



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Montana Newsletter - February 2022

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

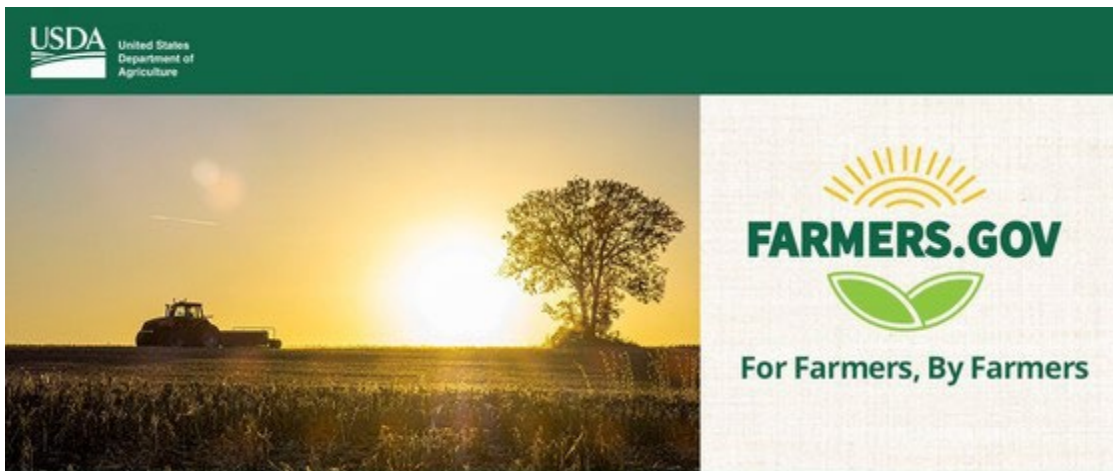
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Some USDA Service Centers in Montana are open to limited visitors by appointment only. Contact your Service Center to schedule an appointment. You can find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator. Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff also continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Producers can learn more about how to leverage these digital offerings by visiting <https://www.farmers.gov/mydocs>.

Montana FSA Program Dates/Deadlines



USDA in Montana reminds agricultural producers of important Farm Service Agency (FSA) program dates. Contact your local service center to apply and with any questions. Visit online at farmers.gov and fsa.usda.gov/mt.

Feb. 4: Deadline for the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program

Feb. 18: Deadline to enroll in the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) Program

Feb. 25: Deadline to enroll in the Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program (SMHPP)

Feb. 28: Deadline to file a notice of loss and submit a LIP application for payment specifically for *M. bovis* bison deaths that occurred in 2021

March 1: Deadline for the 2021 Livestock Indemnity Program Application for Payment and all supporting documentation for timely filed 2021 LIP notices of livestock losses.

March 1: CRP Spring Non-emergency Grazing season starts. Prior approval is required.

March 11: Deadline to enroll in General CRP

March 15: Last day of 2022 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Election and Enrollment Period

March 15: 2022 Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Coverage Application Closing Date for all Spring Crops except Spring-Seeded Canola, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Mixed Forage

March 31: Final availability date for Loans and LDPs for prior year harvested Wheat, Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, and Sesame Seed

April 4: Grassland CRP signup period opens

May 13: Deadline to enroll in the Grassland CRP

ELAP notice of loss must be filed within **30 days** of when loss is apparent for **livestock and farm-raised fish** losses.

ELAP notice of loss must be filed within **15 days** of when loss is apparent for **honeybee** losses.

LIP notice of loss must be filed within **30 days** of when the loss is apparent.

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Deadline Extended to Apply for Pandemic Support for Certified Organic and Transitioning Operations

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has extended the deadline for agricultural producers who are certified organic, or transitioning to organic, to apply for the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP). This program provides pandemic assistance to cover certification and education expenses. The deadline to apply for 2020 and 2021 eligible expenses is now Feb. 4, 2022, rather than the original deadline of Jan. 7, 2022.

Signup for OTECP, administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), began Nov. 8.

Certified operations and transitional operations may apply for OTECP for eligible expenses paid during the 2020, 2021 and 2022 fiscal years. Signup for the 2022 fiscal year will be announced at a later date.

For each year, OTECP covers 25% of a certified operation's eligible certification expenses, up to \$250 per certification category (crop, livestock, wild crop, handling and State Organic Program fee). This includes application fees, inspection fees, USDA organic certification costs, state organic program fees and more.

