

## In This Issue:

- [From the Desk of Matt Russell, State Executive Director](#)
  - [USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity](#)
  - [Grassland CRP Signup Underway](#)
  - [Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance](#)
  - [Myth-Busting FSA's New Revenue-Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs](#)
  - [Tree Assistance Program](#)
  - [Communication is Key in Lending](#)
- 

## From the Desk of Matt Russell, State Executive Director

Iowans have an amazing, once in a generation opportunity to invest in agricultural leadership. The world needs farmers, ranchers, forest and land managers, agricultural scientists, field agronomists, ag journalists, veterinarians, teachers and professors, extension agents, sales representatives, technology entrepreneurs, and on and on. We can't solve the biggest problems facing humanity in the 21st Century without agricultural leaders. It's an exciting time to be a young Iowan interested in a career in agriculture.

When I was at the Corn Belt Cow Calf Conference in Ottumwa in January, I ran into Neric Smith the Program Director for Agricultural Sciences at Indian Hills Community College. More than ten years ago, when I was at Drake University's Agricultural Law Center and he was at Iowa State Extension, we'd worked together in a regional food systems group. As we caught up at the conference, he said, "You should come see what we have going on at the Indian Hills Community College campus in Centerville."

Last week I took him up on it as I was traveling in Southern Iowa working my way through meeting with county offices. Wayne County was on my agenda and Centerville was a short drive away.

I love being part of the Biden-Harris Administration, especially when I'm in rural Iowa. I often tell our staff, mention to groups, or talk about in a speech, that "I'm not a fan of big government. I'm not a fan of small government. I'm a fan of smart government." And that's what struck me as I spent a couple of hours with Neric. He showed me major investments happening on campus. He introduced me to faculty and staff excited about how all levels of government are coming together to create world class opportunities to help emerging leaders build careers in southern Iowa and beyond. We talked with students who confirmed that's why they are at Indian Hills Community College.

Neric and I walked and talked on campus. Then we drove and discussed as we passed student row-crop acres. We chatted among the cattle and ended the morning [recording a recap of my visit](#). My biggest take home of the day was how powerful smart government is when communities combine local, state, and federal investments with volunteers, donations, and the business community.

For everyone looking for examples of smart government, Iowa agriculture is a great place to start. It's not just Indian Hills that leverages government to advance opportunities in agriculture. Our entire Iowa Community College system is investing in future agricultural leaders. Our Regents Universities are preparing Iowa students to lead the next agricultural revolution we're already living in. Even Iowa's private colleges and universities are investing in agriculture programs. And of course, our high schools have agriculture programs and FFA, while ISU Extension invests statewide in 4-H

programs. Everywhere we look in our great state, the world of agriculture provides amazing opportunities for Iowans. [Here's a list of Iowa colleges providing degrees in agricultural sciences.](#)

Farm groups also continue their investment in new leaders. I've been privileged in the last two years to join their awards and scholarship events honoring their rising stars.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack was at Iowa State University earlier this month to announce NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant awards to ISU and the Iowa Soybean Association. As he usually does when on a campus, Secretary Vilsack sat down with ag students for an informal Q and A. He invited and challenged them to consider a career in public service advancing agriculture and rural development.

Which brings me back to my role at Iowa FSA. What an exciting time to be part of Iowa agriculture. USDA is hiring agricultural leaders in our county offices, jobs that also provide an opportunity to work both on and off the farm, as so many Iowans do.

I look forward to future adventures as I crisscross the state. I know I'll find new opportunities to elevate the amazing investments Iowans are making in solving 21st Century problems by investing in the leaders of the next agricultural revolution.

Matt



Neric Smith (pictured right), Program Director of Ag Sciences at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC), meets with SED Matt Russell on the IHCC cattle farm.

---

## USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

### **Additional Updates**

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the Federal Register](#).

