

## Evaluating the Conservation Security Program utilizing the perceptions and economics of producer participation: Implications for land stewardship in Iowa agriculture

**Abstract:** The Conservation Security Program, a “green payment” program, emphasizes rewarding the best stewards of natural resources and attracting the rest via reward payments. This report analyzes the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in Iowa. Program goals and its success in meeting those goals are evaluated. Results in four Iowa watersheds are summarized.

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### More details:

[www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/grants/2009-1/P2006-06.pdf](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/grants/2009-1/P2006-06.pdf)

*The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is rewarding those who have implemented soil conserving practices. However, there is little incentive for producers who have not previously invested in conservation to improve their standards of conservation.*

### What was done and why?

*The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was the first program of its kind in the United States to reward producers with annual payments for conservation practices implemented on working lands. (“Reward the best and motivate the rest” sums up the program philosophy.)*

This study focused on the first two years of Iowa’s experiences with the CSP. The research considered producer experiences, understanding, and awareness of the CSP in four watersheds: East Nishnabotna, North Raccoon, Upper Wapsipinicon, and Turkey. Objectives for the study were to:

- Determine the consistency that the CSP has demonstrated at meeting its published goals, in particular how much success the program has had in its efforts to use rewards to promote conservation in Iowa,
- Establish the resulting impact of the CSP on Iowa farmers and their level of program understanding, and
- Describe the implications of the CSP for national and international farm policy.

### What did we learn?

Rewarding producers for practices already in place is a lesson not lost on long-time stewards, as enrollment in traditional conservation programs typically has allocated the highest payments to those practicing the least conservation. The effectiveness of the CSP in promoting and preserving natural resources could be improved greatly by capitalizing on the current period of high commodity prices and redirecting savings from the Loan Deficiency and Counter-Cyclical payment programs into simplifying the CSP to operate exclusively as a reward program for proven stewards.

Additionally, conservation compliance for commodity programs should be improved and enforced so that the environmental benefits of producers practicing land stewardship is not undermined by producers unwilling to maintain conservation minimums. Promoting the CSP exclusively as a reward program should provide the needed incentive for unproven land stewards to take advantage of cost-share programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) to transition to higher levels of stewardship, increasing the overall acreage of conservation treatment in Iowa and reducing the total area suffering from environmentally damaging practices.



POLICY