

FEATURE – USDA TOUTS IMPORTANCE OF PRODUCER PROGRAMS

INTRO: The U-S Department of Agriculture sees opportunities and challenges for safety net and producer programs in the near future. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more.

U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS TO HELP PRODUCERS PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND MAKE IT THROUGH TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR A WHILE. THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM, OR C-R-P, HAS BEEN AROUND FOR TWENTY FIVE YEARS. A RECENT SIGN-UP SHOWED THAT THE PROGRAM THAT HELPS FARMERS REDUCE SOIL EROSION AND PROTECT WILDLIFE HABITAT IS STILL POPULAR.

Jonathan Coppess, USDA FSA Administrator: It's the first time in four years we've had a general sign up. And you know you talk about some of the market dynamics to see the amount of acreage offered during that month long sign up at the same time that a lot of prices were increasing is I think a great validator of how important folks see the program.

BUT, AS COPPESS SAYS, LEARNING THE BEST WAY TO RUN PRODUCER PROGRAMS IN AN ONGOING PROCESS.

Coppess: We look forward to what more we can figure out as we go. What are some of the specific things we're seeing and hearing on the ground.

THE FARM SERVICE AGENCY ALSO RUNS SAFETY NET AND LOAN PROGRAMS TO HELP PRODUCERS TO GET STARTED AND STAY IN FARMING.

Coppess: One of our strong points of pride with our lending programs is how much we get out to beginning and young farmers. To get those farmers started and then not just getting a loan out there but working with them on the business plan and on the operation so that we see them succeed.

COPPESS SAYS F-S-A'S PROGRAMS ARE NEEDED TO KEEP YOUNGER PRODUCERS ON THE LAND AND ATTRACT NEW FARMERS TO REPLACE AN AGING FARM POPULATION. IN WASHINGTON D-C FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.