Crop and livestock operations transitioning to organic production may be eligible for 75% of a transitional operation's eligible expenses, up to \$750, for each year. This includes fees charged by a certifying agent or consultant for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan.

For both certified operations and transitional operations, OTECP covers 75% of the registration fees, up to \$200, per year, for educational events that include content related to organic production and handling in order to assist operations in increasing their knowledge of production and marketing practices that can improve their operations, increase resilience and expand available marketing opportunities. Additionally, both certified and transitional operations may be eligible for 75% of the expense of soil testing required under the National Organic Program (NOP) to document micronutrient deficiency, not to exceed \$100 per year.

Producers apply through their local FSA office and can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364. The program application and additional information can be found at farmers.gov/otecp.

Additional Organic Support

OTECF builds upon USDA's [Organic Certification Cost Share Program \(OCCSP\)](#) which provides cost share assistance of 50%, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope, to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the NOP. Although the application period for OCCSP ended Nov. 1, 2021, FSA will consider late-filed applications for those operations who still wish to apply.

To learn more about USDA's broader assistance for organic producers, visit usda.gov/organic.

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USDA Adds Mycoplasma Bovis (M. bovis) as Eligible Bison Disease for Livestock Indemnity Program

Deadline to Report 2021 Losses and File Application for Payment is Feb. 28, 2022

Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#) provides benefits to eligible livestock owners or contract growers for livestock deaths exceeding normal mortality caused by eligible loss conditions, including eligible adverse weather, eligible disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law, including wolves and avian predators. In addition, LIP assists eligible livestock owners that must sell livestock at a reduced price because of an injury from an eligible loss condition.

Regarding losses due to eligible disease, research indicates that the bacteria M. bovis is transmitted from bison to bison through instances of adverse weather conditions that cause stressors for bison and enhance transmission and symptoms. Once symptomatic, it is nearly impossible to treat M. bovis in bison.

There is no vaccine currently labeled to mitigate the effects of the bacteria in bison which often results in the death of eligible livestock. No acceptable management practices to treat the disease exist for bison that are stricken with M. bovis.

LIP eligibility for M. bovis bison deaths due to eligible adverse weather events are established by FSA State Offices.

The deadline to file a notice of loss and submit a LIP application for payment specifically for M. bovis bison deaths that occurred in 2021 is Feb. 28, 2022. At the time of application, producers should be prepared to provide proof of bison death losses due to M. bovis.

For bison deaths resulting from M. bovis in 2022 and future years, producers are required to file a notice of loss for livestock that died as a direct result of an eligible loss condition within 30 calendar days from the ending date of the eligible loss condition.

For more information or to report losses and file a LIP application for payment, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

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USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022

General Signup Open

Agricultural producers and landowners can sign up now for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). 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).

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.

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Crop Year 2022 Election and Enrollment Period for ARC and PLC Programs Ends March 15, 2022

The [crop year 2022 election and enrollment period](#) for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs opened on Oct. 18, 2021 and runs through **March 15, 2022**. Producers can now make or change elections and enroll for 2022 ARC or PLC, providing future protections against market fluctuations.

Agriculture Risk Coverage-County (ARC-CO): The ARC-CO program provides income support tied to historical base acres, not current production, of covered commodities. ARC-CO payments are issued when the actual county crop revenue of a covered commodity is less than the ARC-CO guarantee for the covered commodity.

Agriculture Risk Coverage – Individual (ARC-IC): The ARC-IC program provides income support tied to historical base acres and current production of covered commodities. ARC-IC payments are issued when the individual's actual revenue from covered commodities is less than the ARC-IC guarantee for the individual.

Price Loss Coverage (PLC): PLC program payments are issued when the effective price of a covered commodity is less than the respective reference price for that commodity. The effective price equals the higher of the market year average price (MYA) or the national average loan rate for the covered commodity.

Contact your [local USDA Service Center](#) for more information.

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Signup for Free USDA Webinars on Tax Information on Livestock Sales and Disaster Losses

Tax season is just around the corner and there are a variety of important considerations for farmers and livestock producers. USDA has partnered with agriculture tax experts around the country to connect producers to important tax information related to their operations. In February USDA is hosting two informational webinars on income tax treatment of livestock sales and disaster losses. Join us on February 7 and 8 for presentations featuring JC Hobbs of Oklahoma State University to learn about the special tax rules that may apply to your operation.

