



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Nebraska FSA and NRCS State Office Newsletter - July 2023

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## A Message from the FSA Acting State Executive Director

On behalf of county Farm Service Agency offices across the state, I want to thank all of our farmer and rancher customers for your assistance with spring acreage certification, which had a deadline of July 17. Most of our offices have wrapped up, or are in the process of wrapping up, this annual activity.

Last week USDA announced the acceptance of Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres that were offered as part of the most recent sign-up. Nearly 2.7 million acres were allowed into the program nationwide, with Nebraska having the second highest number of accepted acres at 417,865 acres. Those whose CRP offers were accepted now begin the process of working on a conservation plan for those acres with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff. Landowners will have the chance to review these plans before signing the final CRP paperwork with FSA, so please pay attention to contacts from your local USDA Service Center on this program as the timeline to complete this process is tight.

We are nearing the Aug. 1 deadline for those interested in serving on their FSA County Committee to turn in their nomination forms. County committee members are local farmers and ranchers elected by their peers to serve in a role that advises the activities of their county FSA office. It's a great way to give back to your local agricultural community. If you are interested in learning more, call your county FSA office and ask for your county executive director. She or he will be able to take you through all the requirements and assist with paperwork.

We have included two articles below that are specific to organic producers, one for marketing assistance for organic dairies with an Aug. 11 application deadline and one for cost-share on certification expenses for organic producers with an Oct. 31 application deadline. If your operation fits into either of these categories, please take a look at the articles below. Please also note the NRCS article on organic transition funding that is found below.

That's all for this month. Stay safe in the heat as we slide into August.

--Tim Divis

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## **USDA Accepts Nearly 2.7 Million Acres in Grassland CRP Signup**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting offers for nearly 2.7 million acres from agricultural producers and private landowners through this year's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grassland signup. This program allows producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while protecting grasslands and further CRP conservation efforts. Grassland CRP is part of the Biden-Harris administration's broader effort to address climate change and conserve natural resources.

Additionally, USDA has accepted more than 1 million acres through the General CRP signup, and more than 465,800 acres have been submitted through the Continuous CRP signup so far this year.

Top states include:

- Colorado, 430,899 acres;
- Nebraska, 417,865 acres; and
- South Dakota, 325,443 acres.

Grassland CRP leverages working lands practices to improve biodiversity and conserve environmentally sensitive land. Producers can still conduct common grazing practices, such as haying, mowing or harvesting seed from the enrolled land, which supports agricultural production.

To learn more, [read the news release](#).

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## **Deadline Aug. 11 to Apply for Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance**

The Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) was created to assist certified organic dairy producers facing a unique set of challenges in recent years, including higher costs attributed to the pandemic and drought conditions across the country.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is providing financial assistance for a producer's projected marketing costs in 2023 based on 2022 costs. ODMAP provides a one-time cost-share payment, based on marketing costs, on pounds of organic milk marketed in the 2022 calendar year.

Organic dairy producers should apply by Aug. 11, 2023, at their local USDA Service Center.

[Learn more](#).

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## **Organic Certification Cost Share Program Assists Organic Producers With Costs Associated with Organic Certification**

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting applications for the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP). OCCSP assists producers with the costs of organic certification. FSA will cover up to 75% of costs associated with organic certification, up to \$750 for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and state organic program fees (California only). OCCSP will cover costs incurred from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023.

Applications are due Oct. 31, 2023. To apply, producers and handlers should contact the FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#). As part of completing the OCCSP application, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses.

Additional OCCSP details can be found on the [OCCSP webpage](#). More information about these initiatives and more can be found at [farmers.gov/organic-transition-initiative](https://farmers.gov/organic-transition-initiative).

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# Unauthorized Disposition of Grain Results in Financial Penalties

If loan grain has been disposed of through feeding, selling or any other form of disposal without prior written authorization from the county office staff, it is considered unauthorized disposition. The financial penalties for unauthorized dispositions are severe and your name will be placed on a loan violation list for a two-year period. Always call before you haul any grain under loan.

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## Livestock Indemnity Program: Call FSA Within 30 Days of Livestock Losses, Injury

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides financial benefits to producers who suffer livestock losses above normal mortality due to adverse weather, which can include extreme heat and other natural disasters. Producers also can receive some compensation for livestock that have been injured as a direct result of an eligible adverse weather event and were sold at a reduced price due to that injury within 30 calendar days of the end date of the weather event.

