintaining records of conservation practices makes sense. Several years of records are required to be eligible for CSP. On a bus tour of CSP farms in the Blue Earth watershed, Bill Hunt, Minnesota NRCS State Conservationist said that when applicants were turned down, it was often because they lacked sufficient records. Tim Gieseke, Ag and Environmental Policy Specialist with The Minnesota Project noted, "While no one knows exactly what the next farm bill will contain...a farm operation that is well

prepared for changes in the 2007 Farm Bill will have a marketing plan, risk management plan, agronomic plan, and a conservation plan." In fact, USDA offered a pilot project last fall in nine states, to help farmers create their own conservation plan.

Tim is currently conducting training in conservation planning for Certified Crop Advisors and Soil and Water and Conservation District staff in south central Minnesota. Modeled after a Wisconsin training curriculum, the five sessions cover RUSLE2 (Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation, a software model that predicts

long-term, average-annual erosion by water,) conservation cropping systems, on farm resource and energy assessments and Conservation Plan development. The trainings are partially supported by a grant to The Minnesota Project from the NCR-SARE Professional Development Program and a USDA Conservation Innovation Grant. The trainings will be repeated in 2007. Call Tim Gieseke, 507-359-1889 or tgieseke@mnproject.org for more information. Information on the Conservation Planning Training will also soon be available on the Minnesota Project website, www.mnproject.org.

What does success look like?

A fall bus tour of three Blue Earth watershed farms enrolled in the first year (2004) of the Conservation Security Program demonstrated that this program works for many different types of farms. The first stop was Edgewood Farms, a corn, soybean, and hog operation whose CSP contract includes conservation crop rotation, residue management and nutrient management. The second tour stop was J-Ace Farms, which also primarily grows corn and soybeans. The CSP stewardship practices on their contract included conservation crop rotation and residue management. Some of the CSP enhancement practices contained in J-Ace's farm contract included applying fertilizer at or below agronomic rates, Soil Tillage Intensity Ratings (STIR), and spring pre-

plant commercial nitrogen fertilizer application. The final stop on the tour was the Kluender farm, also a third generation farm which began transitioning to organic in 1994. The Kluenders grow organic corn, soybeans, alfalfa, buckwheat, hairy vetch, and winter rye. Since 1980, the Kluenders have used several conservation practices on their land—grass waterways, field windbreaks, shelterbelts, and other conservation practices to reduce erosion and improve water quality. Their CSP practices include using a conservation crop rotation, cover crop, field border, and windbreak/shelter belts. All three farms were approved at Tier I level in 2004.

In 2005, when the Sauk watershed became eligible, the Loxtercamp family applied for and received a contract for Tier III of the CSP on 150 of their 200 acres. The Loxtercamps milk 50 Holstein cows and use manure from the dairy operation as the primary fertilizer in their corn-alfalfa-small grain crop rotation. For more information go to <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/csp.html> and click on "National Program Information" (Above information condensed from MN NRCS website.)

Resources for more information on the Conservation Security Program

Minnesota NRCS: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/csp.html The 2006 CSP Information link contains new fact sheets specific for cropland, grazing land, orchards and vineyards, and fruit and vegetables.

Several nonprofit organizations in Minnesota have been working to implement and keep moving the conservation security program forward for years. They continue to provide information to help farmers enroll in CSP and also work on policy issues related to CSP. With the 2007 Farm Bill pending, it's urgent that your voice be heard now—check out these websites to see what groups are doing, and how you can become involved.

The Minnesota Project:
www.mnproject.org/csp/

The Conservation Planner newsletter is available in full text on-line and will keep up to date on issues in conservation planning, including the CSP. The website also has CSP enrollment fact sheets and educational information as well as policy articles. Contact Loni Kemp, Senior Policy Analyst, lkemp@mnproject.org, 507-743-8300

Land Stewardship Project

The Land Stewardship Project has a series of fact sheets on the Conservation Security Program at www.landstewardshipproject.org/programs_csp.html#links

They also have numerous policy articles and suggestions for getting involved to promote conservation in the 2002 and 2007 farm bills.

Contact LSP Policy Program Director Mark Schultz at 612-722-6377, or e-mail him at marks@landstewardshipproject.org.

Center for Rural Affairs

The Center for Rural Affairs operates a "Hotline" to help farmers with questions about the eligibility and enrolling in the Conservation Security Program. The Hotline number is 402-687-2100 and it operates during open CSP enrollment periods. More information is available at www.cfa.org.

Resources for information about Conservation Practices

For information about conservation practices, see "Conservation Choices, an NRCS brochure available to download at <http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/news/brochures/choices.html>.

