

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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May 6, 2009

NEW MEXICO BULLETIN NO. 300-09-8

SUBJECT: GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP) SIGN-UP AND BATCHING
DATE

TO: All Employees

ACTION REQUIRED: JUNE 5, 2009

Purpose: To advise all NRCS employees that 2009 GRP batching date is May 29, 2009 and that all "high" and "medium-high" priority applications must be ranked by June 5, 2009.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2009

The 2008 Farm bill re-authorized and refunded the Grassland Reserve Program to provide an opportunity for the highest ranked program participants to protect their grasslands from development via permanent easements or 10+ year rental contracts. The program accepts applications on a continuous basis. **The current and perhaps only 2009 batching period will close May 29.** Field Offices need to determine application priority, complete screening for all applications, and complete ranking for "high" and "medium-high" priority applications by **June 5, 2009.** (NRCS New Mexico has requested a two-week extension of recently established national deadlines requiring this schedule. It is unknown if it will be granted.)

Ranking is very competitive, with priority given to ranches with exceptional management and that are either 1) located in priority eastern New Mexico counties (Union, Harding, Quay, Curry, Roosevelt, Lea, De Baca, Chaves, Eddy), or 2) applications where an entity providing matching funds and long-term management is involved. Beyond these priorities, the most heavily weighted ranking factor is range condition, with priority given to grasslands in the best condition. Other ranking factors include the diversity of ecological sites within the offered acreage, threat of conversion to non-grassland uses, and viability of easement management. The prioritization and ranking tool is attached.

Both permanent easement and 10-, 15- and 20-year contract options are available. The 2008 farm bill removed the 30-year rental and easement options. Program payments are tied to the agreement type. Permanent easement holders will be eligible for a one-time payment not to exceed the lowest of three values: the value of the land less the grazing value, an administratively set cap of \$224/ac, or the land owner offer. Rental contract holders will be eligible for annual payments totaling not more than 75% of the grazing value of the land over the life of the agreement.

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Given limited time-frame of this batching period and the competitive nature of applications, FOs should:

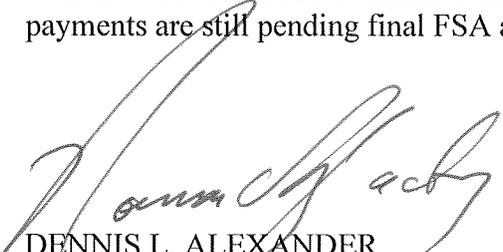
- 1) accept all new applications,
- 2) contact high or medium priority applications from prior sign-ups to see if they want to renew their applications, and
- 3) make a concerted effort to “get the word out” however possible (including the attached “News Release”).

It is hoped the screening tool, rather than lack of producer interest/awareness, will prevent this effort from becoming a major workload, but we would like applications to reflect the level of interest in NM to support future sign-ups/allocations.

Completed prioritization/ranking sheets should be saved for all applications and provided to Seth Fiedler as soon as possible, but no later than **June 5, 2009**. Files should be saved with the following naming convention: FieldOfficeName_ApplicantName_2009GRPRanking.xls.

A web teleconference will be held next Tuesday to discuss the ranking sheet and other GRP issues. Contact information will be provided under separate cover.

FSA is still in the process of revising the application form. According, applicants should use the “customized” AD-1153 attached to this Bulletin for this sign-up (only). Specifics of rental contract payments are still pending final FSA action.



DENNIS L. ALEXANDER
State Conservationist

Attachments