Livestock producers who have experienced weather-related livestock losses or injury are reminded that reporting and documenting those losses is an important part of the LIP application process. Producers must report losses or injury within 30 days of when those livestock losses or injury become apparent. A phone call to the county FSA office can serve as official notice of loss.

Adequate documentation must be provided that proves the death or injury of eligible livestock occurred as a direct result of an eligible loss condition in the calendar year for which benefits are being requested. Documentation also must provide sufficient data that identifies the quantity and the livestock kind/type and weight range. Documents providing acceptable evidence may include, but are not limited to, any or a combination of the following:

- contemporaneous producer records existing at the time of event - pictures with a date
- rendering truck receipts or certificates
- veterinary records
- records assembled for tax purposes
- private insurance documents
- bank or other loan documents
- brand inspection records

Livestock owners or contract growers who suffered livestock losses will file a notice of loss and an application for payment at the USDA Service Center responsible for the physical location county where the livestock deaths or injuries occurred. While livestock owners and contract growers **must file the notice of loss by 30 calendar days of when the**

***loss is first apparent to the participant***, producers have until March 1, 2024, to file the application for payment and provide the supporting documentation for 2023 losses.

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## **Transition Expiring CRP Land to Beginning, Veteran or Underserved Farmers and Ranchers**

CRP contract holders are encouraged to transition their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to beginning, veteran or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers through the Transition Incentives Program (TIP). TIP provides annual rental payments to the landowner or operator for up to two additional years after the CRP contract expires.

CRP contract holders no longer need to be a retired or retiring owner or operator to transition their land. TIP participants must agree to sell, have a contract to sell, or agree to lease long term (at least five years) land enrolled in an expiring CRP contract to a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who is not a family member.

Beginning, veteran or social disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and CRP participants may enroll in TIP beginning two years before the expiration date of the CRP contract. The TIP application must be submitted prior to completing the lease or sale of the affected lands. New landowners or renters that return the land to production must use sustainable grazing or farming methods.

For more information, contact your county USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

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## **Financial Assistance Application Process Opens for USDA Farm Loan Borrowers Who Have Faced Discrimination**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced the opening of the financial assistance application process for eligible farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) directs USDA to provide this assistance. Since the law's passage, USDA has worked diligently to design the program in accordance with significant stakeholder input.

The program website, [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov), is now open. The website includes an English- and Spanish-language application that applicants can download or submit via an e-filing portal, information on how to obtain technical assistance in-person or virtually, and additional resources and details about the program.

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination by USDA in its farm loan programs prior to January 1, 2021, and/or are currently debtors with assigned or assumed USDA farm loan debt that was the subject of USDA discrimination that occurred prior to January 1, 2021, are eligible for this program.

To apply, borrowers have the option to apply via the e-filing portal at [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov) or submit paper-based forms via mail or in-person delivery to the program's local offices. The application process will be open from July 7 to October 31, 2023. Under the planned timeline, applications will be reviewed in November and December, with payments reaching recipients soon thereafter. Importantly, applicants should know that the application process is not on a first come, first served, basis. All applications received or postmarked before the October 31 deadline will be considered.

To support producers throughout the application process, USDA is ensuring that organizations with extensive experience conducting outreach to farm organizations are able to support individuals who may be eligible for the program. These groups include [AgrAbility](#), [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#), [Farmers' Legal Action Group](#), [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#), [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#), [Land Loss Prevention Program](#), [National Young Farmers Coalition](#), and [Rural Coalition](#).

To learn more, [read the full news release](#).

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## **EZ Guaranteed Loans Offer Streamlined Process**

*Options Help More Beginning, Small and Urban Producers Gain Access to Credit*

Producers can apply for a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans. EZ Guarantee Loans use a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved, and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to \$100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations.

A new category of lenders will join traditional lenders, such as banks and credit unions, in offering USDA EZ Guarantee Loans. Microlenders, which include Community Development Financial Institutions and Rural Rehabilitation Corporations, will be able to offer their customers up to \$50,000 of EZ Guaranteed Loans, helping to reach urban areas and underserved producers. Banks, credit unions and other traditional USDA-approved lenders, can offer customers up to \$100,000 to help with agricultural operation costs.

EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent.

For more information about the available types of FSA farm loans, contact your county USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](https://fsa.usda.gov/farmloans).

