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The Agricultural Act of 2014: Working Lands Programs, The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Daniel Villar and Andrew F. Seidl¹

The working lands conservation programs of the 2008 Farm Bill, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) can be expected to expand somewhat in the 2014 legislation, due to the sun setting of other related programs. These programs are targeted to land that has the highest conservation benefits which are usually, but not necessarily, on smaller farms (USDA OBPA 2014). This brief takes a closer look at CSP.

What is CSP?

CSP functions by encouraging stewardship on agricultural lands, cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland and non-industrial private forest land by providing financial assistance to producers who meet program requirements (USDA ERS 2014). Five-year contracts offer annual payments for new and continuing conservation activities. Supplemental payments are also offered on five-year contracts for adopting resource conserving crop-rotation practices. Payments are earned based on conservation performance with higher performing conservation systems earning higher payments.

What is different for 2014?

The Conservation Stewardship Program was a new program for the 2008 Farm Bill, replacing the Conservation Security Program. Spending on the Conservation Security Program in Colorado averaged \$4.3 million from 2005 to 2009. New for 2008 was the provision that in addition to maintaining and managing existing conservation activities participants would also be encouraged to undertake new conservation measures. The 2014 Farm Bill extends these functions of CSP through FY2018 but in a reduced capacity. Annual enrollment is reduced from 12.769 million acres to 10 million acres; since CSP operates under annual acreage limitations rather than a funding cap this constitutes and absolute reduction in size (USDA ERS 2014). The new Farm Bill keeps the aggregate payments to a person or entity over a five-year period at \$200,000 (CBO 2014). Overall, changes to CSP are relatively minor.

¹Graduate Assistant and Professor at Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1172. Contact: andrew.seidl@colostate.edu; (970) 491-6951

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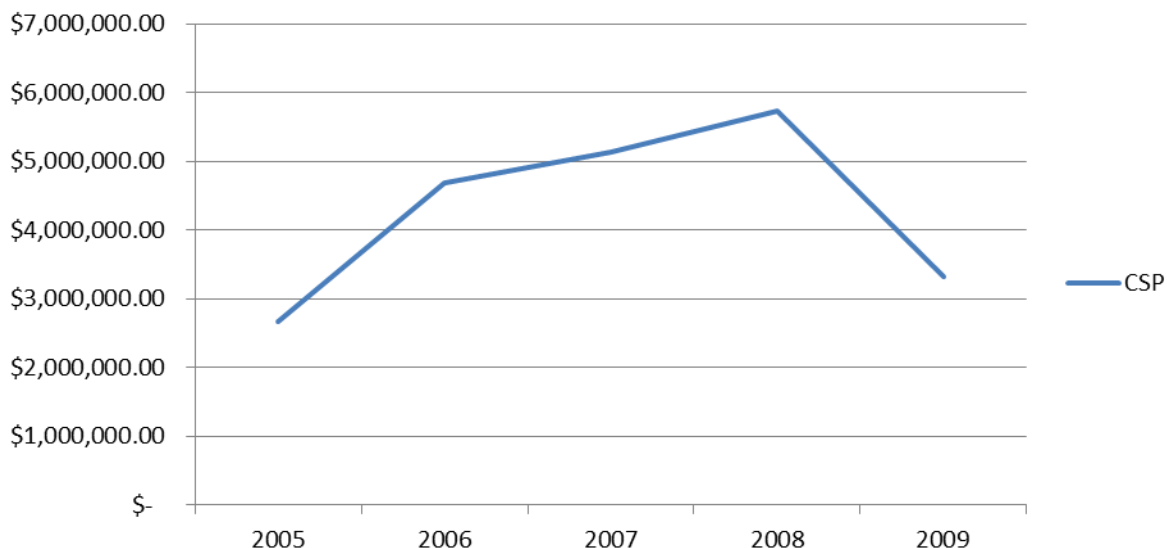


Figure 1: Historical CSP Spending in Colorado, 2005-2009

Source: Environmental Working Group, 2014

Note: Information on conservation spending is incomplete for 2011 and 2012.

Summary of Changes to CSP:

Prior Law/Policy	Enacted 2014 Farm Bill (P.L. 113-79)
CSP provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on tribal and private working lands.	Similar to the Senate bill except that it further defines eligible land to include land used or capable of being used for production of livestock and pastureland.
Establishes the CSP program for FY2009-FY2014. Eligible land includes private agricultural land, tribal agricultural land (that has been planted to crops four of preceding six years), and nonindustrial private forest land.	Reauthorizes the program through FY2018. Moves definition of ‘eligible land’ to the definition section (1238D of the FSA, as amended) and removes nonindustrial private forest land limit of not more than 10% of total annual acres. Permits CSP enrollment of land under a CRP contract provided the CRP contract is scheduled to expire at the end of the year in which the land is enrolled in CSP; and CRP payments for the land cease prior to the date of the first CSP payment.
Establishes contract requirements for addressing at least one resource concern upon application and meeting or exceeding the threshold for at least one priority resource concern by the end of the contract. Establishes a ranking criteria of applications, contract provisions, contract renewal, and contract terminations.	Nearly identical to the Senate bill with minor differences. Includes the requirement that contract renewal participants must meet the threshold for two “additional” priority resources concerns OR exceed the threshold for two “existing” priority resource concerns.
Outlines the duties of USDA, including offering continuous enrollment with at least one ranking period per year, identifying between 3-5 priority resource concerns, and developing a conservation measurement tool. Limits acreage enrollment to 12,769,000 acres for each fiscal year 2008 through 2017. Requires a national average rate of \$18 per acre (to include all costs). Payments may be based on the costs incurred, income forgone, and expected environmental benefits. In general, payments are made at the beginning of each fiscal year and are limited to a total of \$200,000 for all CSP contracts during any five year period.	Increases the number of priority resource concerns identified by USDA to not less than five. Removes references to a conservation measurement tool. Reduces the number of enrollable acres to 10,000,000 acres for each fiscal year 2014 through 2022. Adjusts the payment limit aggregate to \$200,000 for all CSP contracts between FY2014 and FY2018. Provides additional payment direction and requires a prorated performance over the life of the contract to create equal payments each fiscal year. Removes data collection requirements.

Figure 2: Summary of Changes to CSP

Source: Congressional Research Service 2014

Works Cited:

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