

rental contract, nor binds the applicant to convey an easement, enter into a rental contract, or agree to restoration activities.

(c) Offer of enrollment will be through either:

(1) An agreement to purchase an easement presented by NRCS to the applicant which will describe the easement, the easement terms and conditions, and other terms and conditions that may be required by NRCS; or

(2) A rental contract will be presented by FSA to the applicant which will describe the contract area, the contract terms and conditions, and other terms and conditions that may be required by FSA.

(d) For rental contracts, land will be considered to be enrolled in GRP once an FSA representative approves the GRP rental contract. FSA may withdraw the offer before approval of the contract due to lack of available funds or other reasons.

(e) For easements, after the option agreement to purchase an easement is executed by NRCS and the participant, the land will be considered enrolled in GRP. NRCS will proceed with the development of the GRP management plan, conservation or restoration plan if applicable, and various easement acquisition activities, which may include conducting a legal survey of the easement area, securing necessary subordination agreements, procuring title insurance, and conducting other activities necessary to record the easement or implement GRP.

(f) Prior to closing an easement, NRCS may withdraw the land from enrollment at any time due to lack of available funds, title concerns, or other reasons.

§ 1415.10 Compensation for easements and rental contracts acquired by the Secretary.

(a) The Chief will not pay more than the fair market value of the land, less the grazing value of the land encumbered by the easement.

(b) To determine this amount, the Chief will pay as compensation the lowest of:

(1) The fair market value of the land encumbered by the easement as determined by the Chief using—

(i) The Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice, or

(ii) An area-wide market analysis or market survey;

(2) The amount corresponding to a geographical cap, as determined by the State Conservationist, with advice from the State Technical Committee; or

(3) An offer made by the landowner.

(c) For 10-, 15-, and 20-year rental contracts, the participant will receive not more than 75 percent of the grazing value in an annual payment for the length of the contract, as determined by FSA. As provided by the regulations at part 1400 of this title, payments made under one or more rental contracts to a person or legal entity, directly or indirectly, may not exceed, in the aggregate, \$50,000 per year.

(d) In order to provide for better uniformity among States, the NRCS Chief and FSA Administrator may review and adjust, as appropriate, State or other geographically based payment rates for rental contracts.

(e) Easement or rental contract payments received by a participant will be in addition to, and not affect, the total amount of payments that the participant is otherwise eligible to receive under other USDA programs.

(f) Easement payments will be made in a single payment to the landowner unless otherwise requested by the landowner.

(g) USDA may accept and use contributions of non-Federal funds to support the purposes of the program. These funds are available to USDA without further appropriation and until expended, to carry out the program.

(h) USDA recognizes that environmental benefits will be achieved by implementing conservation practices and activities funded through GRP, and that ecosystem credits may be gained as a result of implementing activities compatible with the purposes of a GRP easement, rental contract, or associated restoration agreement. USDA asserts no direct or indirect interest in these credits except:

(1) In the event the participant sells or trades credits arising from GRP

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funded activities, USDA retains the authority to ensure that the requirements for GRP rental contracts, easements, or restoration agreements are met and maintained consistent with this part; and

(2) If activities required under an ecosystem credit agreement may affect land covered under a GRP rental contract, easement, or restoration agreement, participants are required to obtain an assessment from USDA about the compatibility of the activity prior to entering into such agreements.

§ 1415.11 Restoration agreements.

(a) Restoration agreements are only authorized to be used in conjunction with easements and rental contracts. NRCS, in consultation with the program participant, determines if the grassland resources are adequate to meet the participant's objectives and the purposes of the program, or if a restoration agreement is needed. Such a determination is also subject to the availability of funding. USDA may condition participation in the program upon the execution of a restoration agreement depending on the condition of the grassland resources. When the functions and values of the grassland are determined adequate by NRCS, a restoration agreement is not required. However, if a restoration agreement is required, NRCS will set the terms of the restoration agreement. The restoration plan component of the restoration agreement identifies conservation practices and activities necessary to restore or improve the functions and values of the grassland to meet both USDA and the participant's objectives and purposes of the program. If the functions and values of the grassland decline while the land is subject to a GRP easement or rental contract through no fault of the participant, the participant may enter into a restoration agreement at that time to improve the functions and values with USDA approval and when funds are available.

(b) The NRCS State Conservationist, with advice from the State Technical Committee and in consultation with FSA, determines the conservation practices and activities and the cost-share percentages, not to exceed statu-

tory limits available under GRP. A list of conservation practices and activities approved for cost-share assistance under GRP restoration plans is available to the public through the local USDA Service Center. NRCS may work through the local conservation district with the program participant to determine the terms of the restoration plan. The conservation district may assist NRCS with determining eligible conservation practices and activities and approving restoration agreements.

(c) Only approved conservation practices and activities are eligible for cost-sharing. Payments under the GRP restoration agreements may be made to the participant of not more than 50 percent for the cost of carrying out the conservation practices or activities. As provided by the regulations at part 1400 of this chapter, payments made under one or more restoration agreements to a person or legal entity, directly or indirectly, may not exceed, in the aggregate, \$50,000 per year.

(d) The participant is responsible for the operation and maintenance of conservation practices in accordance with the restoration agreement.

(e) All conservation practices must be implemented in accordance with the FOTG.

(f) Technical assistance is provided by NRCS, or an NRCS approved third party.

(g) If the participant is receiving cost-share for the same conservation practice or activity from another conservation program, USDA will adjust the GRP cost-share rate proportionately so that the amount received by the participant does not exceed 100 percent of the costs of restoration.

(h) The participant cannot receive cost-share from more than one USDA cost-share program for the same conservation practice or activity on the same land.

(i) Cost-share payments may be made only upon a determination by a qualified individual approved by the NRCS State Conservationist that an eligible restoration practice has been established in compliance with appropriate standards and specifications.

(j) Conservation practices and activities identified in the restoration plan