



# Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

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## NEW CRP General Signup Announced for March

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced they will conduct a four-week Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general signup, beginning on **March 12th and ending on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012**. Currently, about 1.6 million acres are enrolled in CRP in Minnesota; and with an estimated 292,000 acres set to expire on Sept. 30, 2012. CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

The CRP general signup is a competitive process in which each contract offer will compete with all other offers. All acres offered for CRP enrollment are weighted according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). The Farm Service Agency (FSA) collects data for each EBI factor based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Eligible land must have been cropped between 2002 - 2007 or have a current CRP contract that is due to expire on September 30, 2012. Landowners are encouraged to contact the Stearns County FSA at **320-251-7800 Ext. 2** and set up an appointment to discuss their options and ensure they obtain the highest EBI score, thereby improving the chances of a contract offer being accepted.

One way landowners can significantly improve their CRP contract offer is by including a pollinator habitat component or converting old non-native CRP cover to a native grass and wildflower cover. Higher EBI scores are awarded for these cover types. Up to 50% cost share is available to help establish the approved cover.

Pheasants need habitat featuring a diverse native grass and flower component. Young pheasant chicks survive almost exclusively on a diet of insects. These insects are dependent upon a diverse mix of forbs in and around quality nesting cover. Likewise, a diverse mix of flowering plants creates the best brood cover to allow pheasant chicks to move through habitat at ground level, while having protection from avian predators above.

Additionally, current CRP participants with contracts expiring this fall may make new contract offers. Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever encourage landowners planning on letting their current CRP contracts expire to consider offering at least partial reenrollment of their acreage. This helps increase yields to their cropland, while maintaining water quality and wildlife benefits.

All programs and services of the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District are available without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status.