

Cap Lowered

2008 Farm Bill Drops CRP Eligible Acres To 32 Million

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Conservation provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill were reviewed in detail by Brent Carpenter, research associate for FAPRI-MU at the Breimyer Seminar recently.

"I attempted to pull out the major programs and give some level of detail to those," he said. "There were seven that we discussed and they fall into two basic categories: The Reserve programs, like CRP that most people are familiar with; and then the Working Lands Programs which is a little different approach, Equip and CSP being two of those. I simply gave people an idea of what to look for as they're dealing with producers related to conservation."

Carpenter said there's no major changes in any

of what to plant and whether there is a strong enough economic incentive on some of the marginal land.

"Of course the USDA is not under any obligation to renew those acres and when they expire no one is under obligation to try to renew them," he added. "There's going to be a lot of play here, we know that's been talked about for the last year."

"This summer when they tried to release some of those acres just for hay and grazing it became quite a football and wound up in the court system," Carpenter said. "So will people like to see those acres stay in conservation? Many people think we need to have more acres in production. There's some interesting things to watch there."

There are programs they apply to special cases. One of the things Carpenter learned in digging through some of the data is how impor-



Brent Carpenter, Research Associate for FAPRI-MU, discussed at the Breimyer Seminar recently, conservation provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill.
Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

of the programs. However, the program that has probably changed the most is the conservation stewardship program, now under a new name. The former program had a tiered structure where producers could offer up farmland, then one was allowed to move up in a ranking and become more eligible. That had very limited funding.

"That tiered system is gone, of course not all the rules are written as to how it's going to work but there are some minimum thresholds that we know will need to be in place and that relates to the whole farm," he explained.

Carpenter said the CRP changed in the fact that the cap on the acres that can be enrolled has been lowered nationwide from 37 million to 32 million.

"There will be a couple of years of transition to get down to 32 million," he added. "We talked a little bit about the timing of when those acres would eventually come out of CRP and back into agriculture production. There's lots of questions there, depending on what you believe about where prices are moving, as to what's going to happen to that land."

From the conservation standpoint, those acres were put into conservation programs for a reason. Largely marginal lands were eligible. However, with the kind of rally in prices, there's a strong economic incentive to bring that land back into production. Still there's the question

tant some of those programs are in Missouri. These include grassland reserve and wetland reserve.

"Missouri has lots of people working in conservation systems and from soil, water, wildlife, they were very strong in providing access to technical systems," he said. "Part of that is the technical advisors know the programs, both state and federal, and how those dovetail or overlap and how to get conservation practice right. They know how to tap into these programs, that's a big plus for Missouri."

Carpenter said a good place to learn a bit of history on the farm bill is the Ag Law Center, University of Arkansas. One route is to go to the USDA and there will be links from there to all kinds of farm bill information. He also noted the Economic Research Service has a publication where you can compare the old farm bill with the current, side by side right down to the provisions.

"If you want to learn what has changed, that's where I'd point," he summed.

This is the first time in the history of the Breimyer Seminar that two policy seminars have been held in one year. The program honors Harold Breimyer, a long-time MU professor of agricultural economics who specialized in farm policy, and a columnist for *MidAmerica Farmer Grower*. Prior to joining MU, he had a career at the USDA in Washington D.C. △