USDA U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022

Agricultural producers and landowners can sign up soon for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a cornerstone conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris Administration effort to address climate change and achieve other natural resource benefits. The General CRP signup will run from **Jan. 31 to March 11**, and the Grassland CRP signup will run from **April 4 to May 13.**

Producers and landowners enrolled 4.6 million acres into CRP signups in 2021, including 2.5 million acres in the largest Grassland CRP signup in history. There are currently 22.1 million acres enrolled, and FSA is aiming to reach the 25.5-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2022.

CRP Signups
General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland.

Meanwhile, Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

Alongside these programs, producers and landowners can enroll acres in Continuous CRP under the ongoing sign up, which includes projects available through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

Climate Benefits
Last year, FSA enacted a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP General and Continuous signups, to better target CRP on addressing climate change. This incentive aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CRP's climate-smart practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA invested $10 million last year in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

More Information on CRP
Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to apply for the program -- for General CRP before the **March 11 deadline**, and for Grassland CRP before the **May 13 deadline**. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Additionally, fact sheets and other resources are available at fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

Farmers.gov Feature Helps Producers Find Farm Loans that Fit Their Operation

Farmers and ranchers can use the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* on farmers.gov to find information on USDA farm loans that may best fit their operations.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of loan options to help farmers finance their operations. From buying land to financing the purchase of equipment, FSA loans can help.

USDA conducted field research in eight states, gathering input from farmers and FSA farm loan staff to better understand their needs and challenges.

How the Tool Works

Farmers who are looking for financing options to operate a farm or buy land can answer a few simple questions about what they are looking to fund and how much money they need to borrow. After submitting their answers, farmers will receive information on farm loans that best fit their specific needs. The loan application and additional resources also will be provided.

Farmers can download application quick guides that outline what to expect from preparing an application to receiving a loan decision. There are four guides that cover loans to individuals, entities, and youth, as well as information on microloans. The guides include general eligibility requirements and a list of required forms and documentation for each type of loan. These guides can help farmers prepare before their first USDA service center visit with a loan officer.

Farmers can access the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* by visiting farmers.gov/fund and clicking the “Start” button. Follow the prompts and answer five simple questions to receive loan information that is applicable to your agricultural operation. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

About Farmers.gov

In 2018, USDA unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where farmers will be able to apply for programs, process transactions, and manage accounts.

The *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* is one of many resources on farmers.gov to help connect farmers to information that can help their operations. Earlier this year, USDA launched the *My Financial Information* feature, which enables farmers to view their loan information, history, payments, and alerts by logging into the website.

USDA is building farmers.gov for farmers, by farmers. In addition to the interactive farm loan features, the site also offers a Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool. Farmers can visit farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1 to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

For more information, contact your local County USDA Service Center at or visit farmers.gov.

Agricultural Producers Have Until March 15 to Enroll in USDA’s Key Commodity Safety Net Programs

Call Today About 2022 Crop Year Eligibility

Agricultural producers who have not yet enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2022 crop year have until March 15, 2022, to sign a contract. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers these two safety net programs to provide vital income support to farmers experiencing substantial declines in crop prices or revenues.

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County or PLC, which are both crop-by-crop, or ARC-Individual, which is for the entire farm. Although election changes for 2022 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2022, it will be necessary to sign a new contract.

If an election is not submitted by the March 15, 2022, deadline, the election remains the same as the 2021 election for crops on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the crop.

Producers have completed 976,249 contracts to date, representing 54% of the more than 1.8 million expected contracts.

Producers who do not complete enrollment by the deadline will not be enrolled in ARC or PLC for the 2022 crop year and will not receive a payment if triggered.

Producers are eligible to enroll farms with base acres for the following commodities: barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed, and wheat.

Decision Tools

In partnership with USDA, two web-based decision tools are available to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations:

- Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator, a tool available through the University of Illinois allows producers to estimate payments for farms and counties for ARC-CO and PLC.
- ARC and PLC Decision Tool, a tool available through Texas A&M that allows producers to estimate payments and yield updates and expected payments for 2022.

