

§ 3812. Exemptions**(a) Persons eligible for program benefits in connection with production or reduced production of crops on certain lands; eligibility based upon compliance with conservation plan by January 1, 1995; minimization of documentation**

(1) During the period beginning on December 23, 1985, and ending on the later of January 1, 1990, or the date that is 2 years after the date land on which a crop of an agricultural commodity is produced was mapped by the Soil Conservation Service for purposes of classifying such land under the land capability classification system in effect on December 23, 1985, except as provided in paragraph (2), no person shall become ineligible under section 3811 of this title for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity on any land that was—

(A) cultivated to produce any of the 1981 through 1985 crops of an agricultural commodity; or

(B) set aside, diverted or otherwise not cultivated under a program administered by the Secretary for any such crops to reduce production of an agricultural commodity.

(2) If, as of January 1, 1990, or 2 years after the Soil Conservation Service has completed a soil survey for the farm, whichever is later, a person is actively applying a conservation plan, such person shall have until January 1, 1995, to comply with the plan without being subject to program ineligibility. In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary, Soil Conservation Service, and local soil conservation districts shall minimize the quantity of documentation a person must submit to comply with this paragraph.

(3) Any person who owns or operates highly erodible land that was the subject of a contract entered into under subpart B of part I of subchapter IV of this chapter shall only be required to apply a conservation plan established under this subchapter. The person shall not be required to meet a higher conservation standard than the standard applied to other highly erodible cropland located within the same area. If the person's conservation plan requires structures to be constructed, the person shall have until 2 years after the expiration of such contract to comply with the conservation plan, or a longer period of time if the Secretary determines compliance is otherwise technically or economically not feasible, or such longer period is otherwise appropriate, before such person will be subject to program ineligibility with respect to such land under section 3811 of this title.

(4) On the expiration of a contract entered into under subpart B of part I of subchapter IV of this chapter, the provisions of this subchapter shall apply to the acreage that was the subject of such contract.

(b) Persons eligible for program benefits in connection with production of certain planted crops or production of crops on highly erodible land

No person shall become ineligible under section 3811 of this title for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity—

(1) planted before December 23, 1985; or

(2) planted during any crop year beginning before December 23, 1985.

(c) Ineligibility for loans and payments under section 3811

No person shall become ineligible under section 3811 of this title for program loans, payments, and benefits as the result of the production of a crop of an agricultural commodity or the designation of land to be set aside, diverted, devoted to conservation uses, or otherwise not cultivated under a program administered by the Secretary to reduce production of an agricultural commodity (hereafter in this subsection referred to as "set aside")—

(1) on highly erodible land in an area—

(A) within a conservation district, under a conservation system that has been approved by a conservation district after the district has determined that the conservation system is in conformity with technical standards set forth in the Soil Conservation Service technical guide for such district; or

(B) not within a conservation district, under a conservation system determined by the Secretary to be adequate for the protection of highly erodible land that has been set aside or for the production of such agricultural commodity on any highly erodible land subject to this chapter; or

(2) on highly erodible land that is planted or set aside in reliance on a determination by the Soil Conservation Service that such land was not highly erodible land, except that this paragraph shall not apply to any agricultural commodity that was planted or set aside on any land after the Soil Conservation Service determines that such land is highly erodible land; or

(3) on highly erodible land planted to alfalfa during each of the 1981 through 1985 crop years as part of a rotation practice approved by the Secretary, if the person has submitted a conservation plan, in which case, such person shall have until June 1, 1988, to comply with the plan without being subject to program ineligibility under section 3811 of this title.

(d) Program ineligibility inapplicable to pre-December 23, 1985, section 3811 loans

Section 3811 of this title shall not apply to a loan described in section 3811 of this title made before December 23, 1985.

(e) Limitations on ineligibility for tenants

If a tenant is determined to be ineligible for payments and other benefits under section 3811 of this title, the Secretary may limit such ineligibility only to the farm which is the basis for such ineligibility determination if—

(1) the tenant has established to the satisfaction of the Secretary that—

(A) the tenant has made a good faith effort to meet the requirements of this section, including enlisting the assistance of the Secretary to obtain a reasonable conservation plan for such farm; and

(B) the landlord on the farm refuses to comply with such plan on such farm; and

(2) the Secretary determines that such lack of compliance is not a part of a scheme or device to avoid such compliance.

The Secretary shall provide an annual report to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate concerning the ineligibility determinations limited during the previous 12-month period under this subsection.

(f) Graduated penalties

(1) Ineligibility

No person shall become ineligible under section 3811 of this title for program loans, payments, and benefits as a result of the failure of the person to actively apply a conservation plan, if the Secretary determines that the person has acted in good faith and without an intent to violate this subchapter.

(2) Eligible reviewers

A determination of the Secretary, or a designee of the Secretary, under paragraph (1) shall be reviewed by the applicable—

(A) State Executive Director, with the technical concurrence of the State Conservationist; or

(B) district director, with the technical concurrence of the area conservationist.

