The Cloud County Conservation District is having a sign-up for cost-share funds for the construction of Water Resources Program practices and Non-Point Source Pollution (NPS) practices. The cost-share sign-up will run from April 1 through April 30, 2016 at the USDA Service Center located at 1501 East 7th Street in Concordia. Funding is provided by the Division of Conservation. Kansas Department of Agriculture through appropriations from the Kansas Water Plan Fund.

A partial listing of eligible conservation practices includes: terraces, waterways, underground outlet terraces, diversions, contour buffer strips, fencing, pasture and hayland planting, range seeding, pit ponds, livestock waste systems, irrigation water conveyance pipelines, irrigations systems and grade stabilization structures.

The NPS practices available for cost-share assistance are: upgrading failing on-site waste systems, abandoned well plugging, soil testing and livestock waste systems.

All practices must have contract approval by the Division of Conservation prior to onset of construction in order to receive cost-share assistance. Practices constructed must be maintained for 10 years or the life of the practice. Failure to maintain could render the producer ineligible for future cost-share funds and the producer would be required to pay back cost-share funds received on a pro-rata basis. The work under these contracts must be completed this fall or winter or funding will be lost.

Landowners with natural resource concerns on their property are encouraged to visit the Conservation District to discuss the possibility of receiving state financial assistance. It will be important to have a definite schedule and a contractor lined up to complete the work quickly. The Conservation District has a listing of contractors that work in the county.

The winter months are somewhat slow, as far as field work is concerned, and would be a great time to get your conservation work planned. Conservation planning during the slower season helps NRCS streamline the work load so producers can receive the best service possible.

If you are interested in assistance, stop in at the conservation office this winter to get your plans made. Then sign-up or call (785) 243-1509, Ext. 3, after April 1, to get your application in for cost-share assistance. Applications will be ranked and approved in June. Funds will be available in July for construction of the approved projects.
Conservation Compliance Still an Important Issue
Alan R. Boerger, Resource Conservationist

Calendar year 2015 marked the 30th anniversary since the Food Security Act of 1985 was signed into law. Since 1985, millions of acres of agricultural lands have had conservation plans developed on them with assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Furthermore, millions of tons of soil have been saved due to the planning efforts made by NRCS and the producers who implemented the practices outlined in those conservation plans. Even though conservation compliance is not foremost in everyone’s mind in recent years, the regulations of the Food Security Act are still something producers must adhere to if they wish to continue to be eligible for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and benefits. A few of the USDA benefits and programs that can be affected due to non-compliance issues include:

- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) eligibility.
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) eligibility.
- Conservation Security Program (CSP) eligibility.
- Agriculture Easement Conservation Program (ACEP) eligibility.
- Other Farm Service Agency (FSA) benefits.

Federal Crop Insurance benefits.

Each year, NRCS field staff is provided a list of randomly selected tracts of land to review to ensure producers are implementing or using conservation systems that meet conservation compliance criteria. During the review process, the current conservation system is evaluated in the field to ensure the system being implemented is properly maintaining or reducing the tolerable soil loss limits for the highly erodible field. In addition to reviewing soil loss limits, NRCS staff also reviews whether or not the protection of wetland areas is being observed by producers. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the amount of trees being cleared along riparian areas or issues of stream channels being either filled or straightened. Many of these actions can carry consequences to USDA benefits and program eligibility, but could involve other issues or violations to regulations to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Producers who are thinking of removing trees or manipulating possible wetland areas, need to consult with their local FSA or NRCS office to ensure their proposed actions do not affect wetlands or cause violations which may carry heavy fines and costs for mitigating affected wetland areas.

Since the Food Security Act of 1985 was signed into law, many changes in farming practices and farm programs have taken place, but one remaining fact still endures, compliance with the Act is still the law. Producers can protect their program eligibility and benefits by practicing good conservation methods and understanding the laws that were designed to protect our natural resources. Contacting and working with your local FSA and NRCS office can help you protect your land and your USDA benefits.

NRCS Announces Deadline for CSP Funding in Kansas

SALINA, Kansas — The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications at local offices for newly available funding through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), according to Eric B. Banks, NRCS State Conservationist. CSP is the largest conservation program that helps farmers voluntarily improve conservation efforts on private working lands.

NRCS accepts applications for CSP throughout the year, but producers should submit applications by March 31 to their local USDA Service Center to ensure they are considered for enrollment in 2016. Current CSP participants with expiring contracts have the option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their land. Renewal applications are also due March 31.

The program emphasizes conservation performance—producers earn higher payments for higher performance. Through CSP, producers install conservation enhancements to make positive changes in soil health, air, water, wildlife, other natural resources, animal resources and energy.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements and payment types. Learn more about CSP by visiting the Kansas NRCS Web site (www.ksw.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) or your local NRCS field office. To identify Soil Conservation Service compliance issues, producers must submit applications by March 31 to their local USDA Service Center to ensure they are considered for enrollment in 2016. Current CSP participants with expiring contracts have the option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their land. Renewal applications are also due March 31.

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