

Pheasant News and Notes

January 2024



Trivia Question

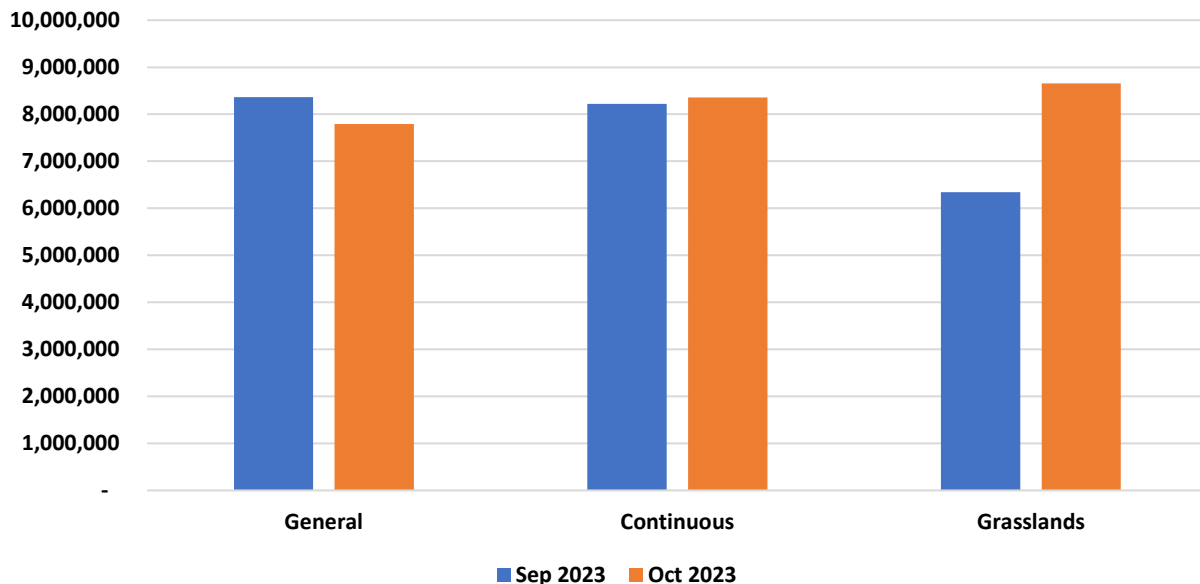
A rephrased version of a recent *Jeopardy* clue: What one-word term specifically describes a brood of pheasants?

USDA and Legislative News

I haven't heard about any substantive progress on the new Farm Bill this past month. Things will hopefully heat up once Congress passes the two FY2024 spending bills with deadlines on January 19th and February 2nd.

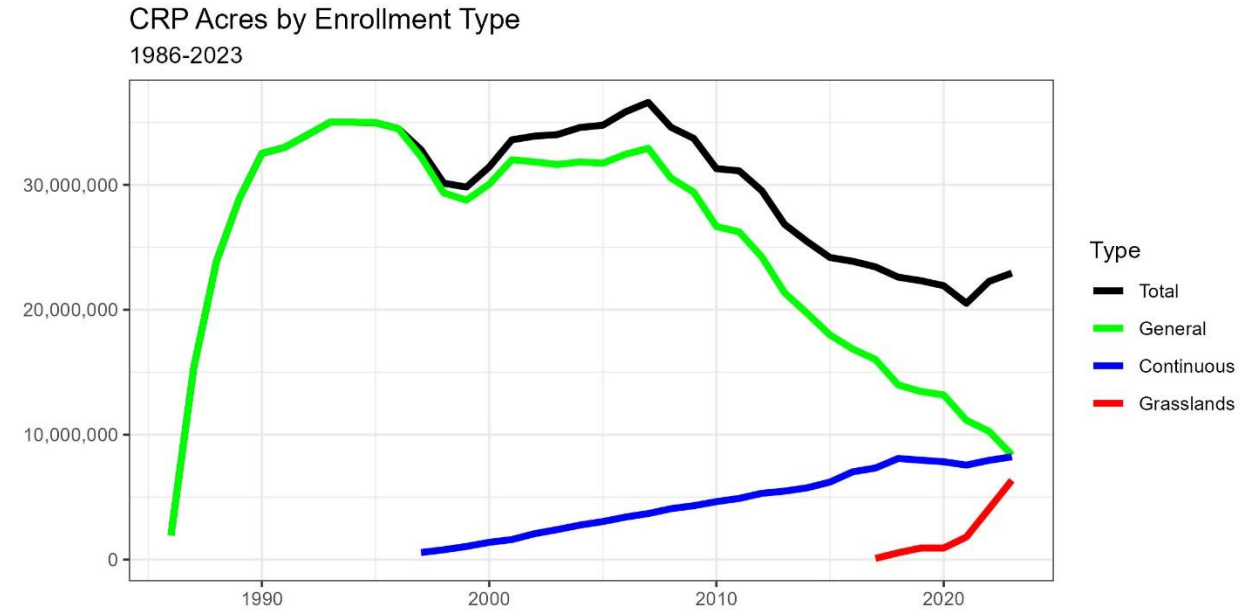
Some in the [press noticed](#) that when the federal fiscal year changed, acres enrolled in Grasslands CRP surpassed those enrolled in either General or Continuous signups for the first time. FSA's [monthly reports](#) showed that as of October, Grasslands enrollment increased by 2.31 million acres, General enrollment lost 0.57 million acres, and Continuous enrollment gained 0.13 million acres when compared to September, the last month of FY2023.

