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## ***News Release***

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### **USDA OPENS 2005 CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM SIGN-UP New Mexico farmers and ranchers among those eligible for first nationwide program**

**ALBUQUERQUE**—Farmers and ranchers in parts of New Mexico are among those invited to participate in the first national sign up of the historic new Conservation Security Program (CSP). USDA has also announced that producers that were in a 2004 CSP pilot watershed will also be included in this enrollment opportunity. The sign up will be available from March 28 to May 27.

Those invited to participate in New Mexico are within the Mimbres watershed in southwest New Mexico; the Upper Pecos, Arroyo del Macho, and Gallo Arroyo watersheds in southeast New Mexico; and the Carrizo, Ute, and Taiban watersheds in eastern New Mexico. Additional land in the Palo Dura Watershed in the Texas Panhandle which crosses over into eastern New Mexico, and the San Bernardino Valley watershed in Arizona which crosses over into the New Mexico boothill may be included. Producers in the Punta De Agua-Tramperos Watershed, which was a 2004 CSP pilot watershed in eastern New Mexico and Texas Panhandle, will also be included in the sign-up opportunity.

“CSP is a whole new direction in the history of USDA conservation programs,” said Rosendo Treviño III, state conservationist for USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. “While conservation incentive programs and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers date back to the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, CSP represents the first time agricultural producers are being paid not just to fix a problem but in recognition of their ongoing stewardship and to maintain and further enhance that conservation commitment.”

Nationally, CSP is being made available on private agricultural land in 220 watersheds, covering about 185 million acres, in every state and the Caribbean. The national \$202 million budget will allow NRCS to offer an estimated 12,000 to 14,000 contracts to eligible farmers and ranchers.

To prepare agricultural producers for this historical new program, Treviño says, New Mexico has been holding workshops across eligible watershed areas. “We hope most of the eligible producers interested in CSP have had a chance to attend a workshop and get a first hand explanation of the new goals and requirements associated with the program.”

The workshops explained that CSP offers three levels or tiers of participation, depending on the amount of the farm enrolled and the current level of documented conservation. Payments

will be made based on this tier level as well as the producer's agreement to do additional practices to further enhance the environment. Tier I contracts (covering part of a farming operation) run for five years while Tier II and III contracts (covering all of a farming operation) can extend for 10 years.

“All successful applications begin with demonstrated protection of soil and water quality,” says Treviño. “This would typically mean managing a farm or ranch using a mix of practices such as irrigation water management, conservation tillage, pest and nutrient management, crop rotation, cover crops and vegetation buffers.” However Treviño says that most CSP participants will go beyond the minimum and work to further enhance soil and water, improve wildlife habitat, or conserve or produce on-farm energy.

Payments will vary depending on the land use (e.g. cropland and rangeland/pastureland), the amount of land enrolled, the tier level and the enhancements undertaken. One-time payments for new practices can also be included in a contract. In New Mexico, these new practices include installation of strip cropping, vegetative barriers, cross wind trap strips, filter strips, and herbaceous wind barriers.

To apply, interested applicants should first do a self-assessment of their farming operation. These were available at workshops or can be obtained in hard copy or CD version from USDA Service Centers in watershed areas. Additionally, the self-assessment and other program information may be accessed at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.

Once applicants have completed the self-assessment workbook and the New Mexico CSP Benchmark Condition Inventory with the required information based on their records from the past two years, they may call their local NRCS office for an appointment for a personal interview. NRCS conservationists will then verify their resource inventory, determine their level of participation and determine possible payments.

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