

## **Cropland Conversion (Grass, Trees and Wildlife Plantings)**

### Definition/Purpose

A Cropland Conversion Practice means to establish and maintain a conservation cover of grass, trees, or wildlife plantings on fields previously used for crop production to improve water quality. Benefits may include reduced soil erosion, sedimentation and pollution from dissolved and sediment-attached substances.

### Policies

1. Cropland Conversion can only be used on land that has a cropping history two of the last five years. This practice must not be used on idle farmland that has grown up in native vegetation and that does not exhibit a water quality concern.
2. If a cooperators is going to graze livestock on cost shared cropland conversion fields, then he/she must provide at his or her own cost livestock exclusion, watering facilities, stream crossing, etc., to protect the water quality. The cooperators must not allow cost shared fields to be overgrazed.
3. Cost Share Program funds can be used to convert cropland not eroding greater than "T" to grass and trees resulting in a reduction of nutrient loading to a nearby water source, due to reducing soil loss or reducing fertilizer application.
4. BMP soil, nitrogen, and phosphorus impacts are required on the contract. Include the planted acreage and drainage area as well. Refer to the Minimum NCACSP Effects Requirements table later in this section for the correct methods of calculation.
5. Minimum life of BMP is ten (10) years.
6. All NRCS standards and NC Agriculture Cost Share Program policies relative to vegetation are to be followed. (See Section V for guidance.)
7. Trees, permanent wildlife food and cover or other vegetation may be used instead of grass for cropland conversion, critical area treatment, filter strips, etc. as long as site specifications are met.
8. For cropland conversion to trees, except for the conditions below, average costs for tree planting will be used. The average cost will be based on the lowest cost tree species that is suitable for the site. (e.g., if the site is suitable for establishing loblolly pines but the grower wishes to establish hardwoods, the cost share rate will be based on loblolly).
  - a. To receive the higher rate a tree planting statement signed by the local representative from the Division of Forest Resources must be submitted. (Please see addendum to NC-ACSP-2 Tree Planting Statement located in Section 6 of the N.C. Agriculture Cost Share Manual).
  - b. CREP enrollments for CP3 Tree Planting, CP3A Hardwood Tree Planting and CP31 Bottomland Timber Establishment specifies planting species other than

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Loblolly Pine. Therefore CREP contracts do not require the Tree Planting Statement (NC-ACSP-2) to receive the higher cost share rate for the planned species.

9. For cropland conversion to trees, in order to establish good tree growth and increase survival rates, cost share assistance is available for chemical releases or other recommended competition control measures before and after planting. For loblolly pines, cost share will be limited to one pre-treatment (site preparation) and one post-treatment. For hardwoods and longleaf pine, cost share will be limited to one pre-treatment (site preparation) and two post-treatments. Cost share may be available for an additional post-treatment within the first 3 years, upon recommendation and a site evaluation from the Division of Forest Resources or a registered forester. The recommendation should accompany the Supplement contract for the additional post-treatment control measure.
10. All contracts involving cropland conversion to trees that include pre- or post- plant site preparation or competition control treatments must include a statement from either the county forest ranger or a registered forester that the specified treatments are necessary. This statement cannot be substituted for the forest management plan required for CREP contracts. A forest management plan recommending the specified treatments can be submitted in lieu of the above statement.
11. Cropland conversion shall not be used in conjunction with a CREP CP22 Riparian Buffer when the cropland conversion eliminates the pollutant source. Agricultural pollutant sources can include un-buffered crop, hay, pasture, or other non-forest area that could contribute to sediment, nutrients, or chemicals to receiving waters.
12. When determining the acreage for which payments can be made for this practice, only the acreage actually planted shall be considered. The area occupied by farm roads, best management practices, ditches, structures, etc. shall not be included in planted acreage.

### Standards

NRCS Technical Guide, Section IV, Standard #327 (Conservation Cover), Standard #512 (Pasture & Hayland Planting).

(Modified November 2008, August 2010)