

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Who is eligible for the Vermont Farmer Ecosystem Stewardship Program (VFESP) or CSP-Assist? Farm operations that meet minimum threshold of a farm as defined in [Section 3 of the Required Agricultural Practices \(RAPs\)](#) are eligible for CSP-Assist payments.

Who is funding CSP-Assist? This program was funded by the State of Vermont and administered by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM). This State-funded program will supplement engagement with the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and was enabled through the findings of the Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group. More information about the findings and recommendations from that Working Group can be found on our [website](#).

Will payments through this program cut into a farm's NRCS CSP payments? No, these payments are separate and supplementary to standard CSP contract payments.

How much funding could I receive if I already have a CSP contract with NRCS? Current CSP participants can receive a state implementation payment of \$3,500 through this program. This payment will be released upon confirmation with NRCS that you hold an active CSP contract that expires on or after December 31, 2024.

How much funding could I receive if I have recently applied to CSP or am working to renew my contract this year? New applicants/CSP renewals are eligible for a \$2,000 Planning payment for completing the planning and assessment stage of their CSP application. This payment will be released upon confirmation with NRCS that you have a fully developed pre-contract CSP Assessment.

In addition, after completion of their CSP Assessment, new applicants/CSP renewals are eligible for a separate and additional \$1,500-\$7,500 Implementation payment for the execution of a CSP contract with NRCS. Please note that this payment rate is variable and will be based on the extent of eligible applicants that apply to this program and budget availability. This payment will be released upon confirmation with NRCS that you have developed and signed a CSP contract with NRCS.

How often can I apply for CSP-Assist and receive payment? CSP-Assist is a one-time incentive program to jumpstart Vermont farms' enrollment in CSP. Applicants are only eligible for one Planning payment and/or one Implementation payment throughout the program's lifespan.

If I am currently enrolled in CSP with NRCS but I am applying for a renewal this year, what can I expect for funding through CSP-Assist? Applicants seeking a CSP Contract renewal will be eligible for each of the Planning and Implementation payments just as if you were a new CSP applicant.

I completed an assessment through NRCS this year but did not meet the threshold to receive a CSP contract. Can I still receive funding through the CSP-Assist program? If your farm operation successfully works with NRCS Conservation Planners to complete an 'CSP Assessment', you can receive the one-time Planning payment of \$2,000, regardless of whether you then receive a contract.

If you learn that you do not meet the threshold for a CSP contract, we encourage you to apply to other conservation payment programs such as NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or AAFM programs such as the Best Management Practices (BMP) or Farm Agronomic Practices (FAP) program. These payment programs often pay a higher per-acre rate per practice and can help you to increase your level of conservation stewardship up to a level where you may be eligible for CSP in the future.

What if I complete an assessment and met the threshold for a CSP contract, but was told my application did not rank out to be funded this round?

You can receive Planning payment now for having completed the CSP Assessment with NRCS. You will not receive Implementation payment for signing a contract unless you are offered a contract from NRCS and sign it.

If you reapply to CSP in the fall and receive/sign a contract then, you can receive the Implementation payment for contract signature then.

Will this program be ongoing? CSP-Assist was funded through a one-time allocation of funds from the Vermont Legislature and is planned to last for two years (2023-2024). This program will provide incentives for farms that are currently enrolled in CSP and farms that apply to CSP between November 2022 through June of 2024. All payments will be disbursed by December 2024 at the latest.

When will funding be distributed through this program? The state incentive payment will be provided within 45-60 days from the time of deliverable submission and approval. Depending on the program payment you are eligible for, you would receive payment either after the receipt of an active CSP Contract, completion of a CSP pre-contract Assessment, and/or the signing of a new CSP contract and the confirmation of enrollment in a CSP contract from NRCS. Please note that NRCS will be providing these materials directly to the Agency of Agriculture as applicable. Please reach out to NRCS for the more information about your CSP Contract - [Vermont State Office | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#).