### **More Background**

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)) or by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). 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. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

---

## **Grassland CRP Signup Underway**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup started **April 17 and runs through May 26, 2023**. Among CRP enrollment opportunities, Grassland CRP is unique as a *working lands program*, allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while protecting grasslands and promoting plant and animal biodiversity and conservation.

Protecting grasslands with CRP not only benefits participants with annual rental payments and cost share assistance; it also contributes positively to the economy of many regions, builds biodiversity, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

More than 2.4 million acres were enrolled through the 2022 Grassland CRP Signup from agricultural producers and private landowners. That signup – the highest ever for the program– reflects the continued success and value of investments in voluntary, producer-led, working lands conservation programs. The current total participation in Grassland CRP is 6.3 million acres, which is part of the 23 million acres enrolled in CRP opportunities overall.

Since 2021, the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), which administers all CRP programs, has made several improvements to Grassland CRP to broaden the program's reach, including:

- Creating two [National Priority Zones](#) to put focus on environmentally sensitive land such as that prone to wind erosion.
- Enhanced offers with 10 additional ranking points to producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers and military veterans.
- Leverage the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to engage historically underserved communities Tribal Nations in the Great Plains

## Other CRP Signups

### General CRP

[General CRP signup closed on April 7](#). The program 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. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

### Continuous CRP

Under [Continuous CRP](#), producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states but has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.

## How to Sign Up

Landowners and producers interested in Grassland CRP, or any other CRP enrollment option, should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

## More Information

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.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new

markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov).

---

## Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance

The term “sodbusting” is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you’re proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.

Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

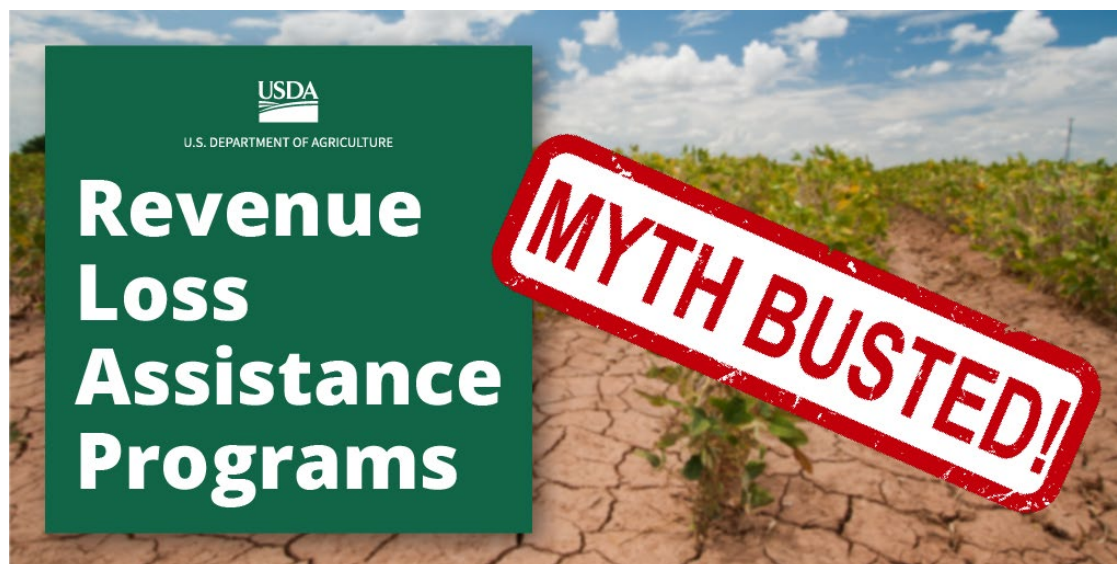
Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification,” with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

---



# Myth-Busting FSA's New Revenue-Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs

In January, we announced two new programs designed to assist producers who experienced revenue losses from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs are revenue-based and feel a little different from our regular programs, but the goal is to better support farmers.

Both the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) Phase Two and the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#) offer a holistic approach to disaster assistance and provide economic support for producers who bear the financial brunt of circumstances beyond their control.