Recent Change in CRP Acres by Enrollment Type

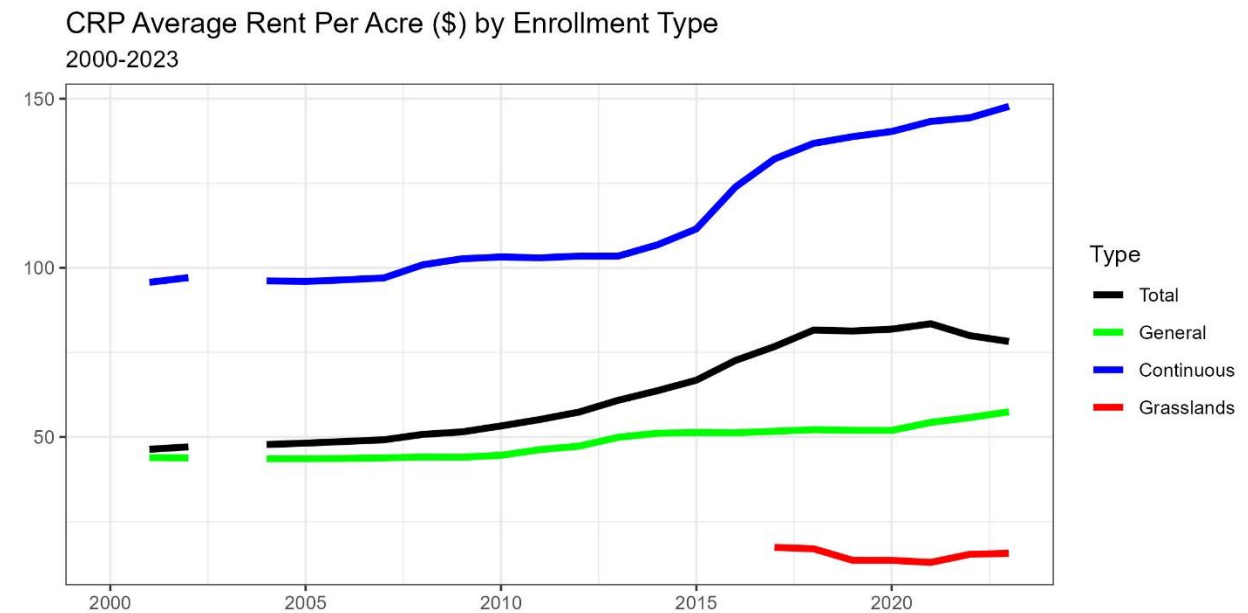


These changes were no surprise – results from the 2023 signups and scheduled contract expirations made the results predictable. The writing has been on the wall for several years that Grasslands acres would overtake the other enrollment types (see trends through 2023 below) without some policy intervention, particularly once Continuous acres stabilized after 2018. That stabilization was by design,

of course – the 2018 Farm Bill reduced rental rates for both General and Continuous practices to below market values.



And again, it's no wonder why cost-conscious policymakers have been willing to trade traditional CRP acres for Grasslands acres. As of October, Grasslands enrollments make up 35% of the program's acres but only 7% of the rental payments.



The press article linked above quotes a farm policy analyst as saying the surge in Grasslands acres means that landowners obviously prefer working lands programs over traditional CRP. Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa) pointed out how wobbly that argument is – it's an apples-to-oranges comparison when rental rates for traditional CRP are constrained below actual market-based soil rental

rates and Grasslands rates are at or above market values. Historically, landowners have been very willing to consider traditional signup opportunities when rental rates matched the market and opportunity costs were low.

Todd also sent along [a recent paper](#) (via Matt Smith of Playa Lakes Joint Venture) examining landowner motivations for keeping expired (or expiring) CRP fields in grass (or not). The importance of a profit motive to a landowner was a good predictor of their decisions but was not the only influential factor. Readers should keep in mind that the study was conducted with landowners in the southern High Plains (southwest Kansas to the Texas Panhandle) where land rental rates for dryland crop production are relatively low. If you want a full copy of the paper and can't access one, let me know and I can send it to you.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Private Lands Working Group held another meeting focused on the issue of improving training opportunities for private lands biologists. Last month it convened a videoconference with a variety of university faculty members working in this space to trade notes. Among those presenting:

