

The Conservation Security Program: Building a Media Strategy in Montana



The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is an alliance of over 30 groups across the nation that works to promote policies and programs supporting long-term economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities.

Messaging Tools for CSP Advocates

Core CSP Messages:

- “The Conservation Security Program helps farmers protect our nation's land, air, and water.”
 - Between 2004 and 2006, 429 farms in Montana were enrolled in CSP, totaling more than 1,216,000 acres.
- “The Conservation Security Program rewards farmers for being responsible stewards of the land.”
 - Between 2004 and 2006, Montana farmers enrolled in CSP received more than \$8,886,000 in CSP payments.
- “The Conservation Security Program encourages even higher conservation performance by providing real incentives for farmers to enhance their environmental stewardship.”
 - Nationally, 2,475 farmers made contract modifications to their 2005 CSP contracts, resulting in more than 1,655,000 acres being added to the highest tiers of the program.
 - In fiscal year 2006, Montana farmers received more than \$1,149,000 in enhancement payments for their conservation practices that went above and beyond the basic CSP requirements. The majority of these payments were for enhanced soil, pest, and habitat management.
- “The Conservation Security Program remains popular with farmers despite significant funding restrictions. The new Conservation Security Program should receive full funding and be open to all farmers in a predictable, simple manner.”
 - Of the 8,920,285 estimated acres in farms (minus CRP) in the funded watersheds for 2005, only 12% of the acres were enrolled in CSP.
 - Only 13 out of the 114 watersheds in Montana have been funded by CSP. (NRCS, EPA)

Countering Negativity:

- “CSP pays farmers for doing nothing.”

Suggested Response: CSP actually requires higher environmental standards than any other USDA program. Recent studies show that enrolled CSP farmers are adding new conservation practices and farmers not yet participating are adding environmentally important practices to become eligible.

- “CSP is not necessary because we have many other conservation programs that are working.”

Suggested Response: CSP is unique – it is the first and only program that rewards good farm stewardship and conservation on land in agricultural production. Other USDA agri-environmental programs focus on cleaning up existing environmental problems or taking marginal land out of production.

- “CSP is too complicated and shuts farmers out unfairly.”

Suggested Response: Congress authorized CSP as an open-enrollment program available to all eligible farmers, but a lack of funding has added restrictions and complexities to the program. We urge Congress to provide full funding so the Conservation Security Program can be open and fair to all farmers, the way it was intended.

Other Messaging Tips:

- *Keep it simple - most Americans do not know what the Conservation Security Program is.*
- *Studies show that advocates are more effective when they connect personal stories with the political context, to help people understand what they – and their government – can do.*
- *See more general tips and articles on messaging at www.frameworksinstitute.org and the “Communications Toolkit” at www.wkkf.org*

Additional Resources on CSP Implementation and Analysis:

A new report gets farmers’ perspectives on the program in the Midwest: *Conservation Security Program Drives Resource Management: An Assessment of CSP Implementation in Five Midwestern States*, Tim Gieske, April 2007, The Minnesota Project: http://www.mnproject.org/csp/CSP_Report_web_April_19,_2007.pdf

The Minnesota Project’s CSP info and resources: www.mnproject.org/csp

The Conservation Security Program: An Assessment of Farmers’ Experience with Program Implementation, Traci Bruckner, September 2006, Center for Rural Affairs: http://www.cfra.org/files/CSP_Report_farmerperspective.pdf

Hidden Treasures: The Conservation Security Program and Wildlife, Duane Hovorka, January 2007. Izaak Walton League of America, National Wildlife Federation, and Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. www.iwla.org/publications/agriculture/hidden_treasures.pdf

All data and statistics provided in this fact sheet were taken from data provided by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the United States Department of Agriculture and the NRCS web pages, unless otherwise noted.

In cases where data on the total number of watersheds in the state was not available from NRCS, the website Surf Your Watershed, run by the Environmental Protection Agency, was referenced. <http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/map2.cfm>