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Food Alliance certification complements federal Conservation Security Program

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service recently announced an innovative public-private partnership with Food Alliance that combines federal payments and market incentives for farmers and ranchers who are true conservation stewards.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) rewards private landowners for environmental stewardship. At Tier Three, the highest level of qualification, payments can run as high as \$40,000 a year with contracts negotiated for 5-10 year periods.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has reviewed Food Alliance's certification standards and issued an opinion that Food Alliance certified farms and ranches are "very likely" to qualify for CSP payments. This is exciting for a number of reasons.

NRCS's endorsement significantly recognizes the credibility of Food Alliance's functional definition of sustainable agriculture and the work that has gone into developing our certification standards over the last eight years.

The alignment between the standards for CSP and Food Alliance certification makes it possible for federal incentives and market incentives to work together—a powerful combination.

In Oregon, the NRCS is also offering Food Alliance farms and ranches an expedited application process in recognition of the value provided by a third-party certification inspection. NRCS field offices will be issued guides to allow them to translate Food Alliance certification records directly into the CSP application. This promises to cut the administrative burden significantly.

Food Alliance is strongly encouraging all of its certified farms and ranches to apply for CSP, with the potential that payments for successful contracts will more than cover the costs of certification. Securing CSP payments will be a significant advantage for participating producers, for the rural businesses they patronize and for their communities.

The market for certified products is growing rapidly. Food Alliance certified farms and ranches are reporting increased sales, new markets and some price premiums. Coupled with NRCS's endorsement of Food Alliance certification and the possibility of federal payments under CSP, there has never been a better time to be a Food Alliance certified farmer and rancher.

Food Alliance is committed to partnering with the NRCS to support and promote CSP. We think this program offers major benefits to agriculture and a chance for real environmental improvement on agricultural lands.