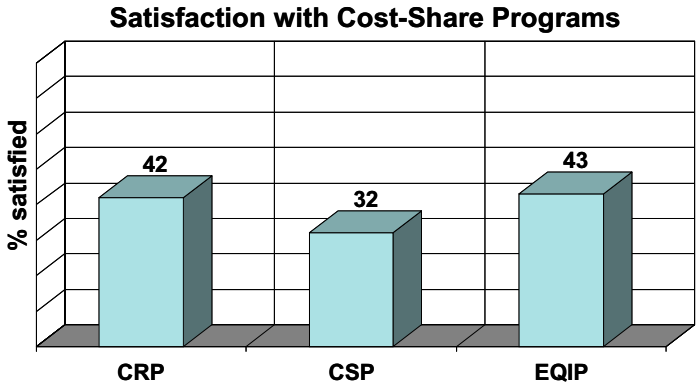
Applying knowledge to improve water quality
Pacific Northwest
Regional Water Program
A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Summer 2007
PNWWATER 113

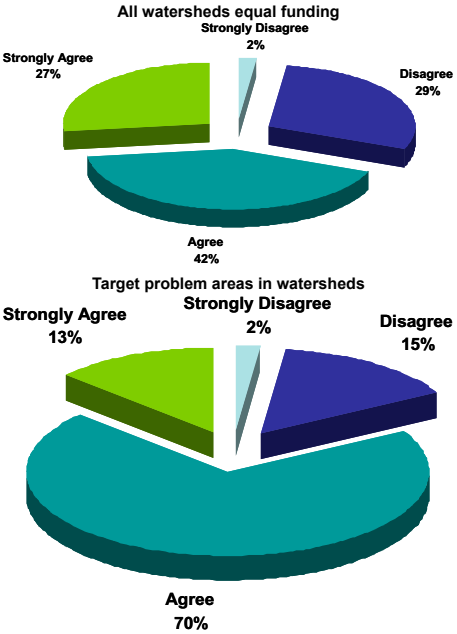
CEAP Survey Results:
Incentives to Conserve Soil and Water Resources



Federal cost-share programs have provided agricultural producers with the financial incentives necessary to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality throughout the USA over the last 40 years. In the last two months we have used PNWWWATER UPDATES (#109, #111) to present survey data collected from 425+ farmers in the 15 to 30 inch annual precipitation zone of northern Idaho and eastern Washington. This survey was undertaken as part of a USDA-Conservation Effectiveness Assessment Program (CEAP) grant received by a team of University of Idaho researchers led by Drs. Jan Boll and J. D. Wulfhorst. In the last two months we have presented data about grower perceptions of soil erosion and water quality and the importance of various factors contributing to on-farm conservation decisions. In this issue we will focus on incentives for conservation of soil and water resources.

Conservation practices can have a significant revenue impact on farm operations. Farmers in eastern Washington and northern Idaho indicated that they overwhelmingly liked (76 percent) conservation incentives that reward producers' stewardship practices. Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of producers indicated a preference for practices or structures that they voluntarily put into place to protect soil and water resources. Producers were less excited about three common federal cost-share programs (CRP, CSP, EQIP) that are available to many in the region.

Cost-Share Programs:



The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a program designed to retire highly erodible and environmentally sensitive cropland from production for a period of ten to 15 years. Land enrolled in this program is usually seeded to grasses or trees to reduce erosion, water pollution, and control the supply of agricultural commodities on the market. CRP payments give participants a stable source of income, and in theory (with reduced acreage) the market price of commodities increases. Forty-two percent of producers indicated that they liked CRP. Conversely, 24 percent of survey respondents did not like the program. This program is particularly unpopular with producers that depend on leases because of the land base reduction. For instance, in Whitman county about 25 percent of the agricultural land is in CRP.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a green payment program that rewards producers for good stewardship. CSP is considered to be compatible with World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements and agricultural subsidies. The program is designed to recognize and reward producers who have conservation practices/structures in place, and to encourage less conservation-oriented producers with financial incentives and technical assistance. This program can

Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners

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Idaho Water Resources Research Institute
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Institute for Water and Watersheds (Oregon)
http://water.oregonstate.edu/

State of Washington Water Research Center
http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/

Environmental Protection Agency
EPA, Region 10
The Pacific Northwest
http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/

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The Project
Land Grant Universities, Water Research Institutes, and EPA Region 10 have formed a partnership to provide research and education to communities about protecting or restoring the quality of water resources. This partnership is being supported in part by the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension System (CSREES).

Our Goal and Approach
The goal of this Project is to provide leadership for water resources research, education, and outreach to help people, industry, and governments to prevent and solve current and emerging water quality and quantity problems. The approach to achieving this goal is for the Partners to develop a coordinated water quality effort based on, and strengthening, indivudual state programs.

Our Strengths
The Project promotes regional collaboration by acknowledging existing programs and successful efforts; assisting program gaps; identifying potential issues for cross-agency and private sector collaboration; and developing a clearinghouse of expertise and programs. In addition, the Project establishes or enhances partnerships with federal, state, and local environmental and water resource management agencies, such as by placing a University Liaison within the offices of EPA Region 10.

provide cost-shares up to 90 percent of the cost of conservation practices. Compared to the CRP program, CSP is less popular with producers in eastern Washington and northern Idaho as only 32 percent of survey respondents like this program. Conversely, 30, 23, and 15 percent of survey respondents did not like the CSP program, were neutral about CSP, or were not familiar with CSP, respectively.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promote environmental protection and agricultural production as compatible national goals. This program offers financial and technical assistance to install or implement structural and management practices. This program, like CSP, emphasizes management practices. Forty-three percent of surveyed producers like the EQIP program. Compared to the CSP and CRP programs EQIP was the best-liked program and had the fewest survey respondents that did not like the program. Based on national studies, EQIP is a well-received program; however, funding is insufficient to meet producer demand.

Cost-share programs aim to reduce soil erosion and improve stream water quality. Over 80 percent of surveyed growers believe that cost-share programs should be applied so that problem areas within watersheds are targeted. Even though survey respondents believe that problem areas in watersheds should be targeted first, 69 percent of producers in eastern Washington and northern Idaho thought that all watersheds should receive equal cost-share funding. Even though cost-share programs have received overall positive responses from producers in the region, negative responses indicate that there is room for the existing programs to be changed or applied/managed differently to achieve higher acceptance/participation rates.

National Water Quality Program Areas

The four land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest have aligned our water resource extension and research efforts with eight themes of the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension System.

1. Animal Waste Management
2. Drinking Water and Human Health
3. Environmental Restoration
4. Nutrient and Pesticide Management
5. Pollution Assessment and Prevention
6. Watershed Management
7. Water Conservation and Management
8. Water Policy and Economics

CSREES is the Cooperative States Research, Education, and Extension Service, a sub-agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, and is the federal partner in this water quality program.