

CRP: Discussion At The 2008 Commodity Classic

MIKE PLUMER

CARBONDALE, ILL.



The issue of what to do or how to change the Conservation Reserve Program was a big discussion at the National Commodity Conference. Livestock producers are concerned about the supply of corn and other feed grains and the price.

The CRP was created in the 1980s as a method to correct the problem of over supply of grains due to good production and the lingering impact of a grain embargo from a previous President, which impacted exports. At the time, the emphasis was to not only reduce production but to also protect highly erodible lands. Payments were based on soil type and productivity. Over time, that emphasis has changed to be more of an environmentally oriented program to protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat.

So how do you change the CRP? Suggestions were to change the emphasis of the program to mainly a wildlife habitat and environmentally

sensitive land program. The big change was to use the NRCS scoring for qualification, possibly modified, that would base rental payments on environmental sensitivity and wildlife benefit. This would mean that a high score would get a large payment, and a low score would get a low payment.

Decoupling this payment from land productivity would actually let the marketplace move the less sensitive land out of CRP and put it back in production. If CRP also allowed for partial field enrollment, then fields with sensitive areas could be reenrolled while the productive land could go back into production.

The result would be more land in production with the more environmentally sensitive land protected, since it would be paid at the county average rental rate. And that rate is a strong economic incentive to use CRP for its best purpose, which currently is water quality protection and wildlife enhancement. What do you think?

Δ

Mike Plumer is Extension Educator, Natural Resources Management, with the University of Illinois at the Carbondale Extension Center.