

LANDOWNERS & THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

Understanding motivations and needs to cultivate participation, retention, and ongoing stewardship



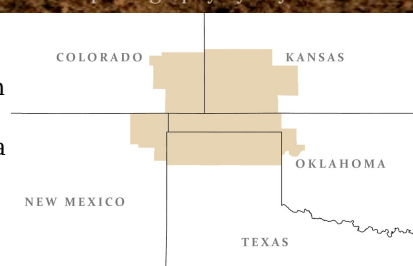
THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

- Incentivizes conversion of cropland to grassland
- Covers 22.3 million acres
- Distributes almost \$2 billion annually
- Enhances wildlife habitat
- Improves water quality
- Sequesters carbon
- Increases soil productivity

The durability of CRP's conservation benefits depends upon how enrolled fields are managed once their contracts expire.

All photography by Ally Steinmetz

This fact sheet reports on a [social science study](#) that explored persistence of grassland conservation and reversion to cropland on fields currently or previously enrolled in CRP in 36 counties in the [southern Great Plains](#). These counties collectively contain over 2 million CRP acres, two-thirds of which are due to expire between 2020 and 2022. The data below are drawn from 700 [survey responses](#), 3 [focus groups](#), 27 [landowner interviews](#), and 3.5 months of [observational research](#).



WHY DO LANDOWNERS PARTICIPATE IN CRP?

Enrollment in CRP allows landowners to balance [soil conservation](#) with the need to generate [stable financial return](#) from their land. Participation in the program helps landowners [sustain or grow](#) their farming or ranching operations, keep their land or farming in the [family](#), or to [retire](#) from farming altogether.

"I'm hoping CRP and the grass program gives us a chance to keep [our land] in the family many more generations."

on their own fields and across the regional landscape



especially for game species

WERE EACH [IMPORTANT MOTIVATIONS](#) to [ENROLL](#) for [OVER 75%](#) of LANDOWNERS with CURRENT CRP FIELDS

DO LANDOWNERS WANT TO RE-ENROLL IN CRP?

[Interest in re-enrolling](#) in CRP was high among landowners with current CRP fields; however, many landowners were concerned about qualifying for re-enrollment due to increased competition for [limited program spots](#).

83%

OF LANDOWNERS WITH CURRENT CRP FIELDS ARE [LIKELY TO TRY TO RE-ENROLL](#)

54%

OF LANDOWNERS WITH EXPIRED CRP FIELDS [UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO RE-ENROLL](#)

WHY?

"The land here never should've been broke out from grass to begin with, so I plan on it staying in CRP as long as the program lives."

WHY NOT?

[TOP CONSIDERATIONS](#) for LANDOWNERS WHO [CHOSE NOT to RE-ENROLL](#)

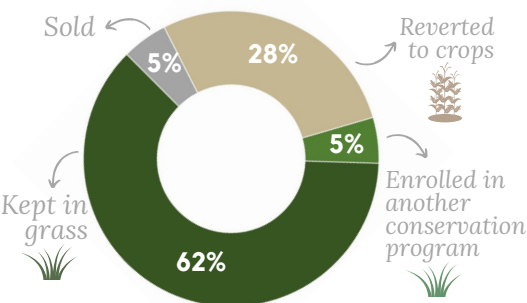
58%
Lower profit potential

42%
Restrictions on haying and grazing

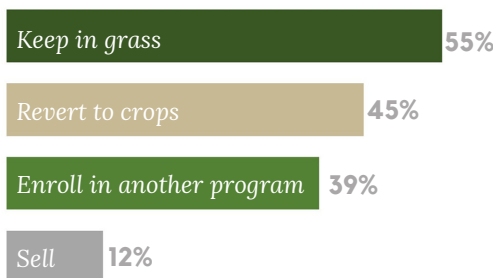
WHAT HAPPENS TO FIELDS THAT ARE NOT RE-ENROLLED?

Landowners' **post-CRP intentions and decisions** are promising for the establishment of enduring conservation benefits from CRP. Over half of landowners with a current CRP field reported being likely to **keep the majority of their fields in grass** if they cannot re-enroll in CRP; persistence of grassland conservation is even higher among landowners with expired CRP fields, around 62%. Landowners appear to be more likely to keep their field in grass and less likely to enroll in another conservation than they expect.

REPORTED POST-CRP LAND USE on the MAJORITY of EXPIRED CRP FIELDS

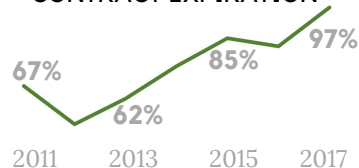


LIKELY POST-CRP LAND USE on the MAJORITY of CURRENT CRP FIELDS



"The fact of the matter is that money talks. We would prefer to leave it in grass, but if you are asking us to take, let's say, \$50,000 a year hit or something, we will probably shred it and plow it up."

EXPIRED CRP FIELDS STILL in GRASS by YEAR OF CONTRACT EXPIRATION



While the majority of CRP fields that expired between 2011 and 2017 have remained in grass thus far, they are **more likely to be reverted to crops as the time since contract expiration increases**. While 97% of fields whose contracts expired in 2017 were still in grass when our survey was conducted, only 67% of fields whose contracts expired in 2011 were still in grass.

WHAT PREDICTS GRASSLAND PERSISTENCE AFTER CRP?

Land use decisions following CRP are shaped by landowner **attitudes and beliefs** about the environment, conservation practices, or the program; the **biophysical characteristics** of the property; **access to equipment** and other resources; **behavioral inertia**, or a preference to manage land in a way that requires little or no change; **social influences**; and underlying **motivations**.

LANDOWNERS LIKELY to PERSIST with GRASSLAND CONSERVATION HAD:

- Positive experiences with the program
- Trust in CRP personnel
- Environmental attitudes about agriculture
- Motivation to improve forage quality
- Motivation to increase grazing land
- Motivation to improve wildlife habitat
- Perceived ease of keeping the field as-is
- A desire to keep their field as-is after CRP
- Neighbors who kept their field in grass after CRP

LANDOWNERS WHO PERSISTED with GRASSLAND CONSERVATION on EXPIRED CRP FIELDS HAD:

- Available resources (cattle, water, equipment)
- Motivation to prevent soil erosion



LANDOWNERS WHO REVERTED THEIR EXPIRED CRP FIELD to CROPS HAD:

- Business-oriented attitudes about agriculture
- Motivation to maximize profit

"I watched that [land] blow too many years. We're not gonna plow it up."

NEXT STEPS & FOR MORE INFORMATION

Spring 2020: **Practitioner meetings** in 5 study states; Summer 2020: Follow-up **landowner focus groups**

CONTACT

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STUDY REPORT

Barnes J, Dayer A, Sketch M, Gramza A, Nocera T, Steinmetz A, Soric M. 2019. Landowners and the Conservation Reserve Program: Understanding needs and motivations to cultivate participation, retention, and ongoing stewardship behavior.

Full report available at tinyurl.com/hdwcpr