



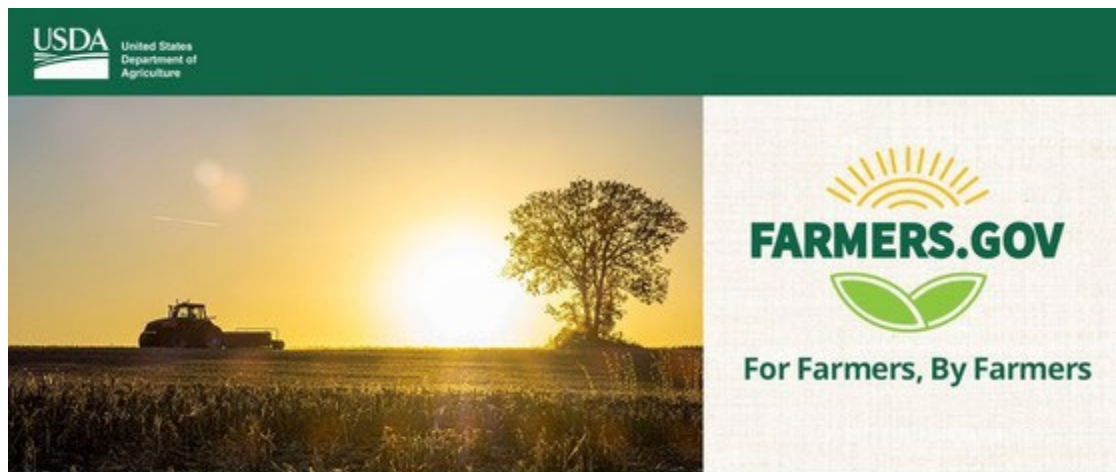
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Some USDA Service Centers in Montana are open to limited visitors by appointment only. Contact your Service Center to schedule an appointment. You can find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator. Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources 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.

May 6: Deadline to apply for the first round of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding

May 13: Deadline to enroll in the Grassland CRP

May 15: First day of Primary Nesting Season (can affect CRP Grazing)

June 10: Deadline to apply for the second round of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding

June 30: Deadline to request ELAP assistance for hauling livestock to forage in 2021.

July 15: Deadline for FSA Maps – 2022 Acreage Reporting/Crop Certification for Annually Seeded Spring Crops, Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Perennial Forage not covered under the NAP, and all other crops not required to be reported by a previous reporting date. *This is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2021 reports for these crops.*

July 15: Last day of Primary Nesting Season (can affect CRP Grazing)

July 16: CRP Haying can begin and first day of CRP Summer Grazing (requires prior approval).

Sept. 30: Deadline to enroll in Continuous CRP SAFE programs

Jan. 31, 2023: Deadline to request all ELAP assistance for 2022 calendar year losses.

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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USDA Designates 29 Montana Counties as Primary Natural Disaster Areas

This Secretarial natural disaster designation allows the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) to extend much-needed emergency credit to producers recovering from natural disasters through [emergency loans](#). Emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of essential items such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation or the refinance of certain debts. FSA will review the loans based on the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability.

According to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), these counties suffered from a drought intensity value during the growing season of 1) D2 Drought-Severe for 8 or more consecutive weeks or 2) D3 Drought-Extreme or D4 Drought-Exceptional.

Impacted Area: Montana

Triggering Disaster: Drought

Application Deadline: Jan. 3, 2023

Primary Counties Eligible:

Montana:

Beaverhead	Golden Valley	Powder River
Big Horn	Jefferson	Richland
Blaine	Lewis and Clark	Roosevelt
Broadwater	Liberty	Rosebud
Carbon	McCone	Sheridan
Cascade	Madison	Stillwater
Chouteau	Musselshell	Teton
Daniels	Petroleum	Toole
Fergus	Phillips	Valley
Garfield	Pondera	

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

Montana:

Carter	Hill	Silver Bow
Custer	Judith Basin	Sweet Grass
Dawson	Meagher	Treasure
Deer Lodge	Park	Wheatland
Flathead	Powell	Wibaux
Gallatin	Prairie	Yellowstone
Glacier	Ravalli	