Crop Insurance Considerations and Decision Deadline

ARC and PLC are part of a broader safety net provided by USDA, which also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

Producers should contact their crop insurance agent to make certain that the election and enrollment made at FSA follows their intention to participate in STAX or SCO coverage. Producers have until March 15, 2022, to make the appropriate changes or cancel their ARC or PLC contract.

More Information

In addition to the March 15 deadline for ARC and PLC, other important deadlines include:

- March 1, Livestock Indemnity Program
- March 11, Conservation Reserve Program General Signup
- March 15, Pandemic Cover Crop Program
- March 25, Dairy Margin Coverage

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the ARC and PLC webpage or contact their local USDA Service Center. In those service centers where COVID cases exceed safety levels, staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email and other digital tools. Producers with level 2 eauthentication access can electronically sign contracts or may make arrangements to drop off signed contracts at the FSA county office. Because of the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors.

Deadline Extended to Enroll in 2022 Dairy Margin Coverage and Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage

Producers encouraged to enroll as soon as possible.

USDA has extended the deadline to enroll in Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) and Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage (SDMC) for program year 2022. **The deadline to apply for 2022 coverage is now March 25, 2022.** As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's ongoing efforts to support dairy farmers and rural communities, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) opened DMC and SDMC signup in December 2021 to help producers manage economic risk brought on by milk price and feed cost disparities.

Enrollment for 2022 DMC is currently at 55% of the 2021 program year enrollment. Producers who enrolled in DMC for 2021 received margin payments each month, January through November for a total of $1.2 billion, with an average payment of $60,275 per operation.

The DMC program, created by the 2018 Farm Bill, offers reasonably priced protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed cost (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer.

Supplemental DMC will provide $580 million to better help small- and mid-sized dairy operations that have increased production over the years but were not able to enroll the additional production. Now, they will be able to retroactively receive payments for that supplemental production.

After making any revisions to 2021 DMC contracts for Supplemental DMC, producers can sign up for 2022 coverage. DMC provides eligible dairy producers with risk management coverage that pays producers when the difference between the price of milk and the cost of feed falls below a certain level. So far in 2021, DMC payments have triggered for January through November for more than $1 billion.

For DMC enrollment, producers must certify with FSA that the operation is commercially marketing milk, sign all required forms and pay the $100 administrative fee. The fee is waived for farmers who are considered limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged, or a military veteran. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the online dairy decision tool.

USDA has also changed the DMC feed cost formula to better reflect the actual cost dairy farmers pay for high-quality alfalfa hay. FSA now calculates payments using 100% premium alfalfa hay rather than 50%. In December 2021, following publication of the new feed cost policy, $102 million was paid to producers as a result of the revised high quality alfalfa feed cost formula.

The amended feed cost formula will make DMC payments more reflective of actual dairy producer expenses and DMC payments. Higher DMC feed cost calculations due to the premium alfalfa adjustment could more frequently trigger DMC indemnity payments for dairy operations having DMC coverage in 2022.

Producers with Crop Insurance to Receive Premium Benefit for Cover Crops

File acreage report by March 15, 2022 to receive the benefit.

Agricultural producers who have coverage under most crop insurance policies are eligible for a premium benefit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) if they planted cover crops during the 2022 crop year. To receive the benefit from this year's Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP), producers must report cover crop acreage by **March 15, 2022**.

PCCP, offered by USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), helps farmers maintain their cover crop systems, despite the financial challenges posed by the pandemic and is part of USDA's Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative, a bundle of programs to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions.

