

“Checking the ‘yes’ box will assign point values in the question’s category. Each of the eight WQET categories has a minimum number of points that must be reached by checking ‘yes.’ If you don’t reach the points minimum in any category, you won’t be eligible for CSP,” he continues.

“All WQET questions must be answered with the entire operation in mind,” says Hammitt. “However, if a farmer is unable to accumulate enough points across the entire farming operation, they can focus WQET on the acres that are eligible and still qualify those acres for CSP. However, doing this limits them to a Tier 1 contract.”

The WQET questions address many issues, such as:

- Are minimum setbacks maintained?
- Is most nitrogen is applied at or close to planting?
- Have you soil sampled at least once every five years?
- Do you follow a nutrient management plan?
- Are you taking proper nitrogen and phosphorus credits?

“There are a few questions that almost every farmer can say ‘yes’ to,” says Hammitt, “But the farmer has to accumulate enough ‘yes’ answers to reach the minimum requirements in each category. And while many combinations of ‘yes’ answers can add up to the total points needed, it is difficult to point out one or two things that every farmer must do to qualify.”

Ellison agrees. “For every farmer I’ve worked with, it seems to come down to a single pivotal question that if he or she cannot answer ‘yes’ to it, they aren’t going to qualify for CSP. Interestingly enough, that question has been different with every farmer.”

Enhancements | adding to the CSP rewards

Beyond the basic qualifications and payments for CSP enrollment, a farmer can receive enhancement payments based on their use of certain practices, whether those practices are already in place or if the farmer is willing to implement them.

“There are enhancement payments for management practices relating to



Gary Hammit

crop nutrients, pests, grazing, wildlife, energy, soil, irrigation water, and air quality,” says Ellison.

“That’s another place where our relationship with farmers through Iowa Soybean Association programs can really pay off for them. Most ISA program participants qualify for enhancement payments under the nutrient management portion of the CSP contract. I think that’s because all of our agronomic and environmental programs, whether it’s the On-Farm Network, CEMSA, or Watershed Programming, are based on sound science and the evaluation of data. Farmers who participate in our programs become better nutrient managers every year. For that, CSP will reward them with enhancement payments.”

To qualify for CSP at the basic level, farmers must have an NRCS 590 Nutrient Management Plan and be actively implementing three to five enhancement practices from a list of 21 practices, including:

- Manure application keyed to phosphorus rates on entire operation
- Laboratory analysis of manure each time applied
- Grid or soil management zone soil analysis per PM287
- No anhydrous application prior to March 1
- Use of late spring nitrate test
- Use of fall stalk test

- Use of starter or sub-surface banding
- Lime application at recommended rates to maintain a pH of at least 6.2
- Management of at least one wetland
- Variable-rate commercial nutrient application on entire operation

“A basic level nutrient enhancement, implementing the 590 Nutrient Management Plan and doing three to five practices, is valued at \$6to-10 per acre,” says Ellison. “In my experience, I find that most farmers are already doing at least three of the practices, so they don’t have a long way to go qualify for basic level nutrient enhancement.”

The upper level enhancement payment requires:

- Implementation of an NRCS 590 Nutrient Management Plan
- Side-dressing nitrogen in corn/soybean rotation with no more than 30 lbs. of N pre-plant (MAP, DAP, starter) and up to 90 lbs. side-dressed, or if no pre-plant, up to 120 lbs. side-dressed
- For a continuous corn rotation no more than 30 lbs. pre-plant, 140 lbs. side-dressed, or if no pre-plant 170 lbs. side dressed
- Three or five of the practices listed (same 21 practices referred to above)

Ellison says the upper level enhancement payments are worth \$18 to \$22 per acre, depending on whether it is three or five of the selected enhancement practices. “In any case, it’s a quick way to climb the scale in terms of enhancement payments. Again, I find that participants in our programs are able to reach these levels pretty easily.”

To learn more about CSP qualification from the NRCS, the first step is to take a look at the NRCS CSP Self-Assessment Workbook. The NRCS CSP Self-Assessment Workbook is a key tool that farmers can use in evaluating their operations for CSP eligibility. In fact, completion of the NRCS CSP Self-Assessment Workbook is a mandatory first step in qualifying for CSP. It is available on-line at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/pdf_files/CSP_SelfA.