

Executive Update



A special update for Idaho conservation leaders ♦ Spring 2005

Special Feature

Idaho NRCS Holds Producer Meetings on CSP

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Idaho held 16 informational meetings this spring on the new Conservation Security Program (CSP).

Farmers and ranchers in 15 watersheds can apply for CSP this year if they meet the eligibility criteria. CSP, established in the 2002 Farm Bill, rewards those producers meeting the highest conservation standards on their land.



Keith Griswold, district conservationist, Cascade, presents CSP information.

About 200 producers attended the meetings held in Bonners Ferry, Kooskia, Grangeville, New Meadows, Cascade, Bruneau, Mountain Home, Glens Ferry, Mackay, Arco, St. Anthony, Ashton and Salmon.

"I felt good about the New Meadows meeting," says **Tom Yankey**, NRCS district

conservationist in Weiser. "There were a lot of questions and good discussion, and we had the larger land operators in attendance."

Many offices are now holding hands-on workshops to help producers through the self-assessment workbook, the Idaho Conservation Recordbook and the overall application process.

"These CSP producers are fun to work with," says **Kelly Olson**, NRCS resource conservationist from Moscow. "These guys are some of the top producers. I've been impressed."

The Bonners Ferry NRCS office held a producer workshop on

April 13 where many of the producers stayed until 11 p.m. documenting their conservation practices.

"It's taking some producers four or more hours to work through the process, depending on their record-keeping," says **Richard Sims**, state conservationist for Idaho. "But, when you think about a Tier III producer receiving \$45,000 a year for ten years, that's not a bad hourly rate."

The sign-up ends May 27. Producers in 2005 watersheds may not see another CSP sign-up for eight years.

In June, Idaho NRCS will propose possible 2006 watersheds for approval by the Secretary of Agriculture. The proposed watersheds are located near Sandpoint, in the Palouse, and near Twin Falls and Jerome.

For more on CSP, visit the NRCS Idaho website.



Charles Barnes, agriculture representative for Congressman Mike Simpson, speaks in support of CSP at the Arco public meeting.

"We believe a farmer can be a partner to conservation. A farmer, in fact, is very mindful of his resources ... we are open to learning from the CSP program."

-Written by a Bonners Ferry landowner in the "Business Objectives" section of his Idaho Conservation Recordbook



Producers at the Grangeville public meeting.



Garry Merritt, Lemhi Valley rancher, fills out his Idaho Conservation Recordbook at the Salmon NRCS office.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
9173 W. Barnes Drive, Suite C
Boise, ID 83709
www.id.nrcs.usda.gov

Richard Sims
State Conservationist
(208) 378-5700

Jody Fagan
Public Affairs Specialist
(208) 685-6978

Conservationist's Corner



Richard Sims
State Conservationist
Idaho NRCS

The Farm Bill: A Success in Idaho

As we at NRCS (and our partners) work through the opportunities for private lands conservation created in the 2002 Farm Bill, many leaders are planning for the 2008 legislation.

At this juncture, I believe it's worthwhile to look at how the current Farm Bill is helping Idahoans. For the years 2002-2004, here's the hard facts:

- EQIP: \$31.7 million
- WHIP: \$605,000
- GRP: \$940,000
- WRP: \$2.7 million

Dollars help get conservation on the land. But what has it meant to Idaho's farmers and ranchers?

In Ovid, EQIP helped an irrigation district pipe an open channel. It saved 50 percent of their water, allowed for new livestock watering facilities and stopped basement water seepage in three homes. At Billingsley Creek, an EQIP contract installed conservation practices to divert a call on water. We are using GRP to address habitat for many species of concern, like sage grouse (which has not been listed to date).

There are over 950 Farm Bill success stories in our state. If you look across the landscape, you will see lands touched by Farm Bill conservation programs in every county. If you talk to farmers and ranchers, you will hear them speak of improved water quantity and quality, and better livestock operations, riparian areas and wildlife habitat.

All these success stories and the experiences of those at the local level are the true springboard into the next Farm Bill.

NRCS Hosts Earth Day Wetland Event

Sara Braasch, regional assistant chief for the West, kicked off an Idaho NRCS Earth Day event at the CB Springs Wetland Project outside of Parma.

Braasch recognized landowners **Claude Baird** and **Jeff Casey** for their conservation efforts. Baird and Casey worked with NRCS to restore the 23-acre wetland area through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). The project includes seven wetland cells that filter irrigation return water before it flows into the Snake River.

Braasch also announced no net loss of wetlands nationwide since the last Earth Day and highlighted that Idaho NRCS has improved over 16,000 acres



of wetlands in the last five years.

Conservation partners and media representatives attended, and Baird and Casey led a tour of the wetlands. **Channel 2 Television** from Boise ran a feature story on the project during their evening news.

EQIP Helps Prevent Heavy Metal Leaching

They say too much of a good thing can turn sour. Such is the case with **Mike and Brenda Schlepp's** farm near Rose Lake, Idaho.

The Coeur d'Alene River traverses the farm where the Schlepps raise cattle, wetland plants and wild rice. The river creates optimum growing conditions, but it also causes erosion. The Schlepps were losing up to six feet of property to the river every year, and this erosion releases heavy metals from the banks, the result of a century of mining upstream.

In addition, a high water event in 2002 breached the dike, releasing 150 tons of soil onto one of their fields.

A year later, the Schlepps decided to work with the Coeur d'Alene NRCS office and enroll in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

"We viewed EQIP as an opportunity to continue our efforts to leave the land in better shape than we found it," Mike Schlepp says.

NRCS constructed a rock spillway and installed water control structures within the dike. This included a culvert with a headgate allowing Mike

and Brenda to relieve pressure during high water and to maintain the water level for their wild rice crop.

Schlepp is pleased with the results. "Any time I can let gravity do the work instead of the power company, that's a plus."

NRCS also stabilized the river banks with wedges of rock and a gravel filter to hold fine sediments.



Before and after the EQIP work.

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