PCCP provides premium support to producers who insured their crop with most insurance policies and planted a qualifying cover crop during the 2022 crop year. The premium support is $5 per acre, but no more than the full premium amount owed. For more information producers can visit Pandemic Cover Crop Program

USDA Offers Expanded Conservation Program Opportunities to Support Climate Smart Agriculture in 2022

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing several new and expanded opportunities for climate smart agriculture in 2022. Updates include nationwide availability of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentive Contracts option, a new and streamlined EQIP Cover Crop Initiative, and added flexibilities for producers to easily re-enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). These improvements to NRCS' working lands conservation programs, combined with continued program opportunities in all states, are part of the Biden-Harris Administration's broader effort to support climate-smart agriculture.

New Partnership Announced

NRCS is announcing a new partnership with Farmers For Soil Health, an initiative of the United Soybean Board, National Corn Growers Association and National Pork Board. Farmers For Soil Health works to advance use of soil health practices – especially cover crops – on corn and soybean farms. The initiative has a goal of doubling the number of corn and soybean acres using cover crops to 30 million acres by 2030. Other partners include the National Association of Conservation Districts, Soil Health Institute, and The Sustainability Consortium.

EQIP Cover Crop Initiative

To complement the new partnership, NRCS is investing $38 million through the new targeted Cover Crop Initiative in 11 states to help agricultural producers mitigate climate change through the widespread adoption of cover crops. States include Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and South Dakota. States were selected for this initial pilot based on their demonstrated demand for additional support for the cover crop practice.

Sign-up dates will be determined at the state-level, and applications will be selected for funding by Feb. 11, 2022. The initiative is aimed at improving soil health through a targeted, rapid, and streamlined application and contract approval process. NRCS will continue to build on this framework and streamlined application process to support farmers and ranchers across the country.

Cover crops offer agricultural producers a natural and inexpensive climate solution through their ability to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide into soils. Cover crops can provide an accelerated, positive impact on natural resource concerns. In fiscal 2021, NRCS provided technical and financial assistance to help producers plant 2.3 million acres of cover crops through EQIP.

EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts

Conservation Incentive Contracts address priority resource concerns, including sequestering carbon and improving soil health in high-priority areas. Through these contracts, NRCS works with producers to strengthen the quality and condition of natural resources on their operations using management practices, such as irrigation water management, drainage water management, feed management and residue and tillage management that target resource concerns, including degraded soil and water quality, available water and soil erosion.

Conservation Incentive Contracts offer producers annual incentive payments to implement management practices as well as conservation evaluation and monitoring activities to help manage, maintain and improve priority natural resource concerns within state high-priority areas and build on existing conservation efforts. Download our “Conservation Incentive Contracts” fact sheet for a list of practices.

CSP Re-Enrollment Option

NRCS updated CSP to allow an agricultural producer to immediately re-enroll in the program following an unfunded application to renew an existing contract. Previously, if a CSP participant did not re-enroll the year their contract expired, they were ineligible for the program for two years.

This ineligibility was imposed on CSP participants even if their failure to sign a renewal contract was due to the unavailability of funds, which is beyond their control. USDA is now waiving this two-year ineligibility restriction for all CSP applications.

This year, producers renewed 2,600 CSP contracts covering 3.4 million acres. Applicants with unfunded fiscal 2022 CSP renewals will receive letters this month, notifying them they are automatically eligible to apply for future CSP funding opportunities, rather than needing to wait two years to reapply.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs – including EQIP and CSP – year-round, however you should apply by state-specific, signup dates to be considered for each year’s funding. To apply, you should contact your closest UDSA service center.

Progression Lending from FSA

Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loans are considered progression lending. Unlike loans from a commercial lender, FSA loans are intended to be temporary in nature. Our goal is to help you graduate to commercial credit, and our farm loan staff is available to help borrowers through training and credit counseling.

The FSA team will help borrowers identify their goals to ensure financial success. FSA staff will advise borrowers on developing strategies and a plan to meet your goals and graduate to commercial credit. FSA borrowers are responsible for the success of their farming operation, but FSA staff will help in an advisory role, providing the tools necessary to help you achieve your operational goals and manage your finances.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

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