



# Note to producers: Conservation buffers

still work . . .

## economically & environmentally

### More opportunities than ever

#### Ask your neighbor about the advantages



Are conservation buffers a good economic choice for your operation? Your neighbor may be the best person to ask. Farmers and ranchers are among the strongest and most credible advocates for use of buffers and supporting practices.

- More than 250,000 buffer contracts with USDA have been signed.
- Nearly 160,000 farms and ranches have buffers, installed under voluntary programs that provide annual rental payments and other financial incentives.
- There is no bidding, no waiting. Offers are automatically accepted if eligibility and other requirements are met.
- Payments vary across the country, with an average of about \$97 an acre per year.

Many farmers and ranchers find that setting aside environmentally sensitive land makes a lot of economic sense. Employees at your local USDA service center or conservation district office can tell you more. Or you can ask a neighbor!

#### Good for you and the environment



In addition to providing economic benefits, buffers can help you achieve a number of important conservation objectives. When used with supporting practices, buffers can help you:

- Prevent soil erosion.
- Improve water quality by removing sediment, fertilizers, pesticides and other pollutants from runoff.
- Improve air quality.
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat.
- Control flooding.
- Improve farm safety.
- Protect buildings, roads and livestock.
- Conserve energy.
- Beautify the landscape.

USDA's voluntary incentive programs, including the continuous Conservation Reserve Program — CCRP — are stronger than ever. They are valuable tools that can help you sustain your operation and protect the environment. That's good news for today and tomorrow!

#### Partners say: 'We're with you'



America's farmers and ranchers often must "go it alone," but when it comes to buffers, other partners have jumped in to help. Their message is, "We're in this together!"

- Groups like Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited and Quail Unlimited believe so strongly in buffers that they are committing thousands of dollars and volunteer assistance to increase buffer establishment.
  - Citizen groups are providing funding and volunteer support for buffer programs.
  - States and cities are supporting buffer programs on rural land, in recognition of the positive impacts buffers have on drinking water supplies.
  - Rural lenders often promote buffers as a wise economic choice.
  - Many farm-related groups and businesses, including cooperatives, also support buffer use.
- Talk to USDA service center or conservation district personnel about partners in your area.

# Now, more than ever, buffers are the right choice

Conservation buffers are a simple way for you and many other farmers and ranchers to stay profitable while protecting your land. USDA supports the use of buffers on cropland, pasture and rangeland through several conservation programs, including the continuous Conservation Reserve Program, or CCRP. Unlike the regular CRP, sign-up for the CCRP is available year-round.

Financial incentives available through CCRP are especially attractive. They include:

- A signing incentive payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways, shelterbelts, field windbreaks, living snow fences, farmable wetlands and wetland buffers, and marginable pastureland wildlife habitat and wetland buffers.
- Up to 50 percent cost sharing for practice installation.

- A practice incentive payment of up to 40 percent of eligible practice installation costs.
- A 20 percent rental rate incentive for riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways and field windbreaks.
- A 10 percent rental rate incentive for wellhead protection areas.
- Higher annual maintenance payments per acre for certain activities.
- Competitive rental rates nationwide for installing riparian buffers on marginal grazing land.



## More options for producers

Today, more than ever, USDA's conservation programs are complementary, so that farmers and ranchers can combine conservation practices to do what's best for their working land. The programs are also voluntary, and most provide incentives and cost sharing.

One of America's largest private land conservation programs is the CCRP. Incentives and cost sharing make it a wise economic choice, and it's recognized by farmers and ranchers across the country as common-sense conservation at its best.

A related program available in about half the states is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. CREP is a federal-state-local program that addresses specific conservation needs, primarily water quality, in the states where it operates.

You'll find that, in addition to CCRP and CREP, several other programs can help you install conservation buffers. Here are

just a few examples:

### **Environmental Quality Incentives**

**Program** — Significant increases in funding for EQIP in the 2002 farm bill make it an attractive program. Livestock-related natural resource concerns and other conservation priorities, including buffers, are among the practices EQIP funds. Local input helps establish local conservation priorities under EQIP.

### **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**

— WHIP is a voluntary program for landowners who want to develop and improve fish and wildlife habitat on private land.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program**

— Landowners can protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property with this voluntary program.

### **Forest Land Enhancement Program**

— A new program in the 2002 farm bill, FLEP provides cost sharing, technical assistance and education to owners of

private forest land. Planning, tree planting, fish and wildlife habitat, riparian restoration and forest improvement are among the practices that states and private landowners may focus on with FLEP.

## Eligible practices

*One or more of these buffers may be right for your farm or ranch*

- Grassed waterways
- Contour grass strips
- Shelterbelts/field windbreaks
- Living snow fences
- Vegetation to reduce salinity
- Filter strips
- Riparian buffers
- Wetland restorations
- Cross-wind trap strips
- Farmable wetlands
- Farmable wetland buffers
- Marginal pastureland wildlife habitat buffers
- Marginal pastureland wetland buffers
- Shallow water areas for wildlife
- Public wellhead protection buffers

## 'OK, where can I learn more?'

- Ask a neighbor who has installed conservation buffers about the economic and environmental benefits.
- Your local USDA service center or conservation district office can provide details about rental payments, cost-share options and other buffer assistance programs available in your area.
- Your state forester's office or consulting foresters can offer advice about what tree and shrub species are appropriate for use in buffers in your area.
- You can also talk to agricultural consultants and representatives of agribusiness firms to find out more about conservation buffers and their use on your farm or ranch.

