USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Technical Considerations
for FSA's Conservation Reserve Program

Seed Mixes / Species Selection

Approved Species List
- Selections are based on ecological factors and precipitation limitations.

Mix Types
- **CP1 Mixes:** A mix of introduced and native species is allowed.
- **CP2 Mixes:** Only native species are permitted.
- **CP4D Mixes:** A blend of native and introduced species, but with the stipulation that a brush component is included.

Definitions
- **Native Species:** Species that originated in the United States.
- **Introduced Species:** Species imported from other countries (e.g., crested wheatgrass).

Pure Live Seed (PLS)
- CRP seeding rates are based on PLS, which considers germination percentage and seed purity to ensure accurate seeding rates.

About
The Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program, is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural producers and landowners to convert highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as native grasses, trees, and riparian buffers.

Existing Field Conditions

Weed Pressure
- Weed competition is a primary challenge; weeds compete aggressively with CRP seedlings for moisture, nutrients, and light.
- Fields are categorized by weed pressure
  - **Field weed free:** Less than 10% weed cover.
  - **Field with weed pressure:** Greater than 10% weed cover.

Field Conversion
- Transitioning from a CP1 to a CP2 mix can be challenging due to the difficulty in controlling previously established introduced perennial species.

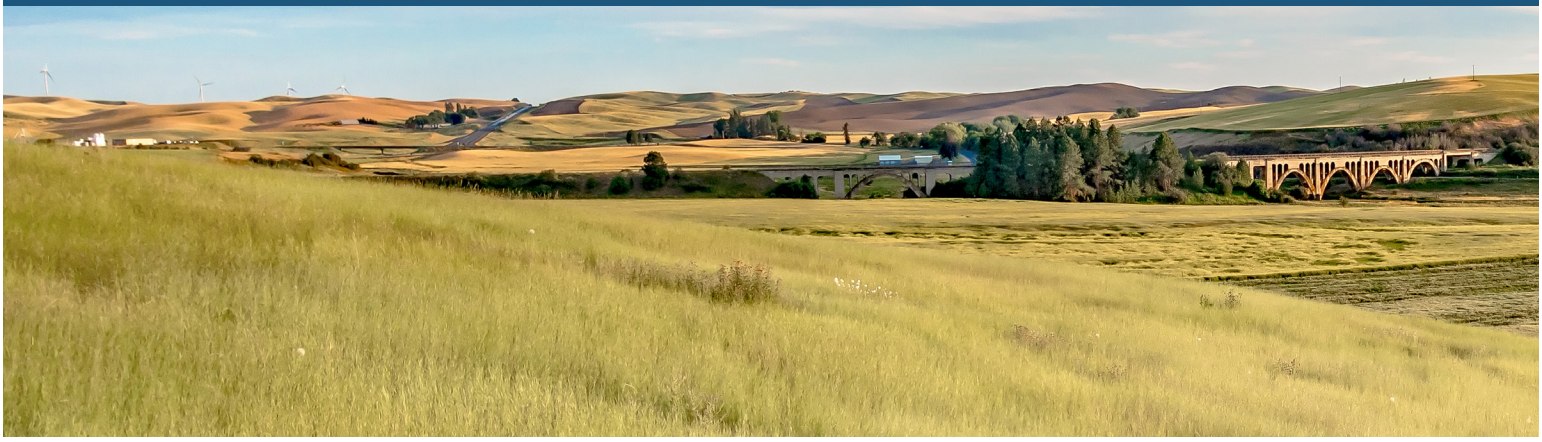
Seedbed Preparation for CRP Establishments

Weed Control (Pre-Planting)
- This is the most critical step.
- Multiple weed control activities may be necessary during the growing season to exhaust the soil seedbank.
- Methods can include conventional tillage or targeted herbicide applications (chem fallow).
- It's essential not to let the weeds set seed.

Seedbed Requirements
- A firm, clean, and weed-free seedbed is crucial for ensuring good seed-to-soil contact given the small size of grass seeds.

Seeding Guidelines

Timing
- **Dormant Seeding:** Typically scheduled between November 1 and Feb. 15.
- **Spring Seeding:** Typically scheduled between March 15 and May 1, in areas with precipitation 16 inches or greater.
- Both native and introduced grasses may require **two to three growing seasons** to become fully established.



Post-Plant Weed Control

Monitoring & Management

- Even with thorough pre-plant preparation, weeds will emerge.
- Regular monitoring is essential to determine the appropriate type and extent of further weed control.
- Options include mowing, manual weeding, or targeted herbicide applications.
- Broad-spectrum herbicides should be avoided on newly emerging grasses and forbs.

Key Administrative Notes

Deviations

- No deviations from the approved Conservation Plans or Implementation Requirements (such as changes in mix, seeding time, or seeding method) are allowed without approval from both NRCS and FSA.

Field Office Support

- Local NRCS Field Offices are available for consultation regarding CRP seedings.

Record Keeping:

- It's important to maintain records of all activities (e.g., spraying, tillage, scouting, etc.).

Herbicide Advice

- NRCS does not provide herbicide recommendations. For chemical assistance, consult WSU extension services or a pesticide consultant

Timelines and Administrative Considerations

Weed Control

- Should commence as soon as possible following CRP contract approval.

Seeding and Certification

- Seeding: Complete within 12-24 months after contract approval.
- Post-plant weed control: Complete within 12 months of seeding.
- Stand certification: Complete within 24 months of seeding.
- A plant density of 1.0 desirable plants per square foot is required—reduced to 0.8 plants per square foot if the annual precipitation is under 12 inches. Stand density must be maintained for the life of the CRP contract.
- A final stand evaluation will be completed by NRCS within the last 2 years of the CRP contract to evaluate that **stand density** and **species composition** requirements have been maintained for the life of the contract.

Mid-contract management

- Scheduled between the fourth and ninth year depending on the contract's length.
- Minimum of one MCM activity is required per contract. Additional MCM activities could be required for the success of the stand, which is determined on a case by case basis.

Field Access Restrictions

- Once a stand is certified, there is no field access from April 1 to July 1 to protect the primary nesting season.