Or, to easily access the information by each of 30 conservation practices go to: www.ctic.purdue.edu/Core4/CT/Choices/Choices.html

Other excellent resources for information

about conservation practices for your farm include:

Your local NRCS office—go to www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/ and click on "find a service center" on bottom left margin, or call St. Paul office at (651) 602-7900

Your local Soil Water and Conservation District office, go to nacdn.net.org/resources/MN.htm, or call the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts at

(651) 690-9028

Your local Resource, Conservation District, go to <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/marcd/contact.htm>

Your local or Regional Extension office, go to: www.extension.umn.edu/offices/, or call Extension's Farm Information Line at: 1-800-232-9077

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MISA's Minnesota Soil Management Series:

In 2001, MISA worked with the NRCs, project partners and Ann Lewandowski to produce five booklets about managing Minnesota soils. The booklets are packed with information aimed at improving soil performance—useful whether you grow a few acres of vegetables for local markets, or two thousand acres of corn and soybeans.

This series will help by providing the background science needed to monitor soil

and to understand how you can modify general recommendations to suit the needs of your farm.

Each publication contains sections that feature basic information, practical applications, and places to look for more help.

Titles in the Soil Management Series include: Soil Management (BU-7399), Compaction (BU-7400), Manure

Management (BU-7401), Organic Matter Management (BU-7402), and Soil Biology and Soil Management (BU-7403). You can find ordering information or view each chapter in full text online by clicking on individual titles at:

www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/crop_systems/DC7398.html, or call 800-876-8636 or email order@extension.umn.edu to order.

Dave Serfling—A champion of the Conservation Security Program

We mourn the loss of Dave Serfling, Preston, Minn., a true conservationist farmer who both practiced and preached sustainable agriculture. He died Jan. 8 in a single vehicle accident in rural Wykoff, Minn.

The 350-acre farm that Serfling's father farmed before him was chosen last October for a regional conservation award by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. In nominating Serfling and his wife, Diane, for the award, the Land Stewardship Project called them

"passionate, pioneering conservationists" and said their "diversified crop and livestock farm among the rolling hills of southeastern Minnesota is a model for conservation farming on fragile soils."

"Dave was very important to family farms and the care of Minnesota's farmland," said Mark Schultz, policy and organizing director of the Minneapolis-based Land Stewardship Project. Schultz said Serfling's testimony before Congress helped bring to fruition the Conservation Security Program, which rewards farmers for soil and water conservation. The program became part of

the 2002 farm bill. Serfling maintained that federal policy should support environmentally sensitive working farms instead of subsidizing farmers based on the volume of their crops. "You have one million creative farmer minds out there in the country," he told the Senate Agriculture Committee in 2001. "If you tell them the environmental results that you want and give them financial incentive to achieve them, they will find a way to deliver." (condensed from Star Tribune, Jan 16, 2006) Dave served as a founding member of the MISA Board of Directors.

MISA Board of Directors Nominations

MISA seeks your help in identifying individuals potentially willing to serve on the Board of Directors for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA.) A term on the MISA Board is three years. You may nominate yourself or someone else to serve on the Board.

Beginning in July 1, 2006, the following vacancies on the Board will be filled:

One (1) **sustainable agriculture**

practitioner (e.g. farmers and ranchers); and, Two (2) **University representatives** with a demonstrated interest in sustainable agriculture. We seek to have the board reflect diversity, especially with respect to gender, race, student status, geographic area, and occupation in the membership on the Board.

The purpose of MISA is to bring together the agricultural community and the

University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond.

For more information or to download an application, visit www.misa.umn.edu or contact the MISA office, 1-800-909-6472. Please submit the application or nomination form to the MISA office by **4:30 p.m., Friday, April 7, 2006.**

Upcoming Events

Minnesota Grown Marketing Conference, March 14, 2006, Continuing Education and Conference Center, St. Paul Campus, University of Minnesota. For more information visit www.mda.state.mn.us/mngrown/conference.htm or contact Paul Hugunin at 651-201-6510 or paul.hugunin@state.mn.us

Meat and Dairy Goat Workshop, March 18, 2006, Marshall, MN

Online Registration address: www.sfa-mn.org

For any questions, contact: Wayne Martin - 1-800-909-6472 or Wendy Lange - 320-269-9617

Food for Folk, March 24, 2006, Fundraiser and awareness for the Food for Folk Project and to highlight sustainably and locally

grown foods. For more information call Tim Dougherty at 612-330-1624.

Sustainable Tourism Meeting, April 19-20, 2006, University of Minnesota. For more information visit www.tourism.umn.edu or contact Nikki Hinds, 612-624-4947.

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You can find more University of Minnesota Extension Service educational information at www.extension.umn.edu. Also check MISA’s home page at www.misa.umn.edu.

Our mission statement: To help bring people together to influence the future of agriculture and rural communities to achieve socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable farms and communities. To stimulate thinking and discussion about sustainability, we try to present items that reflect different points of view. This being the case, we aren’t promoting and don’t necessarily agree with everything we publish.