- The AFWA group heard from Dr. Roel Lopez of Texas A&M at a previous meeting (see [last month's PN&N](#) for details), and he recapped that presentation for the combined audience.
- Dr. Adam Janke of Iowa State described their [Land Stewardship Leadership Academy](#), a 9-month program for early career professionals (soil and wildlife conservationists) aimed at those that have little prior experience with agriculture. The course of study includes reviewing the nuts and bolts of agriculture (taught by extension specialists), landowner social science, and research on behavior change principles (Adam recommends "*Switch*" by Chip and Dan Heath as a good primer on the latter topic). Their program also uses farmer-led sessions, revisiting the same farmers several times over the 9-month course.
- Dr. Mark McConnell of Mississippi State briefly described their [Wildlife Agriculture Concentration](#) (soon to be renamed as the Private Lands Concentration) which is designed to provide the academic experiences leading to qualification as a Certified Wildlife Biologist and for Natural Resources Conservation Service conservationist positions. He also mentioned the Bobwhite Bootcamp sessions organized by PFQF's Dr. Jessica McGuire and the University of Georgia's Dr. James Martin.
- Dr. Tony Vorster of Colorado State mentioned their [Western Ranch Management and Ecosystem Stewardship program](#), and said hands-on experience is critical to student understanding.
- In the chat, Dr. Jared Beaver of Montana State highlighted their [Working Wild U](#) podcast series.

There were other academic folks on the call who didn't present, as well as those in the NGO sector working on the issue (e.g., Steve Jester from [Partnerscapes](#)), so these meetings seem to be helping develop a community of practice around developing private lands talent.

Finally, PFQF is soliciting proposals for construction of a comprehensive literature review of research associated with the Conservation Reserve Program. Funding for this project is coming from the USDA-FSA's CRP Monitoring, Assessment, and Evaluation program. If you know of anyone interested and capable of doing the work, please direct them to [the RPF announcement](#) on the PFQF website.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Pennsylvania Game Commission to release fewer pheasants due to avian flu](#)
[Is it hunting? 'Wild' game increasingly raised in captivity for profit](#)
[Advocate calls for end to pheasant stocking after birds die on Long Island road](#)
[Twelve decades later, Minnesota's pheasant experiment still a success](#)
[Grasslands surge to No. 1 in Conservation Reserve enrollment](#)
[Possible partridge population peak; why there's so many of these colorful birds in ND](#)
[America spends \\$1.2 billion a year on endangered species, but almost half goes to just 2 kinds of fish](#)
[How Royals mark New Year after Christmas from pheasant shoot to mystery 'lucky dip'](#)

Recent Literature

[McGovern, J. M., J. C. Giese, and L. A. Schulte. 2024. Springtime bird use of agricultural landscapes examined by using autonomous recording units. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 95:1.](#)

[Barnes, J. C., A. A. Dayer, A. R. Gramza, M. Sketch, A. M. Dwyer, and R. Iovanna. 2023. Pathways to conservation persistence: Psychosocial drivers of durable grasslands following the Conservation Reserve Program. *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* 78:486-499.](#)

[Wightman, P. H., et al. 2023. Survival and cause-specific mortality of male wild turkeys across the southeastern United States. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Stevens, B. S., et al. 2023. Backpack satellite transmitters reduce survival but not nesting propensity or success of greater sage-grouse. *Ecology and Evolution* 13: e10820.](#)

[Gruntorad, M. P., M. Vrtiska, M. Garrick, and C. J. Chizinski. 2023. Taking matters into their own hands: effects of effort and success on duck hunter satisfaction. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* \(early online version\).](#)

[Watts, M., A. Russell, S. Adhikari, J. Weir, and O. Joshi. 2024. Analysis of cost and cost components of conducting prescribed fires in the Great Plains. *Rangeland Ecology and Management* 92:146-153.](#)

[Zhao, Z., et al. 2024. Comparison of three machine learning algorithms using Google Earth Engine for land use land cover classification. *Rangeland Ecology and Management* 92:129-137.](#)

[Cole, N. W., et al. 2024. Perceived constraints to participating in wildlife-related recreation. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*. 45:100712.](#)

[Smith, A. C., et al. 2023. Spatially explicit Bayesian hierarchical models improve estimates of avian population status and trends. *Ornithological Applications* \(early online version\).](#)

[Soga, M., and K. J. Gaston. 2024. Do people who experience more nature act more to protect it? A meta-analysis. *Biological Conservation* 289:110417.](#)

Trivia Answer

A nide is a brood (or nest) of pheasants. The actual *Jeopardy* question was, “A nide is a brood of these birds, perhaps the ring-necked ones”, asked while showing a video clip of some pheasants feeding. Gary from Virginia wrongly guessed ptarmigan, but Julia from New York nailed it. I’m not sure how many people know the word “ptarmigan” but don’t know what a pheasant looks like, but it can’t be too many. C’mon, Gary!

This update is brought to you by the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships. Our mission is to foster science-based, socially-supported policies and programs that enhance wild pheasant populations, provide recreational opportunities to pheasant hunters, and support the economics and social values of communities. You can find us on the web at <https://nationalpheasantplan.org>.