

Summary of Recommended MS Actions To Date

For Discussion 12-4-14

A. Increase Financial Assistance

1. Increase incentives for riparian forest buffer, e.g.:
 - a. Update/increase marginal pastureland and cropland rental rates
 - b. Remove payment caps for: (1) water development, (2) water development, (3) water facilities, (4) stream crossing
 - c. Develop awards program
 - d. Provide Special Incentive Payments if certain environmental targets are achieved – Oregon CREP Model
2. Link EQIP/CSP eligibility (additional ranking points) to having RFBs
 - a. EQIP could do more to leverage the implementation of riparian forest buffers through CREP in application rankings. This limits the ability to leverage funding and provide a substantial incentive for riparian forest buffers.
 - b. Improve CSP structure to support forest buffers
3. Remove payment caps for: (1) water development, (2) water development, (3) water facilities, (4) stream crossing
4. Utilize State/local/private easement to provide long-term resource protection

B. Improve Technical Assistance

1. Improve staffing to provide better technical assistance for riparian forest buffers and related practices
 - a) NRCS often has limited funds made available through the Farm Service Agency, but there is not a way for the FSA to directly contract with technical assistance providers
 - b) Local level leadership should prioritize TA for riparian forest buffers ---counties that prioritize riparian forest buffers have more success than those that do not
 - c) State Farm Service Agency and NRCS offices lack outcome-based performance measures to assess success (e.g., miles and acres of riparian forest buffer established)
 - d) Develop “team” of experts--- could be circuit riders shared among counties—train knowledgeable of opportunities and program requirements. Provide materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, etc)
 - e) More training for technical service providers, land trusts, and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, assessment of the costs/benefits forest buffers for landowners, and marketing strategies.
2. Customer service
 - a) Application process needs to be streamlined especially for offices where partners are not co-located. Agencies that are working together with a streamlined process have more success than those that do not.
 - b) Landowners do not always have a point-of-contact that they can rely on for guidance for the life of the contract
 - c) Conduct annual status reviews

- d) Involve landowner during all stages of the planning process
- e) Certify all practice performance
- f) Develop network of providers to deliver full services to producers -(construct fence, water facilities, stream crossing, site prep, tree planting, and maintenance
- g) Work and share more information with the contractors

C. Improve Outreach

1. Simplify program communication to “plain English”
2. Develop and maintain a database of potential clients -use the data base to target outreach efforts – use GIS data
 - a) Provide additional resources (databases) to the State to target outreach efforts
 - b) Train staff on outreach marketing opportunities and program requirements. Provide staff outreach materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, etc)
3. Develop marketing platform
 - a) Develop a vibrant WEB presence – with updated program information and “one-stop shop” website
 - b) Have USDA/ERS mine data on existing enrollment to better understand the demographics of CRP participation and their operations
 - c) Develop demographic media materials (dairy vs. grain producer, older vs. new farmer, tenant vs. absentee landowner, etc.)
 - d) Conduct focus groups and do other analysis to better understand how to market the program
 - e) Develop a State outreach committee comprised of major program participants
 - f) Identify and conduct RFB farm tours
 - g) Include Agroforestry message into the marketing
 - h) Explore the use of Public Service Announcements
 - i) Develop RFB signage that denotes RFBs to the general public
4. Improve outreach through partners/programs
 - a) Use one-on-one outreach efforts – through the use of staff with good backgrounds of buffers and good marketing skills
 - b) Seek to increase role of partners in outreach, particularly groups that have a huge mailing list such as Farm Bureau
 - c) Work with State Agencies to cross-sell RFB enrollments when discussing Ag certainty.
 - d) Explore outreach possibilities with partners with successful RCPP
 - e) Deliver consistent message to producers, from multiple sources
5. Develop a 1-800-CREP hotline

D. Improve Establishment, Maintenance, Compliance, Re-enrollment

1. Establishment
 - a) Successful establishment of a riparian forest buffer requires long-term maintenance. Fields of leaning or downed tree-tubes and other signs of failure discourage landowners from enrolling in programs.

b) Incentives for establishment are inadequate and need to begin before planting and occur for at least five years

c) Consider new approaches and research of deer fencing, increased herbicide applications, specialized crews for establishment/maintenance

2. Maintenance

a) Given limited incentives, landowners are often stuck with maintenance issues (e.g. invasive species, tree shelters, loss due to flooding, etc.) after the first couple of years after planting

b) Ensure that those responsible get a “cradle to grave” understanding of the maintenance requirements.

c) Provide extensive review of contract maintenance requirements and review maintenance requirements throughout the contract

d) Seek higher maintenance rates (see financial assistance)

e) Streamline the weed control process (number of field visits)

3. Compliance

a) Conduct practice certification on all practices.

b) Increase annual (in-field) status reviews

c) Seek flexibility to re-enroll/upgrade non-compliant CP-21s (grass filter strips– that have trees) to be enrolled as a CP22. Provide one-time amnesty.

d) Seek additional flexibility in maintenance requirements for CP-21 to allow some natural regeneration (need to talk with wildlife community)

4. Re-enrollment

a) Prioritize technical assistance resources to expiring CP-22s

b) Many CREP contracts are set to expire in the next few years and lack the outreach and technical assistance and changing crop prices could lead to a decline in the area of riparian forest buffers.

c) Grass buffer contracts that have naturally regenerated to forest are unable to reenroll into a forest buffer contract.

E. Program/Policy/Leadership Actions

1. Expand the acreage cap of the CREP

2. Allow for flexibility to pay partial Practice Incentive Payments (PIPs)

3. Allow for flexibility to raise payment caps for livestock crossing, water development, fencing, etc. (see above)

4. Expand the establishment period for RFBs from 2 years to 3-4 years.

5. Provide flexibility on marginal pastureland eligibility determinations.

6. Flexibility to allow simultaneous enrollment in RFB in CREP and stream bank stabilization in EQIP or to reward more ranking points for EQIP offers that have RFBs.

7. Contract out Maryland FSA could contract out with certified TSP to do the work.

8. Modify the design for CP22 standard to permit a grass strip adjacent to the drainage ditch in order to permit periodic maintenance activities of the drainage district.

9. Provide better accounting of current RFB activity including NRCS and State programs.

10. Farm Service Agency and NRCS goals should reflect state WIP targets.
11. Lack of coordination with other federal, state, and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.

F. Conservation

1. Revive easement programs at state level;
2. Utilize state/local/private easement to provide long-term resource protection

G. Increase Use of Targeting

1. Re-enrollments
2. Geographic
 - i) --for water quality
 - ii) --for habitat
 - iii) --lots of new tools/data to use
3. Demographic
 - i) --use market research when developed
 - ii) --pastures and larger farms with streams