Monday, February 7, 2022: 3:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Income Tax Treatment of Weather-Related Sales of Livestock

Breeding, dairy, or livestock (excluding poultry) sold due to drought, flood, or other weather-related condition are potentially eligible for special tax treatment, as this sale is considered an involuntary conversion. This presentation will cover the application of these tax rules which allows for the postponement of gain recognition when replacement animals are purchased.

The gain from the sale of any livestock, including poultry, in excess of the normal number of animals sold annually due to drought, flood, or other weather-related condition may allow the reporting of gain to be postponed until the following year. Special tax rules apply, allowing the postponement to occur. This presentation will cover the rules and procedures that must be followed to postpone the reporting of gain.

Tuesday, February 8, 2022: 3:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Income Tax Rules that Apply to Disaster Losses

The tax treatment for losses of property due to disasters varies depending upon whether the item was personal, business or investment property. In addition, consideration is given to the amount of the loss impacted by insurance proceeds, the tax basis of the property at the time of the loss, or disaster payments received. This presentation will cover the tax treatment that applies to losses of property resulting from a disaster.

Register for both webinars on Farmers.gov: [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers | Farmers.gov](#)

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Update: No Accelerating or Foreclosing on Any Direct Loans

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. Letters are going out to direct loan borrowers that clarify what that suspension means, but Zach Ducheneaux, FSA Administrator, also would like to take a few minutes to [visit with you "in person"](#).

Throughout 2021, some direct loan borrowers may have received a "Notice of Intent to Accelerate" in the mail. We understand this notice has caused some confusion and frustration. We want to assure you that the suspension on adverse actions, including foreclosures on direct loans is still in effect. We have not, and are not, accelerating your direct loans with the Farm Service Agency or foreclosing on your property securing those loans during this suspension.

USDA Announces Inaugural Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack selected 12 members to serve on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) inaugural Secretary's Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture to provide input on policy development and to help identify barriers to urban agriculture as USDA works to promote urban farming and the economic opportunities it provides in cities across the country.

The new Secretary's Advisory Committee is part of USDA's efforts to support urban agriculture, creating a network for feedback. Urban agriculture plays an important role in producing fresh, healthy food in areas where grocery stores are scarce, and also provides jobs and beautifies neighborhoods.

Secretary's Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture

The Committee is made up of agricultural producers, and representatives from the areas of higher education or extension programs, non-profits, business and economic development, supply chains and financing. Members include:

- **Jerry Ann Hebron**, Mich., Urban Producer
- **Bobby Wilson**, Ga., Urban Producer
- **Viraj Puri**, N.Y., Innovative Producer
- **Kaben Smallwood**, Okla., Innovative Producer
- **Sally Brown**, Wash., Higher Education
- **John Erwin**, Md., Higher Education
- **Carl Wallace**, Ohio, Non-Profit Representative
- **John Lebeaux**, Mass., Business and Economic Development Representative
- **Zachari Curtis**, D.C., Supply Chain Experience
- **Allison Paap**, Calif., Financing Entity Representative
- **Tara Chadwick**, Fla., Related Experience
- **Angela Mason**, Ill., Related Experience

USDA and the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production peer reviewed more than 300 nominees, and Vilsack made the final selections. Selections ensured geographic, racial and gender diversity and a broad range of agricultural experience. The new members will serve terms of one to three years.

The first meeting of this inaugural committee, which will be open to the public, will take place in late February. More details will be available in the *Federal Register* and at farmers.gov/urban and the new [Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture website](#).

USDA and Urban Agriculture

The advisory committee and county committees are part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture. Other efforts include:

- Grants that target areas of food access, education, business and start-up costs for new farmers, and development of policies related to zoning and other needs of urban production.
- Cooperative agreements that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans.

- Investing \$260,000 for risk management training and crop insurance education for historically underserved and urban producers through partnerships between USDA's [Risk Management Agency](#) (RMA) and the University of Maryland, University of Connecticut, and Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.
- Providing technical and financial assistance through conservation programs offered by USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS).
- Organizing 11 [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) urban and suburban county committees. FSA will organize additional committees.

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture. Its mission is to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices, including community composting and food waste reduction. More information is available at farmers.gov/urban and the new [Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture website](#).

Additional resources that may be of interest to urban agriculture entities include grants from USDA's [Agricultural Marketing Service](#) and [National Institute of Food and Agriculture](#) as well as [FSA loans](#).

