

USDA and State of Delaware Increase Incentives for Delaware Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Harrington, DE – At the Agricultural Commodities Building today at the Delaware State Fair, USDA Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services Michael Scuse and Governor Jack Markell were joined by USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Bob Walls, DDA Secretary Ed Kee and DNREC Secretary David Small to announce an increase in the maximum incentives available for landowners and agricultural producers through the Delaware Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

The program is a federal-state conservation partnership designed to protect environmentally-sensitive lands in the state's Chesapeake Bay, Delaware Bay and Inland Bays watersheds. USDA and the State of Delaware contribute to the incentive payments that eligible participants receive when enrolling in the program.

“CREP is an extremely important program for Delaware and the Delmarva Peninsula,” said USDA Under Sec. Scuse. “USDA's partnership with the State of Delaware has enabled the enrollment of approximately 6,000 acres into conservation practices that directly impact the water quality and wildlife habitat of the Chesapeake Bay, Delaware Bay and Inland Bays, and we will continue to work together to increase CREP participation by landowners and producers in Delaware”.

“Preserving our environment and keeping our air and water clean are bedrock commitments of my administration and principles that all Delawareans share – none more so than our

farmers and landowners,” said Gov. Markell. “This is a true partnership between the federal government, state government and our farmers and landowners, and I thank the CREP partners for expanding this program.”

In 1999, FSA’s Commodity Credit Corporation and the State of Delaware partnered on Delaware’s CREP to improve water quality of the state’s bays, rivers and streams and increase wildlife habitat. The program encourages landowners to voluntarily remove marginal lands from agricultural production and establish conservation practices that reduce soil and nutrients from entering waterways. Participants enroll eligible acres in contracts of 10 to 15 years and receive funding to create riparian and grassed buffers, wetlands, wildlife habitat, grass filter strips and other conservation practices adjacent to impaired streams and drainage ditches. To date, more 6,000 acres have been conserved, with the goal of enrolling up to 10,000 acres through the program.

Participating landowners receive cost-share assistance for establishing conservation practices, an annual rental payment throughout the length of the contract (10-15 years), and an incentive payment. The new maximum incentive payment increases the range from \$165 to \$225 per acre, an increase from previous levels of \$110 to \$150 per acre.

“CREP has enabled landowners and producers to have a direct impact on the lives of all Delawareans by providing incentives to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff, as well as promote enhanced wildlife habitats,” said FSA State Director Walls. “The increased incentive rates will help to retain and increase environmentally sensitive acres devoted to CREP conservation practices. With help provided by our CREP partner, the State of Delaware, USDA will continue to support this important conservation initiative.”

“It is often said that farmers are the first environmentalists, and this is especially true in Delaware,” said Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Kee. “Partnerships such

as these are valuable ways to protect our waterways and keep them clean and healthy for future generations.”

Managed by DNREC’s Division of Watershed Stewardship, CREP is a critical component in Delaware’s efforts to meet the state’s goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan and the Pollution Control Strategy for the Inland Bays.

“CREP achieves long-term protection of environmentally-sensitive land near impaired streams and other waterways, improving water quality and restoring and enhancing riparian habitat,” said DNREC Sec. Small. “The program is among several clean water initiatives important to helping Delaware make measurable water quality improvements in our Chesapeake Bay tributaries and the Inland Bays. Our thanks to the CREP partnership for enhancing incentive payments to landowners, which will help expand conservation areas throughout the state.”

Landowners can enroll in Delaware CREP on a continuous basis. Interested participants are encouraged to contact Dale Churchey, Delaware CREP Coordinator, at 302-242-9943, to review eligibility and discuss practices appropriate for their property.