Idaho: Clark, Fremont and Lemhi

North Dakota: Divide, McKenzie and Williams

Wyoming: Big Horn, Campbell, Crook, Park and Sheridan

More Resources

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help you determine program or loan options. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

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USDA Encourages Producers to Enroll in Grasslands CRP

Producers Must Apply by May 13

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages producers and landowners to enroll in the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through May 13, 2022. Grassland CRP provides a unique opportunity for farmers, ranchers, and agricultural landowners to keep land in agricultural production and supplement their income while improving their soils and permanent grass cover. The program had its highest enrollment in history in 2021 and is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's broader effort to equip producers with the tools they need to help address climate change and invest in the long-term health of our natural resources.

[Grassland CRP](#) is a federally funded voluntary working lands program. Through the program, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides annual rental payments to landowners to maintain and conserve grasslands while allowing producers to graze, hay, and produce seed on that land. Maintaining the existing permanent cover provides several benefits, including reducing erosion, providing wildlife habitat and migration corridors, and capturing and maintaining carbon in the soil and cover.

FSA provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. The annual rental rate varies by county with a national minimum rental rate of \$13 per acre for this signup. Contract duration is 10 or 15 years.

Grassland CRP National Priority Zones

Because Grassland CRP supports not only grazing operations but also biodiversity and conserving environmentally sensitive land such as that prone to wind erosion, FSA created two [National Priority Zones](#) in 2021: the Greater Yellowstone Migration Corridor and Dust Bowl Zone. As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's focus on conservation in important wildlife corridors and key seasonal ranges, for this year's signup, FSA is expanding the Greater Yellowstone Wildlife Migration Corridor Priority Zone to include seven additional counties across Montana, Wyoming, and Utah, to help protect the big-game animal migration corridor associated with Wyoming elk, mule deer, and antelope.

Offers within one of these National Priority Zones will receive an additional 15 ranking points and \$5 per acre if at least 50% of the offer is located in the zone.

Alongside Grassland CRP, producers and landowners can also 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).

Broadening Reach of Program

As part of the Agency's Justice40 efforts, producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers and military veterans, will receive 10 additional ranking points to enhance their offers.

Additionally, USDA is working to broaden the scope and reach of Grassland CRP by leveraging the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to engage historically underserved communities. CREP is a partnership program that enables states, Tribal governments, non-profit, and private entities to

partner with FSA to implement CRP practices and address high priority conservation and environmental objectives. Interested entities are encouraged to contact FSA.

More Information on CRP

Landowners and producers interested in Grassland CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before the May 13 deadline. 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. The working lands signup announced today demonstrates how much it has evolved from the original program that was primarily intended to control soil erosion and only had the option to take enrolled land out of production. The program has expanded over the years and now supports a greater variety of conservation and wildlife benefits, along with the associated 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.

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USDA Accepts 2 Million Acres in Conservation Reserve Program General Signup

This year nearly 90,000 accepted acres in Montana add to the CRP General Signup total

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting more than 2 million acres in offers from agricultural producers and landowners through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup, which included nearly 90,000 acres in Montana. This is the first of the program's multiple signups occurring in 2022. With about 3.4 million acres expiring this year, Vilsack encourages producers and landowners to consider the Grassland and Continuous signups, both of which are currently open.

Producers submitted re-enrollment offers for just over half of expiring acres, similar to the rate in 2021. Offers for new land under General CRP were considerably lower compared to last year's numbers, with fewer than 400,000 acres being offered this year versus over 700,000 acres offered last year.

It is important to note that submitting and accepting a CRP offer is the start of the process, and producers still need to develop a conservation plan before enrolling their land on October 1, 2022. Each year, during the window between offer acceptance and land enrollment, some producers change their mind and ultimately decide not to enroll some accepted acres without penalty.

The three other types of CRP — Grassland, Continuous, and CREP — are still available for either working-lands or targeted, often smaller sub-field, offers. Producers have submitted offers on nearly 260,000 acres through the Continuous and CREP signup so far this year. The Grassland signup — which last year had its highest participation ever — closes May 13, 2022.

