

THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM IN CONNECTICUT

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The Conservation Reserve Program under its current guidelines is a dismal failure. To date, this program has yet to sign up a single Connecticut farmer. Moreover, I doubt that CRP makes much sense to the rest of New England. As indicated by Ron Overton, three of the four states that have yet to sign up anyone are in New England; Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

First, like much of New England, Connecticut is largely forested. About 60% of the land area is classified as forest. Most of these wooded areas once supported agriculture but were abandoned as more fertile land in the Midwest became cultivated. In a very real sense, the marginal agricultural lands are already growing timber and are doing so without federal assistance.

Secondly, land values have skyrocketed. It is nearly impossible to purchase a building lot anywhere in Connecticut for under \$40,000. With the price of real estate among the highest in the nation, it is difficult for farmers to hold out against increasingly lucrative offers from developers. Under these circumstances, it is quite understandable why farmers are reluctant to commit themselves to a ten year conservation program.

**Third, most agricultural land in this state can be leased for prices double the maximum allotments under CRP. Economically,**

it makes no sense for a farmer to enroll in the program for \$50.00 an acre when he can lease the same land to his neighbor at twice the price.

Finally, the one growing practice that might have considerable appeal to farmers is not allowed under CRP, Christmas tree culture. Situated between Boston and New York, Connecticut is a geographically ideal place to raise Christmas trees. In fact, many farmers have already invested in this lucrative practice. The profit motive itself seems to be reason enough to place land under Christmas tree cultivation and incentives such as those under CRP are probably not necessary.