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## **July FSA Loan Interest Rates**

### **OPERATING/OWNERSHIP**

Operating: 4.5%

Operating – Microloan: 4.5%

Farm Ownership: 4.875%

Farm Ownership - Joint Financing: 2.875%

Farm Ownership - Down Payment: 1.5%  
Emergency - Actual Loss: 3.75%

#### **FARM STORAGE FACILITY LOAN**

3-year term: 4.125%  
5-year term: 3.875%  
7-year term: 3.750%  
10-year term: 3.750%  
12-year term: 3.750%

#### **MARKETING ASSISTANCE**

Commodity Loan: 6.125%

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## **NRCS Announces \$75 Million to Assist Producers Transitioning to Organic as Part of USDA's Organic Transition Initiative**



USDA announced its \$75 million investment in conservation assistance for producers transitioning to organic production. As part of the multi-agency [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will dedicate financial and technical assistance to a new organic management standard and partner with new organic technical experts to increase staff capacity and expertise.

The investment, which includes funds from the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), will help build new and better markets and income streams, strengthen local and regional food systems, and increase affordable food supply for more Americans, while promoting climate-smart agriculture and ensuring equity for all producers.

#### **Direct Farmer Assistance**

NRCS will dedicate \$70 million to assist producers with a [new organic management standard](#) under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

NRCS will help producers adopt the new organic management standard, which allows flexibility for producers to get the assistance and education they need such as attending workshops or requesting help from experts or mentors. It supports conservation practices required for organic certification and may provide foregone income reimbursement for dips in production during the transition period.

Higher payment rates and other options are available for underserved producers including socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran, and limited resource farmers and ranchers.

#### **How to Apply**

Eligible producers include farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and other producers beginning or in the process of transitioning to organic certification. NRCS will announce

state-specific deadlines later this year, after which producers can apply through NRCS at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

### **Notice of Funding for Seven New Positions**

NRCS will dedicate \$5 million to partner with six organic technical experts through five-year agreements. The organic experts will develop regional networks and support NRCS staff who provide services to USDA customers. These services include hosting hands-on organic training and fielding organic-related staff questions. One organic research position will support this network. A [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#), which closed on June 11, 2023, outlined requirements for proposals from regional organizations and partners.

For more information, visit [farmers.gov/organic](https://farmers.gov/organic).

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## **USDA Announces Historic Investment in Wildlife Conservation, Expands Partnership to Include Additional Programs**

USDA is expanding its work on wildlife conservation by investing at least \$500 million over the next five years and by leveraging all available conservation programs, including the [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP), through its [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW) effort. These commitments will ramp up the conservation assistance for farmers, ranchers, private forest owners and tribes with a focus on working lands in key geographies across the country as well as hiring for key conservation positions.

The funding will help deliver a series of cohesive [Frameworks for Conservation Action](#), which establish a common vision across the partnership of public and private interests and goals for delivering conservation resources in a given ecosystem, combining cutting-edge science with local knowledge.

The new funding includes \$250 million from the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and \$250 million from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

[Read more in the news release.](#)

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## **Dates to Remember**

**July 31, 2023** – FSA deadline for enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) CLEAR30 Signup

**Aug. 1, 2023** – FSA deadline for producers to request a farm transfer or a farm reconstitution

**Aug. 1, 2023** – FSA County Committee Election candidate nomination form must be returned by close of business

**Aug. 11, 2023** – FSA deadline to apply for Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program

**Sept. 4, 2023** – USDA Service Centers closed for federal holiday



*\*\*\*Please note any above NAP calendar reference may not be inclusive for all NAP-covered crops; NAP participants should contact their County FSA Office to confirm important program deadlines.*

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## **State of Nebraska Offers Private Well Owners Reverse Osmosis System Rebate Option**

The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) is offering private well owners the opportunity to access the Private Well Reverse Osmosis Rebate Program.

Applications are being accepted now and will be reviewed for consideration on a month-to-month basis. Submitted applications will be given equal consideration as long as funding for the program remains available in the month in which the application is submitted. Participation in the rebate program requires pre-approval from NDEE. The installation of any reverse osmosis small water treatment system cannot begin until a rebate agreement is signed between the private well owner and NDEE.

Private well reverse osmosis system rebates are available to property owners of private wells with drinking water test levels above 10 parts per million (ppm) of nitrate. Applicants will be eligible for up to \$4,000 in rebates per small treatment installation that is effective in the removal of nitrate to a level below 10 ppm. Testing costs, purchase price of the system, and installation costs are eligible expenses that can be included in a rebate application.

For more information on this opportunity, visit the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy website to [read the news release](#).



### **Nebraska FSA and NRCS State Office Information**

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Visit the Nebraska FSA website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/ne](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ne).

Visit the Nebraska NRCS website at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/ne](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/ne).

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