General CRP Signup

The General CRP Signup 58 ran from Jan. 31 to March 11, 2022.

Through CRP, producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve soil health and water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat on agricultural land. In addition to the other well-documented benefits, lands enrolled in CRP are playing a key role in climate change mitigation efforts across the country.

In 2021, FSA introduced improvements to the program, which included a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This incentive provides a 3%, 5% or 10% incentive payment based on the predominant vegetation type for the practices enrolled – from grasses to trees to wetland restoration.

More Information

While the General Signup is closed, producers and landowners can still apply for the Continuous and Grassland signups by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#).

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. Learn more at fsa.usda.gov/crp.

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Showcase Your Season with #Plant2022

This planting season let's highlight the innovation and leadership demonstrated by conservation-minded farmers in our #Plant2022 campaign. We'll share your photos and stories on social media, blogs, and a nationwide storymap.

Learn more at <https://go.usa.gov/xuTqj>.

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2022 Avian Influenza in the United States - What you need to know!

To date, USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in commercial and backyard flocks in several states including Montana. Avian influenza viruses are classified as either "low pathogenic (LPAI)" or "highly pathogenic (HPAI)" based on their genetic features and the severity of the disease they cause in poultry. Caused by an influenza type A virus, HPAI can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and wild birds (especially waterfowl).

The clinical signs of birds affected with all forms of Avian Influenza may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Decreased water consumption up to 72 hours before other clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production

- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

In addition to the disease infecting domestic birds, it is important to know that wild birds can also be infected and show no signs of illness. They can carry the disease to new areas when migrating, potentially exposing domestic poultry to the virus. The [APHIS' wild bird surveillance program](#) provides an early warning system for the introduction and distribution of avian influenza viruses of concern in the United States, allowing APHIS and the poultry industry to take timely and rapid action.

With the recent detections of avian influenza in wild birds and domestic poultry in the United States, bird owners should review their biosecurity practices and stay vigilant to protect poultry and pet birds from transmission of this disease. The following bio-safety guidelines are effective methods for safeguarding commercial operations and smaller flocks:

- Backyard flock owners should practice strict biosecurity, including preventing birds from exposure and/or co-mingling with wild birds and other types of poultry.
- Shower, change clothes, and clean and disinfect footwear before entering your poultry housing areas.
- Respiratory protection such as a medical facemask would also be important and remember to always wear clean clothes when encountering healthy domestic birds.
- Carefully follow safe entry and exit procedures into your flock's clean area.
- Reduce the attractiveness for wild birds to stop at your place by cleaning up litter and spilled feed around poultry housing areas.
- If you have free range guinea fowl and waterfowl, consider bringing them into coops or flight pens under nets to prevent interaction of domesticated poultry with wild birds and their droppings.
- It is best to restrict visitors from interacting with your birds currently.
- Do not touch sick or dead wildlife and keep them away from domestic poultry
- Try not to handle sick or deceased domestic birds (if you must, use proper personal protective equipment to minimize direct contact and cautiously disinfect anything that comes into contact with the deceased and or sick bird).

As part of the existing USDA Avian Influenza response plans, Federal and State partners as well as industry are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps:

- **Quarantine** – restricting movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- **Eradicate** – depopulate the affected flock(s);
- **Monitor region** – testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine area;
- **Disinfect** – kills the virus in the affected flock locations; and
- **Test** – confirming that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

Sick or deceased domestic birds should be reported to your local veterinarian. Positive domestic cases are handled by APHIS and its partners. States that have confirmed cases of Avian Influenza should work closely with USDA-APHIS on surveillance, reporting and control efforts. Disposal methods will be evaluated on a

case-by-case basis depending on a variety of factors, including the size of the flock, space requirements, associated costs, local conditions, and applicable laws/regulations.

The United States has the strongest Avian Influenza surveillance program in the world, where we actively look for the disease and provide fair market value compensation to affected producers to encourage reporting.

