



RLCC Employee of the Year! Robert Lee Care Center is proud to recognize Frankie Arnold as the employee of the Year. Frankie has been a vital part of Robert Lee Care Center's team. She has worked at this facility as a Dietary Supervisor for the greater part of her career and is currently working as a Dietary Kitchen Manager. She has been in this profession for at least 45 years. Her work ethics are very outstanding. Frankie is always around to help out wherever she is needed. She is the heart and soul of the dietary department. Frankie is a resident of Robert Lee Care Center and had one daughter, Jackie, two grandkids, Christy and David, and four great-grandkids. Congratulations Frankie!!

Conservation Stewardship Program Sign-ups Open

Producers to submit initial application by March 31

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently announced this year's deadline for producer applications for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is March 31.

March 31 is also the deadline by which initial applications are needed from farmers with expiring 2012-2016 contracts if

they want to renew them for another five years. Some 12 million acres already in the program are eligible for renewal this year.

"CSP is a continuous sign-up program, and producers can apply to enroll at any time of the year," said Traci Bruckner, Senior Policy Associate for Agriculture and Conservation at the Center for Rural Affairs. "NRCS applies a cut-off date for applications to be considered during a particular fiscal year. Once the cut-off date is past,

producers may continue to apply, but they will not be considered for entry until the spring of the following year. To enroll in 2016, you must file your application by March 31."

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary stewardship incentives program administered by NRCS. It rewards farmers, ranchers, and foresters for maintaining existing conservation and for adopting additional measures that run beyond the farm or ranch.

CSP pays producers for clean water, better soil management, improved habitat, energy efficiency, and other natural resource benefits. Since the program began in 2009, nearly 70 million acres of farm and ranch land have been enrolled in the program.

To sign up, farmers and ranchers should visit their NRCS local service center and submit their basic application form by the March 31 deadline. "Once a farmer or rancher's initial application is accepted by NRCS, they are then scored based on current and planned future conservation activities," added Bruckner. "If applicants meet acceptable conservation levels, they become eligible to compete in a ranking process that determines who will receive contracts. NRCS works down through the list of eligible

applicants until acreage allocated to the particular state for that particular year runs out."

2012 Contracts Up for Renewal

March 31 is also the deadline for CSP contract holders who enrolled in 2012 to renew. CSP contracts last for five years and can be renewed for an additional five years, extending and building upon their previous conservation efforts and current level of stewardship.

Existing CSP contracts enrolled in 2012 will expire later this year if they are not renewed by March 31. Producers should act now to ensure a seamless transition into another five-year contract and avoid any lapse in payments.

Approximately 12 million acres and 8,000 contracts are up for renewal this year. In 2014 and 2015, approximately 75% of expiring CSP acres were renewed in the program, and we join our colleagues at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) in hoping to see renewal rates that meet or exceed the first two re-enrollment periods.

Producers should be receiving a letter from their local NRCS office very soon about the opportunity to renew their contract for another five-year period. Renewal applications must also be received by March

31 to ensure a seamless transition into their next contract without a lapse in payments.

Program Improvements

"We are pleased to report that two key improvements we have been advocating for along with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition will be part of the program moving forward," Bruckner said. "These include more funding and a higher and expanded application of the minimum payment for small acreage farms and ranches."

NRCS will be able to enroll nearly all 10 million acres as authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, which is 2.3 million more acres than last year's sign-up due to the annual appropriations not placing any funding limits on the CSP. This will help ensure NRCS can better meet program demands and enroll more farmers. In Nebraska, for example, in 2015 NRCS was only able to enroll 30% of eligible program applicants, Bruckner added.

"The increase in the minimum payment to improve access for small acreage farms and ranches will be set at \$1,500. Previously, this minimum payment was set at \$1,000 and was only available to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers," Bruckner concluded. "This change opens up the minimum payment level to all participating small acreage farms and ranches."

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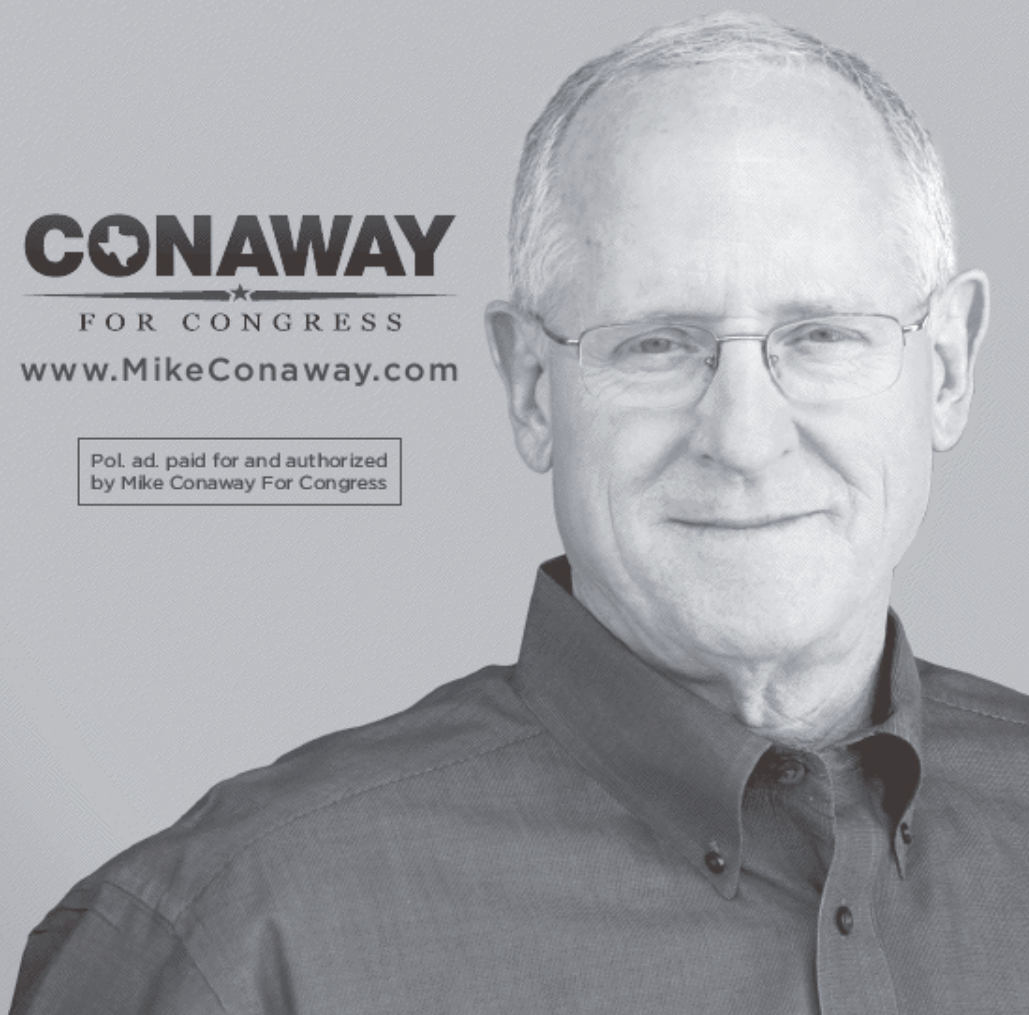
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