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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## USDA BEGINS STATEWIDE SIGN-UP FOR NEW CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

**Massachusetts farmers and forestry producers urged to apply before Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>**

AMHERST, Mass., Aug. 12, 2009 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has begun continuous sign-up for the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in Massachusetts. NRCS administers CSP, a voluntary conservation program designed to encourage agricultural and forestry producers to adopt additional conservation practices and improve, maintain and manage existing ones. The first cutoff for application ranking purposes is **September 30<sup>th</sup>**.

Through CSP, NRCS will provide financial and technical assistance to eligible producers to conserve and enhance soil, water, air and related natural resources on their land. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, improved pastureland, non-industrial private forestland — a new land use for the program — and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

To apply for CSP, individual producers, legal entities and Indian tribes are encouraged to use a self-screening checklist first to determine whether the new program is suitable for them or their operation. The checklist is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at [www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov) and at NRCS field offices located in local USDA Service Centers. USDA Service Center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

After the self-screening, the producer's current and proposed conservation activities will be evaluated to determine the level of environmental performance to be achieved. A producer must treat at least one resource concern and one priority resource concern during the length of the five-year CSP contract.

Applications will be ranked based on several criteria including the three to five priority resource concerns identified for Massachusetts. NRCS field staff will conduct on-site field verifications of pre-approved applicants' information.

"The Conservation Stewardship Program changed dramatically in the 2008 Farm Bill," said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "NRCS has developed a program that should appeal to our diverse customers and offer them an equal chance to participate. We hope that Massachusetts agricultural and forestry producers will take full advantage of the benefits that this newly revised program offers."

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CSP will offer two possible payment types: annual and supplemental. The annual payment will be based on conservation performance and calculated by land use type and acreage for enrolled eligible land. A supplemental payment is also available to participants who also adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation. The annual payment limitation for a person or legal entity is \$40,000. A person or legal entity cannot exceed \$200,000 for all contracts entered into during any five-year period.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) authorized the Conservation Stewardship Program. Congress renamed and revamped the former Conservation Security Program completely to improve its availability and appeal to agricultural and forestry producers. The Conservation Stewardship Program will be offered in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Pacific and Caribbean areas through continuous sign-ups with announced cut-off application dates for ranking periods. The maximum annual enrollment is capped at nearly 12.8 million acres nationwide.

Individual producers, legal entities and Indian tribes must meet several requirements to obtain a Conservation Stewardship Program contract. They must be listed as the operator in the USDA farm records management system for the operation being offered for enrollment. They must document that they control the land for the term of the contract and include all eligible land in their entire operation in that contract. They must comply with highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions and comply with adjusted gross income provisions.

Land enrolled in the Conservation Security Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Grasslands Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program is ineligible for the new Conservation Stewardship Program.

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