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USDA Expands Partnerships for Conservation Through Its Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

New Partners are Encouraged to Apply

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is leveraging its authorities under the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to bring in new types of partners and ultimately expand opportunities in voluntary conservation for the Nation's agricultural producers and private landowners. In direct response to feedback from state agencies, Tribes, non-profits and other groups, USDA has updated CREP's rule regarding matching fund requirements, and invested in additional staff to work directly with partners for streamlined, partner-driven conservation efforts.

CREP is part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and enables USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), through Farm Service Agency (FSA), and partners to co-invest in partner-led projects. CREP also plays an important role in USDA's broader climate change strategy, bringing together producers, landowners and partners for climate-smart land management.

Matching Funds

A Dec. 6, 2019, rule required that 50% of matching funds from partners be in the form of direct payments, which made it more difficult for diverse types of groups to participate as partners in CREP. With this rule change, partners can now provide their negotiated level of matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance. This change allows for greater flexibility and opportunity for additional partners to participate in the program.

This change was enacted through a [Dec. 13, 2021 rule in the Federal Register](#).

The rule also updated policy to now provide a full annual rental rate to producers who are impacted by state, Tribal or local laws, ordinances and regulations that require a resource conserving or environmental protection measure. The previous rule reduced the rental payment made to producers who were covered by such laws.

Additional Capacity to Support Partners and Producers

In order to implement these changes, FSA has hired three new CREP staff members, using a regional approach to work closely with potential and existing partners and expand program availability. The team members include:

- **Evelyn Whitesides**, focusing on Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia and Caribbean Region (Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands).
- **Kim Martin**, focusing on Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin.
- **Patrick Lewis**, focusing on Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Pacific Basin, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

These investments in CREP staffing build on other recent outreach and education efforts by FSA, including a [\\$4.7 million investment announced this year](#) to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers on a variety of CCC and FSA programs, including conservation programs.

Currently, all CREP partners are States; however, FSA is strongly encouraging Tribes and non-governmental organizations to consider partnerships. This program is a great vehicle for their conservation-focused efforts.

About CREP

Currently, CREP has 34 projects in 26 states. In total, more than 860,000 acres are enrolled in CREP.

Eligible partners include States, Tribal groups, and non-governmental organizations. Potential partners interested in CREP should contact their FSA [State Office](#) or one of the new CREP team members listed above.

More Information

Earlier this year, FSA rolled out a number of improvements to CRP, which included a larger emphasis on climate-smart agriculture through a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP general and continuous signups. Learn more in our [“What’s New with CRP” fact sheet](#). These updates to CREP build on FSA’s larger effort to improve all components of CRP.

To learn about CREP and other CRP opportunities, producers and landowners should contact their [local USDA Service Center](#).

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Livestock Losses

Montana livestock producers are reminded to keep updated livestock inventory records. These records are necessary in the event of a natural disaster.

The [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP), administered by USDA Farm Service Agency, provides assistance to eligible producers for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law. LIP compensates livestock owners and contract growers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather, including losses due to hurricanes, floods, blizzards, wildfires, extreme heat or extreme cold.

For disease losses, FSA county committees can accept veterinarian certifications that livestock deaths were directly related to adverse weather and unpreventable through good animal husbandry and management.

In addition, LIP provides assistance for injured livestock that are sold within 30 days of an eligible loss condition at a reduced price due to adverse weather or attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law.

For livestock death losses, eligible livestock owners must file a notice within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent. Producers should document the adverse weather conditions and date(s) of weather events.

Participants must provide all supporting documentation to their local FSA office no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred. Livestock owners and contract growers must record all pertinent information, including the number and kind of all livestock adversely impacted. Some examples of required supporting documentation include:

- Beginning Inventory Records
- Proof of death loss documentation
- Purchase and sales records
- Calving records (include date of birth, date of death and cause of death)
- Preg test records (completed by 3rd party)
- Copy of growers contracts
- Proof of normal mortality documentation

2021 Livestock Losses: In addition to filing a timely notice of loss, producers must submit an application for payment and all supporting documentation by **March 1, 2022**.

2022 Livestock Losses: In addition to filing a timely notice of loss, producers must submit an application for payment and all supporting documentation by **March 1, 2023**.

Additional Information about LIP is available at your local FSA office or online at: fsa.usda.gov/mt or farmers.gov.

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RMA Extends Crop Insurance Flexibilities to June Due to COVID-19

Because of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is extending program flexibilities to Approved Insurance Providers (AIPs) and agricultural producers until June 30, 2022 or later. Originally, these flexibilities were expiring this month.

