

## Wellhead Protection Through CRP

Anyone responsible for delivering clean, healthy water to consumers in rural areas can now add the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the list of agencies providing assistance for watershed and wellhead protection. The National Conservation Buffer Initiative is designed to protect and enhance ground and surface water quality and other environmental resources by encouraging landowners across the country to install 2 million miles of conservation buffers by the year 2002. These filter strips, wellhead protection areas, riparian forest buffers, grassed waterways, and other small parcels of land are planted to permanent vegetation that will reduce the flow of water and sediment — and any pollutants they may carry — to surface and ground water. The initiative complements EPA's programs authorized under the 1986 Safe Drinking Water Act amendments to help municipalities and rural communities protect their drinking water sources.

One of the key provisions of the 1996 farm bill is the continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) sign-up that allows landowners to enroll eligible land at any time under a 10- or 15-year contract to install permanent vegetative cover and, in return, receive rental payments based on soil type, productivity, and local land rental rates. Land within a 2,000-foot radius from a public well, as designated by EPA or a designated state agency as a wellhead protection area, can be enrolled in the continuous CRP sign-up. Circular areas can be "squared off" to eliminate odd-shaped corners, to a maximum of 367 acres. Specifically for wellhead protection areas, there is a 10 percent incentive payment for enrollment in the continuous



CRP! Moreover, 50 percent (and sometimes more) cost-share assistance may be available for the cost of installing buffers.

Enrolling land in CRP for conservation buffers is easy. Owners of eligible land in wellhead protection areas can simply go to their local USDA Service Center and enroll their land for conservation buffers under the continuous CRP sign-up. If your well or well field is privately owned or owned by someone other than your Association, you may want to work with the owner(s) to encourage them to enroll the land in CRP or obtain other assistance for installing buffers. Other federal, state, and local government programs can help with the cost of implementing buffer practices to protect surface water as well as ground water. EPA's 319 program is one. Also, USDA's Natural Resources

Conservation Service helps place buffers and other conservation practices on the land through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP).

Vegetative buffers — strips planted to grasses, shrubs, and trees — have tremendous filtering capability; in some cases, taking up as much as three-fourths or more of the nutrients washing off a farm field. This is especially true when they are installed in conjunction with other proven conservation practices. They are a highly effective, inexpensive way to protect source water supplies. Buffers are common sense conservation for the land and cost-effective pollution prevention for water managers. ♪

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**The dates are set for PRWA's 1999 Annual Conference.**

**March 24, 25, 26, 1999**

**Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel**

**Watch for more details and registration information coming soon.**