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Demand for Conservation Program Overwhelms Funding

CANTON, MN – Recently announced results for the 2006 sign-up for the popular Conservation Security Program reveal a severe shortage of funding to help farmers care for the land and water.

USDA announced this week that only half of the qualified producers who applied nationwide were enrolled in the 60 watersheds – and that was after another 50 watersheds had already been cut.

Some 8000 farmers demonstrated that they achieved high conservation standards in their operation and were thus eligible to receive annual reward payments starting this year. But in the end, only the top 4,400 who were in the highest class of conservation excellence could be funded.

“While we are thrilled to see the growing popularity of this program that rewards the best stewards of the land, it is deeply disturbing that Congress has failed to provide the promised funds for more farmers to improve their farms to protect water and wildlife,” said Loni Kemp, Senior Policy Analyst at the Minnesota Project. “House leaders have placed a funding cap on the program that is keeping farmers from maximizing their contribution to the environment.”

To date, the new program has long-term conservation contracts with nearly 20,000 farmers, ensuring good stewardship on some sixteen million acres of working farmland nationwide. Yet the strong unmet demand by farmers shows that many more want to enroll and be rewarded for solving resource problems.

“The Conservation Security Program is the only federal farm program that requires farmers to not only do some good practices, but to prove they have protected water quality, preserved the soil, and provided habitat for wildlife on their working farmlands. It is highly effective and farmers want to do it, so Congress should fully fund it next year,” said Kemp. “Unfortunately, the House once again proposes to limit it severely – not even allowing for a sign-up next year. It is now up to the Senate to approve full funding.”

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