(3) Period for implementation

A person who meets the requirements of paragraph (1) shall be allowed a reasonable period of time, as determined by the Secretary, but not to exceed 1 year, during which to implement the measures and practices necessary to be considered to be actively applying the conservation plan of the person.

(4) Penalties

(A) Application

This paragraph applies if the Secretary determines that—

(i) a person has failed to comply with section 3811 of this title with respect to highly erodible cropland, and has acted in good faith and without an intent to violate section 3811 of this title; or

(ii) the violation—

(I) is technical and minor in nature; and

(II) has a minimal effect on the erosion control purposes of the conservation plan applicable to the land on which the violation has occurred.

(B) Reduction

If this paragraph applies under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall, in lieu of applying the ineligibility provisions of section 3811 of this title, reduce program benefits described in section 3811 of this title that the producer would otherwise be eligible to receive in a crop year by an amount commensurate with the seriousness of the violation, as determined by the Secretary.

(5) Subsequent crop years

Any person whose benefits are reduced for any crop year under this subsection shall continue to be eligible for all of the benefits described in section 3811 of this title for any subsequent crop year if, prior to the beginning of the subsequent crop year, the Secretary deter-

mines that the person is actively applying a conservation plan according to the schedule specified in the plan.

(g) Preparation or revision of conservation plan

The Secretary, in providing assistance to an individual in the preparation or revision of a conservation plan under this section, shall provide such individual with information—

(1) concerning cost effective and applicable erosion control measures that may be available to such individual to meet the requirements of this section; and

(2) concerning crop flexibility, base adjustment, and conservation assistance options that may be available to such individual to meet the requirements of this section, including the provisions of titles X, XII, and XIII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (or the amendments made by such titles).

(h) Noncommercial production of agricultural commodities

Section 3811 of this title shall not apply to the noncommercial production of agricultural commodities on a farm if such production is limited to two acres or less and if the Secretary determines that such production is not intended to circumvent the conservation requirements otherwise applicable to lands under this subchapter.

(Pub. L. 99-198, title XII, §1212, Dec. 23, 1985, 99 Stat. 1506; Pub. L. 100-28, §§2, 3, Apr. 24, 1987, 101 Stat. 291; Pub. L. 101-624, title XIV, §1412, Nov. 28, 1990, 104 Stat. 3569; Pub. L. 102-237, title II, §204(2), Dec. 13, 1991, 105 Stat. 1854; Pub. L. 104-127, title III, §§301(d), 312-314, Apr. 4, 1996, 110 Stat. 981-983; Pub. L. 110-234, title II, §2002, May 22, 2008, 122 Stat. 1027; Pub. L. 110-246, §4(a), title II, §2002, June 18, 2008, 122 Stat. 1664, 1755.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in subsec. (c)(1)(B), was in the original “this title”, meaning title XII of Pub. L. 99-198, which enacted this chapter and former section 2005a of this title and amended sections 590g, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2009 of this title, sections 4207 and 4209 of Title 7, Agriculture, and provisions set out as a note under section 1981 of Title 7.

The Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, referred to in subsec. (g)(2), is Pub. L. 101-624, Nov. 28, 1990, 104 Stat. 3359, as amended. Title X of the Act enacted section 1446h of Title 7 and amended section 1425a of Title 7. Title XII of the Act, known as the Forest Stewardship Act of 1990, is classified principally to amended chapter 41 (§2101 et seq.) of this title. Title XIII of the Act enacted sections 138 to 138i and 499b-1 of Title 7, amended sections 499c, 608c, and 608e-1 of Title 7, and enacted provisions set out as notes under sections 499a and 1622 of Title 7. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title of 1990 Amendment note set out under section 1421 of Title 7 and Tables.

CODIFICATION

Pub. L. 110-234 and Pub. L. 110-246 made identical amendments to this section. The amendments by Pub. L. 110-234 were repealed by section 4(a) of Pub. L. 110-246.

AMENDMENTS

2008—Subsec. (f). Pub. L. 110-246, §2002, added subsec. (f) and struck out former subsec. (f) which related to graduated sanctions.

1996—Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 104-127, §301(d)(1), in first sentence, struck out “that documents the decisions of the person with respect to location, land use, tillage systems, and conservation treatment measures and schedule and that is based on the local Soil Conservation Service technical guide and approved by the local soil conservation district, in consultation with the local committees established under section 590h(b) of this title and the Secretary, or by the Secretary” after “applying a conservation plan”.

Subsec. (a)(3). Pub. L. 104-127, §312, substituted “shall only be required to apply a conservation plan established under this subchapter. The person shall not be required to meet a higher conservation standard than the standard applied to other highly erodible cropland located within the same area. If the person’s conservation plan requires structures to be constructed, the person shall” for “shall, if the conservation plan established under this subchapter for such land requires structures to be constructed.”.

Subsec. (c)(3). Pub. L. 104-127, §301(d)(2), substituted “, in which case,” for “based on the local Soil Conservation Service technical guide and approved by the local soil conservation district, in consultation with the local committees established under section 590h(b) of this title and the Secretary.”.

Subsec. (e)(1)(A). Pub. L. 104-127, §301(d)(3), substituted “conservation plan” for “conservation compliance plan”.