If you do not raise domestic birds or have a poultry operation but you encounter sick or dead wild birds, please use bio-safety measures, and report your findings through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, this strain of Avian Influenza is a low risk to the public. While the transmission rate from animals to humans is low, it is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be shared between species. To learn more about Avian Influenza and to remain up to date on the latest related news and information, you can visit the USDA [APHIS webpage](#).

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USDA Accepting New or Modified Proposals for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is welcoming new and modified proposals from conservation partners for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative, a part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) focused on effectively managing wildlife habitat. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has expanded available practices under this initiative in response to feedback from partners.

Through SAFE, producers and landowners restore vital habitat in alignment with high-priority state wildlife conservation goals. Specifically, landowners establish wetlands, grasses, and trees. These practices are designed to enhance important wildlife populations by creating critical habitat and food sources. They also protect soil and water health by working as a barrier to sediment and nutrient run-off before they reach waterways.

Expanded Practices

To help improve the planning and implementation of the SAFE initiative, FSA is adding two new practices with the assistance of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), FSA's sister agency. In partnership with FSA, NRCS employees across the country provide CRP participants with critical conservation planning assistance, which will now include managing for early successional habitat cover establishment or management, as well as wildlife habitat planting. These additional eligible practices will enable SAFE partners to better target a wide variety of wildlife species, such as the Northern bobwhite, lesser prairie-chicken, and the New England cottontail.

As part of this year's SAFE signup, FSA will also authorize cost-share assistance for producers who would like to re-enroll acres in CRP but need assistance updating their vegetative cover to align with NRCS practice standards for early successional habitat or wildlife planting.

Submitting Proposals

Eligible entities for SAFE include government entities, non-profits, or private organizations.

Additionally, partners with SAFE projects with both General and Continuous CRP practices must submit modified proposals to continue in the program.

New and modified proposals for SAFE projects must be submitted to the FSA State Office in Bozeman in June. Contact your State Office for the state-specific deadline. More information on developing proposals is available at fsa.usda.gov/crp.

More Information

SAFE is part of the Continuous CRP signup, and producers can begin enrolling in new or updated SAFE programs beginning October 1, 2022. Meanwhile, the Continuous and Grassland signups are currently open, and producers can learn more by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). To learn more about SAFE and its benefits, see the initiative's [fact sheet](#).

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.

CRP complements other USDA conservation programs, including several programs offered by NRCS for working lands and conservation easements. Earlier this month, NRCS released its [Northern Bobwhite, Grasslands and Savannas Framework for Conservation Action](#) to help guide voluntary conservation work over the next five years across 25 states, including over 7 million acres of new conservation practices on productive, working lands, and will contribute to the Biden-Harris administration's efforts to make our nation a leader on climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience. The plan will accelerate voluntary conservation efforts for the Northern bobwhite quail and the grassland and savanna landscapes that the species calls home.

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Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. Foreign persons who have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the [AFIDA form](#) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements. The data gained from these disclosures is used in the preparation of periodic reports to the President and Congress concerning the effect of such holdings upon family farms and rural communities. Click [here](#) for more information on AFIDA.

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USDA to Provide Payments to Livestock Producers Impacted by Drought or Wildfire

New Emergency Livestock Relief benefits to be delivered through two-phased approach; compensation for 2021 forage losses.

The U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that ranchers who have approved applications through the 2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) for forage losses due to severe drought or wildfire in 2021 will soon begin receiving emergency relief payments for increases in supplemental feed costs in 2021 through the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) new [Emergency Livestock Relief Program \(ELRP\)](#).

Background

On September 30, 2021, President Biden signed into law the *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act* (P.L. 117-43). This Act includes \$10 billion in assistance to agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms and other eligible disasters experienced during calendar years 2020 and 2021. Additionally, the Act specifically targets \$750 million to provide assistance to livestock producers for losses incurred due to drought or wildfires in calendar year 2021. ELRP is part of FSA's implementation of the Act.