“Our priority is to keep our producers and partners as safe as possible, while at the same time continuing to provide the best service we can,” said Marcia Bunger, Administrator of USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA). “These unique times call for everyone to be cautious and as flexible as possible, and these added flexibilities will help us achieve those goals.”

Extended flexibilities include:

- Allowing notifications to be sent electronically, including policy related information over the phone or other electronic methods to select policy elections by sales closing, acreage reporting and production reporting dates, including options, endorsements and their forms. Producers may sign electronically or within 60 calendar days.
- Allowing producers to submit a request for a written agreement after the sales closing date.

- Allowing producers with inability to physically sign a written agreement because of COVID-19 to do so after the expiration date.
- Providing additional time for AIPs to accept Regional Office Determined Yield, Master Yield, and Irrigated Determined Yield requests for Category B (annual) crops.
- Allowing AIPs to request a 30-day extension to submit Determined Yield requests for Category C (perennial) crops.
- Waiving the witness signature requirement for approval of Assignments of Indemnity.

Additional details can be found in [RMA's Jan. 20, 2022 Manager's Bulletin](#), the [frequently asked questions](#) or farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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USDA Invests \$2 Million in Risk Management Education for Historically Underserved and Small-Scale Producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing up to \$2 million in cooperative agreements this year for risk management education and training programs that support historically underserved producers, small-scale farmers, and conservation practices. USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is investing in organizations, such as nonprofit organizations, universities, and county cooperative extension offices, to develop training and education tools to help producers learn how to effectively manage long-term risks and challenges.

"Agriculture is an inherently risky business, and a strong farm safety net is key to sustaining and ensuring the success of American producers," said RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger. "We're committed to improving access to crop insurance, and our partnerships with organizations help us reach communities that have historically lacked access to training and resources. We want to make sure all producers know and understand how to manage risk and what options are available to them."

RMA works with partners to assist producers, especially historically underserved, farmers and ranchers, in effectively managing long-term risks and challenges. RMA re-established its support of risk management education in 2021, investing nearly \$1 million in nine risk management education projects. From 2002 to 2018, RMA provided annual funding for risk management education projects, supporting more than \$126 million worth of projects in historically underserved communities.

How to Apply

Interested organizations must apply by 5:59 pm Eastern Time on March 11 through the Results Verification System at rvs.umn.edu. To learn more, view the notice of funding opportunity on grants.gov.

A broad range of risk management training activities are eligible for funding consideration, including training on Federal crop insurance options, record keeping, financial management, non-insurance-based risk management tools, and natural disaster preparedness among others. Partners can also train farmers at all levels on risk management options that help secure local food systems.

This selection process is competitive, and RMA will prioritize projects focused on underserved, organic, and specialty crop producers. Additionally, organizations providing training related to climate change, wildfire response, local foods, and urban ag will also be given stronger consideration.

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NRCS Announces New EQIP Funding Opportunity for Tribal Producers

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Montana is offering a new assistance opportunity for agricultural producers through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). While NRCS accepts applications year-round, producers and landowners should apply by the Feb. 18, 2022, ranking date to be considered for this year's funding.

"EQIP is our flagship conservation program. By focusing the expanded benefits of the Conservation Incentive Contracts in high priority areas, we're enabling Tribal producers to strengthen their land management and conservation practices," said Tom Watson, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana.

The [EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts](#) will be targeted to include socially disadvantaged producers operating on Montana's seven reservations and in Blaine, Cascade, Glacier, and Hill counties.

The 2018 Farm Bill created the new Conservation Incentive Contracts option to address high-priority conservation and natural resources concerns. Through 5- to 10-year contracts, producers manage, maintain and address important natural resource concerns and build on existing conservation efforts. Conservation Incentive Contracts were piloted in select states in fiscal year 2021. The opportunity is now available nationwide.

Ranking dates for all programs and states are available at nrcs.usda.gov/staterankingdates. Applications received after ranking dates will be automatically deferred to the next funding period.

To learn more about Conservation Incentive Contracts, visit the [NRCS website](#). You can also contact your [local USDA Service Center](#).

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Change to Conservation Stewardship Program Allows Re-enrollment without Two-Year Waiting Period

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing added flexibilities for producers to easily re-enroll in the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP).

"At NRCS, our job is to provide the tools farmers and ranchers need to best manage the resources of their operations – the foundation of our rural communities," said Tom Watson, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana. "We don't always get it right the first time, but we listen and make adjustments when possible. This change in agency policy will provide more opportunities for re-enrollment in CSP."

