

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
675 U.S. Courthouse  
801 Broadway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

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May 19, 2004

TENNESSEE BULLETIN NO. 300-04-5

SUBJECT: LTP – GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP) FY 2004

Purpose. To provide guidance for implementation of the FY 2004 Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) in Tennessee.

Expiration Date. December 31, 2004.

The Interim Final Rule for the GRP was released by the Secretary of Agriculture on May 11, 2004. The Interim Final Rule will require that some adjustments be made to the operation of the GRP in FY 2004. The following guidelines will apply:

1. The enclosed revised “Ranking Criteria – Agreement Options” for 10-, 15-, 20-, and 30-year Agreements” dated March 1, 2004, will be utilized for scoring and ranking all rental agreements.
2. The enclosed revised “Ranking Criteria – Easement Options – 2004” for permanent and 30-year easements dated March 12, 2004, will be utilized for scoring and ranking GRP conservation easements.
3. In FY 2004, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications for both rental agreements and easements in Tennessee continuously.
4. Applications should be scored and ranked promptly and results forwarded to the appropriate Area Resource Conservationist in the format as shown on enclosure dated 3/15/04 (GRP Summary of Applicants Ranked, Easements or Rental Agreements). Resource Conservationists will enter data into the electronic spreadsheets, as provided by Lynda LeMay, and provide data to Donald Dotson by a date to be determined.
5. It is anticipated that approvals for contracts and/or easements will be made at the state level by early July. The initial cut-off date for receiving, ranking, and scoring applicants is June 25, 2004.

-M O R E-

DIST: O  
Louis Buck, FSA, Nashville, TN

Additional guidance is as follows:

1. An eligible offer must consist of 40 contiguous acres of eligible land (pastureland, hayland, native grassland, and land containing primarily forbs).
2. Conservation easements within city limits of incorporated towns are not eligible.
3. Annual rental rates have been established for each county and previously distributed to field offices of FSA and NRCS.
4. Landowners who select the easement option have no financial obligation until after an offer based on the appraisal is made by USDA. USDA pays 100 percent of the appraisal, survey, and legal fees to file the easement. Availability of program funds will affect approval of easements.
5. In the Grassland Reserve Program, participants retain the right to hay and graze the grasslands, but it must be done in a manner that maintains the land in viable and diverse grass species. If the land is to be grazed, a conservation plan will be developed outlining a Prescribed Grazing Plan that must be applied. In Tennessee for grassland used for hay, seed production, or wildlife habitat, **NO** haying, mowing, or seed harvest will be allowed on 20 percent of those grassland acres during the primary nesting and brood rearing season. This season begins on April 15 and ends August 15. This is needed to maintain habitat value for several ground nesting birds and small game that are in declining numbers across the state. The program restricts practices that would destroy the grassland community such as the production of crops, fruit trees, and vineyards.
6. Cost share for establishment/restoration is limited to a maximum of \$2,000 per contract to establish native warm season grasses, only. The cost-share rate is 75 percent.

Questions may be directed to Mike Zeman at (615) 277-2571 or AnnSue Wattenbarger at (615) 277-2570. The Interim Rule may be accessed from the NRCS home page at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP/>.

/s/

JAMES W. FORD  
State Conservationist

Enclosures

- Ranking Criteria – Rental Agreements (3/1/04)
- Ranking Criteria – Conservation Easements (3/12/04)
- GRP Summary of Applicants Ranked (Rental Agreements) 3/15/04
- GRP Summary of Applicants Ranked (Easements) 3/15/04