For impacted producers, USDA will leverage LFP data to deliver immediate relief for increases in supplemental feed costs in 2021. LFP is an important tool that provides up to 60% of the estimated replacement feed cost when an eligible drought adversely impacts grazing lands or 50% of the monthly feed cost for the number of days the producer is prohibited from grazing the managed rangeland because of a qualifying wildfire.

FSA received more than 100,000 applications totaling nearly \$670 million in payments to livestock producers under LFP for the 2021 program year.

Congress recognized requests for assistance beyond this existing program and provided specific funding for disaster-impacted livestock producers in 2021.

ELRP Eligibility – Phase One

To be eligible for an ELRP payment under phase one of program delivery, livestock producers must have suffered grazing losses in a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks or a D3 (extreme drought) or higher level of drought intensity during the 2021 calendar year, and have applied and been approved for 2021 LFP. Additionally, producers whose permitted grazing on federally managed lands was disallowed due to wildfire are also eligible for ELRP payments, if they applied and were approved for 2021 LFP.

As part of FSA's efforts to streamline and simplify the delivery of ELRP phase one benefits, producers are not required to submit an application for payment; however, they must have the following forms on file with FSA within a subsequently announced deadline as determined by the Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs:

- CCC-853, *Livestock Forage Disaster Program Application*
- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet*.
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable).
- Form FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs* (if applicable).
- Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, if applicable, for the 2021 program year.
- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*) for the ELRP producer and applicable affiliates.

ELRP Payment Calculation – Phase One

To further expedite payments to eligible livestock producers, determine eligibility, and calculate an ELRP phase one payment, FSA will utilize livestock inventories and drought-affected forage acreage or restricted animal units and grazing days due to wildfire already reported by the producer when they submitted a 2021 CCC-853, *Livestock Forage Disaster Program Application* form.

Phase one ELRP payments will be equal to the eligible livestock producer's gross 2021 LFP calculated payment multiplied by a payment percentage, to reach a reasonable approximation of increased supplemental feed costs for eligible livestock producers in 2021.

The ELRP payment percentage will be 90% for historically underserved producers, including beginning, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers, and 75% for all other producers. These payments will be subject to a payment limitation.

To qualify for the higher payment percentage, eligible producers must have a CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, form on file with FSA for the 2021 program year.

Payments to eligible producers through phase one of ELRP are estimated to total more than \$577 million.

ELRP - Phase Two

Today's announcement is only Phase One of relief for livestock producers. FSA continues to evaluate and identify impacts of 2021 drought and wildfire on livestock producers to ensure equitable and inclusive distribution of much-needed emergency relief program benefits.

Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Assistance for Crop Producers

FSA is developing a two-phased process to provide assistance to diversified, row crop and specialty crop operations that were impacted by an eligible natural disaster event in calendar years 2020 or 2021.

This program will provide assistance to crop producers and will follow a two-phased process similar to that of the livestock assistance with implementation of the first phase in the coming weeks. Phase one of the crop assistance program delivery will leverage existing [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) data as the basis for calculating initial payments.

Making the initial payments using existing safety net and risk management data will both speed implementation and further encourage participation in these permanent programs, including the Pasture, Rangeland, Forage Rainfall Index Crop Insurance Program, as Congress intended.

The second phase of the crop program will be intended to fill additional assistance gaps and cover eligible producers who did not participate in existing risk management programs.

Through proactive communication and outreach, USDA will keep producers and stakeholders informed as ERP implementation details are made available.

Additional Livestock Drought Assistance

Due to the persistent drought conditions in the Great Plains and West, FSA will be offering additional relief through the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#) to help ranchers cover above normal costs of hauling livestock to forage. This policy enhancement complements previously announced ELAP compensation for hauling feed to livestock. Soon after FSA announced the assistance for hauling feed to livestock, stakeholders were quick to point out that producers also were hauling the livestock to the feed source as well and encouraged this additional flexibility.

It is important to note that, unlike ELRP emergency relief benefits which are only applicable for eligible losses incurred in the 2021 calendar year, this ELAP livestock and feed hauling compensation will not only be retroactive for 2021 but will also be available for losses in 2022 and subsequent years.

