

2008 Farm Bill

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)



Delaware

The **GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM** (GRP) is a voluntary program jointly managed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency (FSA). The program purpose is to assist owners and operators of private land in protecting grazing uses and the related grassland values such as grassland-dependent plants and animals, soil erosion control, and air or water quality protection.

Applicants must have current crop and producer records on file with the FSA. They must own or control the land, agree to maintain the grassland for the contract term, and implement a grazing management plan and any conservation practices included in a restoration plan.

Applicants may choose between a rental contract of 10, 15 or 20 years, or a permanent easement. Rental contract holders receive an annual rental payment and 50% of the cost of any restoration practices. Applicants who agree to sell a conservation easement retain the grazing rights, and receive as compensation for the easement, the lesser of the established geographic rate, appraised value less the grassland value, or landowner offer for the easement.

What Activities are Allowed?

Easements and rental contracts allow, consistent with program purposes, the following activities:

- Soil disturbance activities if they are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of grazing uses and related conservation values;
- Common grazing practices, including those related to forage and seed production and routine management activities necessary to maintain the viability of the forage resources;
- Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production, subject to appropriate nesting season restrictions;
- Fire pre-suppression activities such as fire breaks and prescribed burning; and
- Grazing related activities, such as fencing and livestock watering facilities

What is Restoration?

GRP will pay to restore the offered areas to grass, or to enhance existing grassland function and values. Conservation practices that can be included in a restoration agreement are:

- *Brush Management
- *Upland or Wetland Habitat Management
- *Pasture and Hayland Planting
- *Conservation Cover
- *Grazing land mechanical treatment
- *Prescribed grazing
- *Access Control (fencing of riparian areas)
- *Fencing for new rotational grazing systems
- *Animal trails and walkways for access to pastures, including stream crossings
- *Watering facilities for livestock
- *Pipeline to support a watering facility



What Activities are Not Allowed?

Easements and rental contracts prohibit:

- *The production of crops, fruit trees, vineyards or other agricultural commodities (annually tilled products);
- *Any other activity inconsistent with maintaining grazing uses and related conservation values.

What is a GRP Easement?

A GRP easement is a reserve rights easement, wherein the landowner sells the land in fee simple to the United States, and is then granted, through the easement deed, the right to maintain and use the grasslands in perpetuity for the grazing and related purposes specified in the easement deed.

Compensation for an easement is determined after the applicant eligibility is established, NRCS has determined the land meets program purposes, and the applicant has read the standard easement deed and agreed to continue in the acquisition process.

NRCS has the option of completing a site-specific appraisal for an offered easement, or an annual market survey of Delaware land values and grazing values. Unless the landowner submits an application with a lower per acre offer, NRCS will accept an offer for the easement based on the results of the appraisal/market survey, the geographic rate cap, or the landowner offer - whichever is lower.

Geographic rate caps, based on average land values for grazing land less the value of the grazing rights, are set annually by the State Technical Committee, an advisory board to the NRCS State Conservationist.

Contact Your Local USDA Office

Kent County
800 Bay Road, Suite #2
Dover, DE 19901
Phone: (302) 741-2600 x3

New Castle County
2430 Old County Road
Newark, DE 19702
Phone: (302) 832-3100 x3

Sussex County
21315 Berlin Road, Unit 3
Georgetown, DE 19947
Phone: (302) 856-3990 x3

Who Is Eligible to Apply?

To participate in a GRP rental contract, applicants must own or have control of the agricultural land under consideration for the intended contract period.

What Land Is Eligible?

There is no minimum acreage for enrollment. Portions of farms or entire farms are eligible for both easements and rental contracts.

Land is not eligible for GRP if it is currently enrolled in another USDA Farm Bill conservation program such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program or the Wetland Reserve Program. Land is also ineligible if it is used for mitigation purposes, or if it is publicly owned.

However, land under any of these or a similar state contract that is expiring within the next twelve months may apply for GRP and, upon existing contract expiration, be converted to a GRP contract in order to maintain the grasslands developed under the original contract.

Applicants for GRP easements must own the land under consideration, and demonstrate clear title at the time of application.

How Does Signup for GRP Work?

Interested applicants can review the program information available at www.de.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grassres/grassland_res_pro.html, or contact their local USDA Service Center. A signed application can be filed at any time.

Applications are grouped for ranking normally once a year, and are ranked on how well the proposed area meets national and state environmental and program purpose objectives. Applicants who are actively managing grazing lands or agree to roll expiring CRP or state contracts directly into GRP rental contracts are given priority. Other ranking criteria include threat of conversion to other land uses, project area size, quality of soils, and need for restoration.

What are the Payment Rates and Terms?

Both rental and easement contracts have a \$50,000 annual payment limitation per person per year for restoration payments if restoration of the grasslands is required. Restoration payments are made after practice implementation, at 50% of the actual cost.

There is a separate per person per year annual payment limitation of \$50,000 for rental payments on rental contracts. Rental rates are set by the FSA County Committee on an annual basis.

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