Subsec. (f)(1). Pub. L. 104-127, §313(a), substituted “No person” for “Except to the extent provided in paragraph (2), no person” and substituted “the person has acted in good faith and without an intent to violate this subchapter. A person who meets the requirements of this paragraph shall be allowed a reasonable period of time, as determined by the Secretary, but not to exceed 1 year, during which to implement the measures and practices necessary to be considered to be actively applying the person’s conservation plan.” for “such person has—

“(A) not violated the provisions of section 3811 of this title within the previous 5 years on a farm; and

“(B) acted in good faith and without the intent to violate the provisions of this subchapter.”

Pub. L. 104-127, §301(d)(4)(A), struck out “that documents the decisions of such person with respect to location, land use, tillage systems, and conservation treatment measures and schedules prepared under subsection (a) of this section” after “apply a conservation plan”.

Subsec. (f)(2). Pub. L. 104-127, §313(b), substituted “with respect to highly erodible cropland that was not in production prior to December 23, 1985, and has acted in good faith and without an intent to violate the provisions” for “meets the requirements of paragraph (1)”.

Subsec. (f)(3). Pub. L. 104-127, §301(d)(4)(B), struck out “prepared under subsection (a) of this section” after “a conservation plan”.

Subsec. (f)(4). Pub. L. 104-127, §313(c), struck out concluding sentence which read as follows: “A determination or the granting of a variance by the Secretary under this paragraph shall not be counted as a violation for the purposes of paragraph (1)(A).”

Pub. L. 104-127, §301(d)(4)(C), in introductory provisions, struck out “that documents the decisions of such person with respect to location, land use, tillage systems, and conservation treatment measures and schedules prepared under subsection (a) of this section” after “apply a conservation plan”.

Subsec. (f)(4)(C). Pub. L. 104-127, §314(1), substituted “problem, including weather, pest, and disease problems” for “problem”.

Subsec. (f)(5). Pub. L. 104-127, §314(2), added par. (5).

1991—Subsec. (f)(4)(A). Pub. L. 102-237, §204(2)(A), substituted “such violation” for “such violations” after “which”.

Subsec. (g)(2). Pub. L. 102-235, §204(2)(B), struck out comma after “XIII”.

1990—Subsec. (a)(3), (4). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(a), added pars. (3) and (4).

Subsec. (b)(1), (2). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(1), (2), inserted “or” in par. (1) and substituted a period for a semicolon in par. (2).

Subsec. (b)(3) to (5). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(4), redesignated pars. (3) to (5) as pars. (1) to (3), respectively, of subsec. (c).

Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(3), (4), added subsec. (c) introductory provisions, and redesignated former subsec. (c) as (d).

Subsec. (c)(1). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(4), (5), redesignated par. (3) of subsec. (b) as par. (1) of subsec. (c) and in subpar. (B) inserted “for the protection of highly erodible land that has been set aside or” after “adequate”.

Subsec. (c)(2). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(4), (6), redesignated par. (4) of subsec. (b) as par. (2) of subsec. (c) and inserted “or set aside” in two places.

Subsec. (c)(3). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(4), redesignated par. (5) of subsec. (b) as par. (3) of subsec. (c).

Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(b)(3), redesignated subsec. (c) as (d).

Subsecs. (e) to (h). Pub. L. 101-624, §1412(c)–(f), added subsecs. (e) to (h).

1987—Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 100-28, §3, inserted “that documents the decisions of the person with respect to location, land use, tillage systems, and conservation treatment measures and schedule and that is” after “conservation plan”, and inserted at end “In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary, Soil Conservation Service, and local soil conservation districts shall minimize the quantity of documentation a person must submit to comply with this paragraph.”

Subsec. (b)(5). Pub. L. 100-28, §2(b), added par. (5).

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 2008 AMENDMENT

Amendment of this section and repeal of Pub. L. 110-234 by Pub. L. 110-246 effective May 22, 2008, the date of enactment of Pub. L. 110-234, see section 4 of Pub. L. 110-246, set out as an Effective Date note under section 8701 of Title 7, Agriculture.

§ 3812a. Development and implementation of conservation plans and conservation systems

(a) Technical requirements

In connection with the standards and guidelines contained in Natural Resources Conservation Service field office technical guides applicable to the development and use of conservation measures and management practices as part of a conservation system, the Secretary shall ensure that the standards and guidelines permit a person to use a conservation system that—

- (1) is technically and economically feasible;
- (2) is based on local resource conditions and available conservation technology;
- (3) is cost-effective; and
- (4) does not cause undue economic hardship on the person applying the conservation system under the person’s conservation plan.

(b) Measurement of erosion reduction

For the purpose of determining whether there is a substantial reduction in soil erosion on a field containing highly erodible cropland, the measurement of erosion reduction achieved by the application of a conservation system under a person’s conservation plan shall be based on the estimated annual level of erosion at the time of the measurement compared to the estimated annual level of erosion that existed before the implementation of the conservation measures and management practices provided for in the conservation system.

(c) Residue measurement

(1) Responsibilities of the Secretary

For the purpose of measuring the level of residue on a field, the Secretary shall—