To calculate ELAP program benefits, an [online tool](#) is currently available to help producers document and estimate payments to cover feed transportation cost increases caused by drought and will soon be updated to assist producers with calculations associated with drought related costs incurred for hauling livestock to forage

More Information

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on farmers.gov, including USDA resources specifically for producer impacted by [drought](#) and [wildfire](#) and the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, producers should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#).

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USDA To Compensate Drought-Stricken Ranchers for Above Normal Costs to Haul Livestock to Forage

Due to the persistent drought conditions in the Great Plains and West, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering additional relief through the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#) to help ranchers cover above normal costs of hauling livestock to forage or other grazing acres. This policy enhancement complements previously announced ELAP compensation for hauling feed to livestock. ELAP livestock and feed hauling assistance is retroactive for 2021 and will be available for losses in 2022 and subsequent years.

ELAP Assistance Overview

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or loss conditions as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture. In addition to ELAP covering feed transportation costs where grazing and hay resources have been depleted, ELAP now also covers transportation costs associated with hauling livestock to feed sources. This includes places where:

- Drought intensity is D2 for eight consecutive weeks as indicated by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#); or
- Drought intensity is D3 or greater.

Additionally, FSA has updated ELAP policy to also cover water hauling in areas experiencing D2 for eight consecutive weeks, lowering the drought intensity threshold (previously D3) triggering the availability of this financial assistance.

Eligibility

To be eligible for ELAP assistance, livestock must be intended for grazing and producers must have incurred feed or livestock transportation costs on or after Jan. 1, 2021. Although producers will self-certify losses and expenses to FSA, producers are encouraged to maintain good records and retain receipts and related documentation in the event these documents are requested for review by the local FSA County Committee.

Payment Calculations

USDA will reimburse eligible ranchers 60% of livestock transportation costs above what would have been incurred in a normal year. Producers qualifying as underserved (socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning or military veteran) will be reimbursed for 90% of the feed transportation cost above what would have been incurred in a normal year.

USDA uses a national cost formula to determine reimbursement costs that will not include the first 25 miles and distances exceeding 1,000 transportation miles. The calculation will also exclude the normal cost to transport hay or feed if the producer normally purchases some feed. For 2021, the initial cost formula of \$6.60 per mile will be used (before the percentage is applied).

Online Decision Tool

Producers can use the updated ELAP Feed Livestock Transportation Producer Tool to help producers document and estimate payments to cover both feed and livestock transportation costs caused by drought. The tool (a Microsoft Excel workbook) and other resources are available at fsa.usda.gov/elap. Final payments may vary depending on eligibility.

Eligible ranchers should contact their FSA county office to apply for ELAP assistance. To simplify the application process, ranchers can print or email payment estimates generated by the online tool for submission to FSA. The deadline to request ELAP assistance for hauling livestock to forage in 2021 is June 30, 2022. The deadline to request all ELAP assistance for 2022 calendar year losses will be Jan. 31, 2023.

More Information

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on farmers.gov, including USDA resources specifically for producer impacted by [drought](#) and [wildfire](#) and the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, producers should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#).

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USDA Announces Investment in Six Watershed Infrastructure Projects to Benefit Rural and Historically Underserved Communities in Montana

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$420 million in 132 infrastructure projects in 31 states, including a [\\$330,000 investment in six projects in Montana](#). These projects include rehabilitating dams, flood prevention, and watershed restoration projects, and they are part of the Biden-Harris Administration's implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), building on a \$166 million nationwide investment announced earlier this year.

Projects in Montana include:

- **Fort Peck Tribes – Wolf Point Irrigation Project BIL** WFPO funding will be used to implement ag-water management methods to build towards climate resiliency. Funds are needed to modernize the Wolf Point Irrigation Project water delivery system.
- **Helena Valley Irrigation District BIL** WFPO funding will be used to implement ag-water management methods to build towards climate resiliency. Funds are needed to modernize the Helena Valley Irrigation District water delivery system.
- **Kinsey Irrigation District BIL** WFPO funds will be used to perform a feasibility study on a proposed watershed project that would rehabilitate and modernize the Kinsey Irrigation District water delivery system located in the Cabin Creek – Yellowstone River watershed near Kinsey, Montana.
- **Missoula Conservation District BIL** WFPO funding will be used to implement ag-water management methods to build towards climate resiliency. Funds are needed to modernize the Missoula Conservation District Irrigation District water delivery system.
- **Tongue & Yellowstone River Irrigation District BIL** WFPO funding will be used to implement ag-water management methods to build towards climate resiliency. Funds are needed to modernize the Tongue & Yellowstone River Irrigation District delivery system.

