

Conservation Programs Are Waiting for a Farm Bill

Submitted by Deb Daniel, RRWCD General Manager

Members of the Senate and House Ag Committees are optimistic that they will be able to negotiate and approve the 2018 Farm Bill during the lame duck session. Until the 2018 Farm Bill is approved or the 2014 Farm Bill is extended, producers must wait for funding for conservation programs such as Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).

The new Republican River Revised CREP Agreement went into effect on October 1, 2018, which was also the deadline for approving the 2018 Farm Bill. As soon as a new Farm Bill is approved, producers will be able to apply for a CREP contract through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or for a conservation program through the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS).

Conservation programs offered in the Northern High Plains Basin are only for the voluntary permanent retirement of irrigated acres.

It is very important that producers interested in the CREP or EQIP programs notify their local FSA and NRCS offices that they are interested in applying for a contract.

Through the CREP program, producers enter into a 15-year contract and must revegetate the formerly irrigated acres according to the local NRCS recommendations. The well owner is allowed 6" of irrigation over the first 12 months of the contract to establish vegetation. The land cannot be dryland farmed or grazed throughout the length of the contract.

The well owner must either abandon the well or may apply to down-size the well for domestic/livestock use. Water for livestock or domestic use may not be pumped during the 15 years of the contract.

An EQIP program will be offered through the NRCS, but what that program will include, will not be decided until after the Farm Bill is approved. This program would allow dryland farming and grazing of the formerly irrigated acres.

Producers are encouraged to also notify the Republican River Water Conservation District (RRWCD) that they are interested in applying for supplemental contracts for both programs. Documents needed by the RRWCD for a CREP application includes: a copy of the deed, copies of the last 6 years of FSA 578 forms and corresponding maps, and if the applicant is a company or partnership the RRWCD requires legal documentation describing who is included in the business and who has power of attorney.

The Senate and the House currently are negotiating on the 2018 Farm Bill and hope to have it approved soon. If they are not successful, decisions about the Farm Bill will have to wait until after the new Senators and Congressmen are assigned to ag committees in both houses.

Producers are strongly encouraged to notify their local FSA or NRCS offices for updates on funding and for more information on the conservation programs. These local offices are keeping a list of producers who are interested in these programs. You may also contact the RRWCD at (970)332-3552 if they have questions or concerns.