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 [local USDA Service Center](#) 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 nationwide. 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.

The 2022 CSP ranking date has passed. However, NRCS accepts applications for CSP year-round. Call your local USDA Service Center to learn more.

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USDA to Invest up to \$225 Million in Partner-Driven Conservation on Agricultural and Forest Land

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service will invest \$225 million this year through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). RCPP is a partner-driven program that leverages collective resources to find solutions to address natural resource challenges on agricultural land. This year's funding announcements include opportunities for projects that address climate change, benefit historically underserved producers and support urban agriculture. Read more in the [press release](#).

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Landowners Can Apply for Forest Resiliency and Wildfire Mitigation Assistance through the USDA Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Montana were awarded four [Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership](#) projects last week. These partnership projects will mitigate wildfire risk, protect water quality, improve wildlife habitat, restore forest ecosystems and ultimately contribute to USDA's efforts to combat climate change.

Private forest landowners located within the priority areas for the following three-year projects can apply for technical and financial assistance. While NRCS accepts applications for all programs year-round, landowners should apply by March 4, 2022, to be eligible for the current round of funding. Interested landowners can use the contact information below to get more information.

- Connecting Fuels Treatments in the Salish Mountains and Whitefish Range, Flathead National Forest: Contact the Kalispell NRCS field office at 406-742-4242.
- Fire Adapted Bitterroot (FAB), Bitterroot National Forest: Contact the Hamilton NRCS field office at 406-361-6191.
- Gallatin Valley Resiliency and Watershed Health, Custer Gallatin National Forest: Contact the NRCS Bozeman field office at 406-522-4012.
- Libby Surround Stewardship, Kootenai National Forest: Contact the NRCS Eureka field office at 406-296-0367.

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Save the Date! Update on Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has emphasized USDA's commitment to partnering with producers, land managers and rural communities to deliver climate solutions through voluntary, incentive-based approaches that strengthen rural America. On **Monday, February 7**, Secretary Vilsack will provide an update on USDA's plan to support climate-smart commodities while expanding market opportunities during an event at Lincoln University of Missouri, an 1890 Land Grant University. Remarks will begin at **12:50 p.m. CT**.

[Join the livestream](#) on February 7.

USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;
- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

[Farmers.gov](#) now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

Managing USDA Business Online

Using farmers.gov, producers, entities and those acting on their behalf can also:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices, plans and contracts.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View farm loan and interest information (producers only).

Future plans include adding the ability to import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture planting boundaries.

To access your information, you'll will need a [USDA eAuth account](#) to login to farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit [farmers.gov](#) and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the [Sign In/Sign Up link](#) at the top right of the website. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

In addition to the self-service features available by logging into farmers.gov, the website also has ample information on USDA programs, including pandemic assistance, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance. Recently, USDA updated the navigation and organization of the site as well as added some new webpages, including "[Get Involved](#)," "[Common Forms](#)," and "[Translations](#)." [Learn more about these changes](#).

Montana Soil Outreach

From September 2021 through July 2022, the Montana Association of Conservation Districts, Montana Watershed Coordination Council and partners are reaching out across the state to ask: What more might be done to better support farmers and ranchers in managing soils in Montana?

The purpose is to increase the pace and scale at which land stewards implement voluntary practices and systems to maintain and improve soil health, and thereby the long term economic and ecological vitality of agriculture in Montana. In August of 2022 a report will be shared on what was learned along with any recommendations that seem to emerge. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

[Learn how to participate.](#)

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Small-Scale, Local Producers Get Improved Insurance Coverage through New Micro Farm Policy

Agricultural producers with small-scale farms who sell locally can now get simplified insurance coverage through a new policy designed for their needs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed the new Micro Farm policy, which simplifies recordkeeping and covers post-production costs like washing and value-added products.

“USDA is focused on supporting local and regional food systems, and Micro Farm is one more example of how we’re helping agricultural producers with farms of all shapes and sizes to manage their unique operations and risk,” said Marcia Bunger, Administrator for USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA). “The Risk Management Agency values collaboration and feedback from our customers, and Micro Farm is one way we’re responding to producers’ needs.”