- **Wyota Irrigation Project** BIL WFPO funding will be used to implement ag-water management methods to build towards climate resiliency. Funds are needed to modernize the Wyota Irrigation Project water delivery system.

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New Report Shows Economic Value of Farm Bill Conservation Easements

This new publication is a partnership among the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Montana Association of Land Trusts, and the Heart of the Rockies Initiative. The report analyzes the economic impact of conservation easements in Montana. In particular, the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program which was created in the 2014 Farm Bill and is designed for farmers and ranchers to work with the NRCS and land trusts across the country to conserve farm and ranch lands, strengthen America's food production, and protect wildlife habitat through voluntary conservation easements. A conservation easement is a private property right utilized by a landowner that typically restricts development of the land but maintains almost all agricultural management options and opportunities. The report shows:

- Between 2014 and 2021 the NRCS, farm and ranch families, and land trusts (or state agency) teamed up to invest \$109 million from the Farm Bill ALE program to conserve 289,000 acres of ag lands in 22 Montana counties.
- Every ALE Farm Bill dollar allocated to farm and ranch conservation yielded \$1.89 of economic activity, nearly doubling the positive impact of the Farm Bill funding.
- 95% of the allocated funds were used to directly assist with farm and ranch agricultural operations and expansion, farm and ranch family succession planning, business strength and stability, and direct purchase of farm and ranch equipment.
- These dollars produced a total economic impact of \$182 million for Montana's economy, supported 1,057 local jobs and \$41.5 million in labor income, and contributed \$99 million to Montana's Gross Domestic Product.

Find the full report on the [Montana Association of Land Trusts](#), [Heart of the Rockies Initiative](#), or [NRCS](#) websites.

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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) extended program flexibilities to Approved Insurance Providers (AIPs) and agricultural producers until June 30, 2022, or later.

"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 Updates Livestock Insurance Options to Offer Better Protection, Flexibility

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has updated three key crop insurance options for livestock producers: the Dairy Revenue Protection (DRP), Livestock Gross Margin (LGM), and Livestock Risk Protection (LRP). USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) revised the insurance options to reach more producers, offer greater flexibility for protecting their operations, and ultimately, better meet the needs of the country's swine, dairy, and cattle producers. The updates were published last week for the 2023 crop year, which begins July 1, 2022.

"Great and sound customer service is the most important thing we can provide our nation's producers, making sure the programs and products we offer give them the most useful tools for covering their risks," said RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger. "Agriculture is not a static industry, and these updates reflect the importance we place on always knowing the evolving needs of producers and offering the most people the best risk management tools we can."

DRP is designed to insure against unexpected declines in the quarterly revenue from milk sales relative to a guaranteed coverage level; LGM protects against the loss of gross margin (or livestock's market value minus feed costs); and LRP provides protection against price declines.

Producers will now have more flexibility for DRP, LGM, and LRP, when indemnities are used to pay premiums, which can help producers manage their operation's cash flow. With these updates, producers can now have both LGM and LRP policies, although they cannot insure the same class of livestock for the same time period or have the same livestock insured under multiple policies.

Additional updates by insurance option include:

Dairy Revenue Protection

- Dairy producers are now able to continue coverage even if they experience a disaster, such as a barn fire, at their operation.

Livestock Gross Margin

- Cattle, Dairy, and Swine coverage has been expanded, making it available in all counties in all 50 states.

