

THE EFFECT OF THE CONSERVATION RESERVE
PROGRAM ON NURSERY PRODUCTION IN MISSOURI

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We just, as I'm sure everyone else did, read the initial projections as to the number of seedlings that would be needed for the Conservation Reserve Program with mixed feelings. Here was possibly the greatest tree planting program ever, with potential planting stock needs in the Northeast greater than the combined capacities of all public and private nurseries in the region. Where were the seedlings going to come from? However, by the end of the fourth signup period in February 1987 our concerns were taking a different form. Of the total 658,600 acres accepted into the program in Missouri at that time only 367 acres were accepted for tree planting. This did not send great shock waves through our nursery production schedules.

A number of factors possibly contributed to this very low percentage of acreage being signed up for tree planting. One of these being, in the region of the State containing the bulk of the eligible acres, the prairie region north of the Missouri River, tree planting and/or forestry is not traditionally thought of as an land management option. And secondly, I feel the inherent skepticism of many farmers regarding new government programs fostered a reluctance to put acres into trees because of the difficulty of converting back to agriculture if Congress changed its mind or crop prices rose.

In March 1987, prior to the fifth Conservation Reserve bidding period the Missouri Department of Conservation implemented a program that provided an additional 25% cost-share on CRP acres being devoted to approved practices. The practices approved for this additional cost-share were CP2 (native grass establishment), CP3 (tree planting), and CP4 (permanent wildlife plantings). Practice CP13 (filter strips) has since been added to the approved list. These practice are now eligible for 75% cost-share (50% federal--25% state).

The fifth signup period saw another 1268 acres approved for tree planting. This probably cannot be attributed wholly to the additional cost-share available. There was more "campaigning" on the part of foresters, both with landowners and local United States Department of Agriculture Agriculture Stablization and Conservation Service personnel, and also, I think some reservations in the minds of farmers regarding the program itself were waning.

Because the Department of Conservation's commitment of dollars to this program and it's potential impact on forest and wildlife plantings in the state, it was decided that planting stock would be committed to the program as well. In other words, CRP plantings were given priority for obtaining seedlings over the first-come-first served general public orders. To accomplish this all forest districts were asked to submit a list of all approved CRP tree plantings and the requested planting stock was set aside. The net result of this was some 200,000 plants of 14 species were reserved for approximately 50 landowners. On the surface this does not appear to be much -- 200,000 seedlings are

not many out of a total of 8,000,000 and 50 orders are not many out of 16,000.

The problem was that for the oaks CRP reservations involved nearly 100% of our production and for black walnut over 50% of our production. This not only left essentially none of these species available for other landowners, but late CRP signees were also scrambling for planting material. Of the three major species utilized by the CRP program in Missouri (northern red oak, white oak and black walnut) efforts to increase production for 1989 distribution were thwarted by paucity of suitable seed for the oaks. However, a bumper walnut crop allowed us to seed for more black walnut than we ever had in the past.

Thus, we thought we were sitting in pretty good shape for the coming CRP signup and for covering more non-CRP orders. That is until the sixth signup period saw 1610 acres accepted for tree planting (doubling the total acres accepted in the first five signup periods combined) and the as of yet undetermined effects of the drought of '88.

In summary, while the CRP acres devoted to tree planting fell far short of the 12% goal, the predominate use of only a limited number of species resulted in shortages of suitable planting stock from both public and private sources.