Micro Farm is offered through Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) and is geared to local producers. Details include:

- **Eligibility:** Micro Farm is available to producers who have a farm operation that earns an average allowable revenue of \$100,000 or less, or for carryover insureds, an average allowable revenue of \$125,000 or less. The increase in allowable revenue for a carry-over insured will allow for some farm growth in subsequent years before they become ineligible for the program. RMA’s research showed that 85% of producers who sell locally reported they made less than \$75,000 in gross sales.
- **Coverage Levels:** All coverage levels will be available to producers using Micro Farm. This will enable producers to purchase the 80% and 85% coverage levels without providing additional paperwork.
- **Underwriting and Recordkeeping Requirements:** Micro Farm minimizes underwriting and recordkeeping requirements, and producers will not have to report expenses and individual commodities.
- **Post-production Revenue:** Producers can include post-production activities as revenue, such as washing and packaging commodities or value-added products like jam.

Micro Farm is available for the 2022 crop year. Sales closing dates are Jan. 31, 2022, Feb. 28, 2022, or March 15, 2022, depending on the producer’s county.

Producers with crops insured under another crop insurance policy or a vertically integrated operation will not be eligible.

This new policy derived from research directed by the 2018 Farm Bill, and it includes feedback from producers who grow for their local communities. [See the full report.](#)

Specialty and Organic Crops

The Micro Farm policy builds on other RMA efforts to better serve specialty and organic crop growers. This includes WFRP, which provides coverage for producers with larger operations that may not be eligible for Micro Farm. RMA recently made [improvements to WFRP](#) as part of a broader set of [new policies and expanded policies](#) to assist specialty crop and organic producers.

More Information

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA Agent Locator](#). If you have difficulty finding an agent, contact your [RMA Regional Office](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at [rma.usda.gov](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In 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 [www.usda.gov](#).

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Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants

Know a Montana rancher, farmer or forestland owner who goes above and beyond in the stewardship and management of natural resources? Nominate them by March 15 for the 2022 Montana Leopold Conservation Award®. Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to land, water, and wildlife habitat management on private, working land.

Sand County Foundation and national sponsor American Farmland Trust present the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 23 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. In [Montana](#), the \$10,000 award is presented with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Rangeland Resources Committee. Nominations may be submitted on behalf of a landowner, or landowners may nominate themselves. The application can be found at [www.sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA](#).

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Higher Loan Limit Now Available for USDA Guaranteed Farm Loans

USDA Extends Disaster Set-Aside for Direct Loans Until 2022

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a higher loan limit will be available for borrowers seeking a guaranteed farm loan starting Oct. 1, 2021, from \$1.776 million to \$1.825 million.

FSA farm loans offer access to funding for a wide range of producer needs, from securing land to financing the purchase of equipment. Guaranteed loans are financed and serviced by commercial lenders. FSA

provides up to a 95% guarantee against possible financial loss of principal and interest. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.

In fiscal year 2021, FSA saw continued strong demand for guaranteed loans. FSA obligated more than \$3.4 billion in guaranteed farm ownership and operating loans. This includes nearly \$1.2 billion for beginning farmers. The number of guaranteed borrowers has grown by 10% to more than 38,750 farmers and ranchers over the last decade. FSA expects the increasing demand for farm loans to continue into fiscal year 2022.

Disaster Set-Aside Extension

USDA has additional support available to producers given the recent outbreaks of the COVID-19 Delta variant and has extended the availability of COVID-19 Disaster Set-Aside (DSA) for installments due through Jan. 31, 2022. In addition, FSA will permit a second DSA for COVID-19 and a second DSA for natural disasters for those who had an initial COVID-19 DSA. Requests for a COVID-19 DSA or a second DSA must be received no later than May 1, 2022.

Last year, FSA broadened the use of the DSA. Normally used in the wake of natural disasters, the DSA can now allow farmers with USDA farm loans who are affected by COVID-19 and determined to be eligible, to have their next payment set aside. The set-aside payment's due date is moved to the final maturity date of the loan or extended up to twelve months in the case of an annual operating loan. Any principal set-aside will continue to accrue interest until it is repaid. This will improve the borrower's cashflow in the current production cycle.