Livestock Risk Protection

- Insurance companies are now required to pay indemnities within 30 days, rather than the previous 60 days, following the receipt of the claim form.
- Head limits have been increased:

oFed Cattle: 12,000 head per endorsement and 25,000 head per crop year

oFeeder Cattle: 12,000 head per endorsement and 25,000 head per crop year

oSwine: 70,000 head per endorsement and 750,000 head per crop year

- The termination date under LRP has been extended from June 30 to August 31
- Location reporting requirements have been relaxed to list only state and county, instead of the precise legal location.

Learn more on [RMA's Livestock Insurance Plans webpage](#). 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](#).

More Information

These improvements to livestock insurance options build on other efforts by USDA to improve programs for livestock producers. Recently, USDA expanded the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish to cover transportation costs of livestock to feed as well as feed to livestock. And USDA expanded Dairy Margin Coverage to enable dairy producers to enroll supplemental coverage.

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).

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Three Finalists Selected for Montana Leopold Conservation Award

Three finalists have been selected for the prestigious Montana Leopold Conservation Award®.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners 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 24 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. In [Montana](#), the \$10,000 award is presented with the [Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation](#), and the [Rangeland Resources Committee](#).

“For generations, Montana’s farmers and ranchers have been dedicated stewards of our land and water resources,” said Governor Greg Gianforte. “Through the Leopold Conservation Award, we recognize the farmer, rancher, or forested landowner who has set the standard as a caretaker of our working landscapes.”

The finalists are:

- **Goggins Ranch of Ennis in Madison County:** Goggins Ranch is two properties owned and managed by family members Pat Goggins, Janet Goggins Endecott, and Rachel Endecott. They've established a diversity of plant species along the riparian areas of two perennial streams to provide habitat for fish, aquatic and pollinator insect species, migratory birds, and wild game like moose, deer, and bear. They invest in water conservation practices that maximize forage production for their beef cattle, and minimize waste of irrigation water.
- **Pete and Meagan Lannan of Livingston in Park County:** Regenerative agriculture practices used at the Lannan's Barney Creek Livestock ranch are improving the soil and building the resiliency of rangeland. Intensive rotational grazing of their beef cattle is designed around being ecologically and economically profitable. Efforts such as fencing off riparian areas are improving water quality while providing quality habitat for wildlife including sandhill cranes, bees and mule deer.
- **Kurt and PJ Myllymaki of Stanford in Judith Basin County:** The Myllymakis use cover crops to graze their beef cattle and to improve soil health. Wind and water erosion are greatly reduced when soil is continuously covered with a living crop. Having the option to graze cover crops gives their native rangeland pastures more time to rest. Wildlife populations have increased in diversity and numbers with the improved wildlife habitat and winter cover that cover crops and healthy rangeland provide.

Earlier this year, Montana landowners were encouraged to apply (or be nominated) for the award. Applications were reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders.

The award recipient will be revealed at the Montana Range Tour on August 30. Last year's recipient was Hidden Hollow Hideaway Cattle and Guest Ranch, owned by the Flynn family of Townsend in Broadwater County.

"These award finalists are examples of how Aldo Leopold's land ethic is alive and well today. Their dedication to conservation shows how individuals can improve the health of the land while producing food and fiber," said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and CEO.

"As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of the Montana award finalists," said John Piotti, AFT President and Chief Executive Officer. "At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three."

The Montana Leopold Conservation Award is made possible through the generous support of American Farmland Trust, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Rangeland Resources Committee, Sand County Foundation, Sibanye-Stillwater, TC Energy, Northwest Farm Credit Services, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, C Lazy J Livestock Inc., Ducks Unlimited, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, McDonald's, Montana Farm Bureau Federation, Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, Soil and Water Conservation Society, and World Wildlife Fund.

In his influential 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage, which he called "an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity."

For more information on the award, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org.

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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](#).

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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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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:** Producers will have **15 days** from when the loss is first apparent, to file a **honeybee** notice of loss. 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:

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.

- [Montana Disaster Designation Information](#)
- [Emergency Farm Loans](#)
- [Farm Loan Programs](#)

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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](#) 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.

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Montana

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

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Regional Director:
ERIC BASHORE

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