With the rollout of any new program, there is a learning curve for producers and employees alike. ERP Phase Two and PARP are no exception. To encourage producer participation in these valuable programs, I'm going to do my best to debunk some myths and misconceptions surrounding ERP Phase Two and PARP.

With a June 2, 2023, deadline to apply for both programs, it's important that we clear up confusion about how to apply, what documents are required for participation, insurance requirements and related misinformation making its way across the countryside.

**Now, let's do some myth-busting.**

## **Myth #1 – You need to submit a completed tax return to FSA to apply for ERP Phase Two or PARP.**

While these programs are based on revenue losses, you do not need a tax return, completed or otherwise, to apply for assistance. In fact, we have an [ERP Phase 2 tool](#) and [PARP tool](#) that walk you through the process step by step.

We understand that you may have questions for your certified public accountant or tax preparer, who was likely been hard to reach prior to the April 18 Internal Revenue Service tax deadline but we encourage you to download the program decision tools and get started. You'll probably discover that you already have on hand much of the information you need.

The following supporting materials will help you:

- Schedule F (Form 1040); and
- *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 for ERP and for calendar years 2018, 2019, and 2020 for PARP.

The only reason you *might* have to provide your tax returns to FSA is in the event of a spot check or a request from the FSA County Committee.

Producers can [register for a free webinar](#) hosted by USDA and members of the National Farm Income Tax Extension Committee on Monday, May 1 at 2 p.m. eastern for a discussion on completing the ERP Phase Two application form.

## **Myth #2 – You cannot receive an ERP Phase Two payment if you received a payment under Phase One.**

It's possible that you can still receive ERP Phase Two benefits if you received an ERP Phase One payment. There is also a possibility that your Phase Two payment may be offset.

## **Myth #3 – ERP Phase Two was intended to be an additional payment to those who received payment under Phase One.**

ERP Phase Two was never designed or intended to be an additional payment. Instead, it was intended to assist those producers who did not receive relief in Phase One.

[Click here to read the full blog and view a producer testimonial on the application process.](#)

---

# Tree Assistance Program

If you're an orchardist or nursery tree grower who experienced losses from natural disasters during calendar year 2023, you must submit a TAP application either 90 calendar days after the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent.

TAP provides financial assistance to help you replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Eligible tree types include trees, bushes or vines that produce an annual crop for commercial purposes. Nursery trees include ornamental, fruit, nut and Christmas trees that are produced for commercial sale. Trees used for pulp or timber are ineligible.

To qualify for TAP, orchardists must suffer a qualifying tree, bush or vine loss in excess of 15 percent mortality from an eligible natural disaster, plus an adjustment for normal mortality. The eligible trees, bushes or vines must have been owned when the natural disaster occurred; however, eligible growers are not required to own the land on which the eligible trees, bushes and vines were planted.

If the TAP application is approved, the eligible trees, bushes and vines must be replaced within 12 months from the date the application is approved. The cumulative total quantity of acres planted to trees, bushes or vines, for which you can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 1,000 acres annually.

---

## Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be successful. FSA staff will provide guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower's graduation to commercial credit. While it is FSA's commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower's responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses
- The development of problem situations
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

If a farm loan borrower can't make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your local USDA Service Center at or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

---



**Join Our Team**

*We are hiring*

**BE A PART  
OF OUR  
STORY**

**Farm Service Agency**

fsa.usda.gov  
usajobs.gov

## Iowa Farm Service Agency

10500 Buena Vista Court  
Des Moines, IA 50322

Phone: 515-254-1540

**Matt Russell, Executive Director**

### Iowa State Committee

Wendy Johnson, Chair  
Kayla Koether  
Ryan Marquardt  
Mark Recker  
Seth Watkins

## Subscribe to updates from Farmers.gov

Email Address  e.g. name@example.com

## Share Bulletin



POWERED BY