More Information

Producers can explore available options on all FSA loan options at fsa.usda.gov or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some [USDA Service Centers](#) are open to limited visitors. Contact your Service Center to set up an in-person or phone appointment. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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Inform FSA Promptly of All Changes in Farming Operation and Contact Information

It is important to promptly report any changes in your farming operation to FSA. These changes can include, but are not limited to, changes in your address, phone, or email, name changes, changes to entity membership or shares, formation or dissolution of any entity (such as a trust, partnership, LLC, LLP or corporation) that owns or operates land or owns other farming assets used in your operation, sale or purchase of land, adding or dropping leases, and any changes to financing or equipment. Participants in FSA and NRCS programs are required to timely report changes in their farming operation to their local FSA office in writing and update their CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan with necessary changes, as applicable. Failure to timely notify your local FSA office may result in ineligibility for program benefits, or delays in issuance of program payments. If you have any updates or corrections to your records, please call your local FSA office to update your records.

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FSA's Ongoing Notice of Loss Requirements

It's important for agricultural producers to report losses immediately as all disaster programs are dependent on the timely reporting of the loss. A notice of loss can be filed with USDA Farm Service Agency via phone, email, fax or scheduled office visit.

- **ELAP – Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program:** Starting in 2020, producers will have **15 days** from when the loss is first apparent, to file a **honeybee** notice of loss instead of 30 days,. This change provides consistency between ELAP and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which also has a 15-day notice of loss period for honey. **For other covered livestock losses**, including livestock feed, grazing and farm-raised fish losses, the notice of loss deadline for ELAP will remain **30 days** from when the loss is first apparent to the producer.
- **LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program:** Submit Notice of Loss within **30** calendar days of when the loss is first apparent. Producers should document the adverse weather conditions and date(s) of weather events.
- **TAP - Tree Assistance Program:** Final Date to Submit an Application and Supporting Documentation within 90 calendar days of: the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent to the producer.
- **NAP – Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program:** Submit Notice of Loss within **15** calendar days of the earlier of a natural disaster occurrence, the final planting date if planting is prevented by a natural disaster, the date that damage to the crop or loss of production becomes apparent; or the normal harvest date. **Note:** A producer's signature is required on form CCC-576 when a Notice of Loss is submitted.

Change to Policy on Filing a Notice of Loss for Grazed Forage Producers with NAP Coverage:

For the 2021 and subsequent crop years, NAP forage producers with the intended use of grazing who elect to use independent assessments or other approved alternative loss percentage methods to establish their loss are no longer required to file a CCC-576 Notice of Loss with FSA. However, a CCC-576 Application for Payment form must be submitted to FSA no later than 60 calendar days after the coverage period ends.

Producers that elect to have the grazing loss determined using similar mechanically harvested units still must timely file a CCC-576 Notice of Loss within 15 days of the disaster event or damage to the crop first becomes apparent or within 15 days of harvest.

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FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) are a resource to help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

Depending on the applicant's needs, there are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#) option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a Joint Financing loan is \$600,000 and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

To be eligible, the operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show

documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about FSA Loan programs, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has several loan programs to help you start or continue an agriculture production. Farm ownership and operating loans are available.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of targeted underserved applicants.

A targeted underserved applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities.

For purposes of this program, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

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Emergency Loans Available in Montana

FSA's Emergency Loan Program is available for agricultural producers in counties designated as primary or contiguous natural disaster areas. See map below of current Disaster Designations in Montana. Contact your local FSA office for specific designations in your area and time frames to apply. Eligible producers have **eight months** from the date of the disaster designation to apply for low-interest emergency loans to 1.) restore or replace essential property; 2.) pay all or part of production costs associated with the disaster year; 3.) pay essential family living expenses; or 4.) refinance certain debts, excluding real estate. Producers interested in applying for an emergency loan, or other FLP loans, should contact their local FSA office to set up an appointment with the Farm Loan Program staff serving your area.

- [2021 Montana Disaster Designations \(by Type\) - \(by county\)](#)
- [Emergency Loan Factsheet \(pdf\)](#)
- [FSA Farm Loan Program \(Web\)](#)

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Montana Farm and Ranch Stress Resource Clearinghouse

Montana State University Extension and an associated statewide advisory council have developed an [online clearinghouse of resources](https://msuextension.org/wellness/stress-management/mt-farm-stress-clearing-house/) for a wide range of topics related to stress and mental health. The clearinghouse was created specifically for ag producers and their families, but it contains a wealth of information for anyone interested in learning more about causes of stress, stress prevention and management, and overall mental health. To access the site, please click on this link: <https://msuextension.org/wellness/stress-management/mt-farm-stress-clearing-house/>



Montana

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LES J RISPENS

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FSA Policy Reminders: [2021 Annual Notification to FSA Customers](#)

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ERIC BASHORE

Contact information for your local office, visit: www.farmers.gov.