

Appendix 7: Perspectives on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – Interview Data

"CRP broke the back of traditional farming. The first year was 1985, and the average lease was twenty years. That generation of kids, they didn't learn. The machines were in the shed and they didn't come out. It did a lot to stop the small farms."

"You shouldn't be eligible for payments unless you're a working farmer."

"You can't tell me that CRP that has almost no diversity in its grass mixture is really providing any more wildlife habitat or care than our farm. I mean, I don't know for certain, but I'd like to see some studies on that."

[A couple with three young children explained that they could not afford to take over the husband's family farm, because his relatives would expect financial returns equivalent to their existing CRP lease payment].

"As I'm trying to return to the farm I'm expected to compete with that lease payment,"

"We can't compete with the federal government. What - \$30 an acre? There's no way, we just can't do it."

"As a person who wants to get into farming, it's extremely frustrating to have people that have ground that is in CRP, because that's the ground that we would want to go get ... "

"Because you could certify it [as organic] right off the bat [much of the land in CRP would immediately meet the requirement that land be free of chemicals disallowed by the National Organic Program for at least three years], but these people are getting fat checks from the government."

"We've never been in the CRP. We've never used that, we've never taken advantage of that. We believe we can raise our own crop and we don't have to worry about grazing, emergency grazing [a designation which allows producers to graze their enrolled conservation lands if the county exceeds legislated drought thresholds]. We raise our crops and sell our crops and over the years, we've probably forgone a lot of income, but that isn't right. CRP should be made for wildlife habitat, but you shouldn't break it out as a pasture insurance. Every year they want the CRP, 'well I want to graze that.' Excuse me, we're paying not to graze that, but these guys think they deserve it. So we don't have any set aside. We produce everything off of every acre and we get paid for doing the right thing [crop rotations focused on soil health]."

"It's not a sustainable practice for the farming industry."

"People here are really nice and we've had really good discussions [about trying to buy additional land] but trying to break free even another 320 acres is ... and it's all in CRP, so I think one of the other disincentives at least in the state of Montana is the CRP program."