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USDA TO HOLD PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION ON THE CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM

St. Paul/Minnesota, January 20, 2004—The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service will hold 5 public listening sessions in Minnesota to gain feedback on a proposed rule to implement the new Conservation Security Program (CSP). The meetings will be held on the following dates and locations:

January 27, 2004 – Kasson, MN at Diggers Bar and Grill from 10:00 - 2:00
January 29, 2004 - St. Cloud MN at the St. Cloud City Hall from 10:00 – 12:00 and followed by the Minnesota State Technical Committee Meeting from 1:00– 3:00
February 2, 2004 – Bemidji, MN at the Northland Inn from 3:00 – 6:00
February 3, 2004 - Fergus Falls, MN at the Bigwood Convention Center from 10:00 – 12:00

Authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, CSP is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural working lands and enhances the condition of America's natural resources. The program is designed to reward the best conservation stewards of the most environmentally sensitive areas in targeted watersheds.

“We are holding the listening session to give the public ample opportunity to voice their opinions about the new program,” said name, NRCS District Conservationist for *specific field office location*. “Last year, we used the public's ideas and suggestions to develop the proposed rule and now we are asking for comments that will help guide us in developing the final regulations for program implementation.”

Public comments at the listening session will be limited to 5 minutes per speaker. Those who wish to speak may make arrangements in advance by calling Julie MacSwain/(651)-602-7859, or they may sign up at the listening session. If a sign language interpreter or other special accommodations are necessary, contact Julie MacSwain/(651)-602-7859 no later than January 22, 2004.

Written statements will be accepted at the listening session or may be submitted by mail, e-mail or fax to Conservation Security Program Comments, ATTN: David McKay, NRCS Conservation Operations Division, P.O. Box 2890, Washington DC 20013; e-mail david.mckay@usda.gov; fax 202-720-4265.

The CSP proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* on January 2, 2004; comments are due by March 2, 2004. The proposed rule and additional information on the program can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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