

In This Issue:

- [Twitter Livestream on Mental Health Support for Farmers and Ranchers on May 20](#)
- [USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic, Transitioning Producers](#)
- [USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators](#)
- [USDA Accepting New or Modified Proposals for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement](#)
- [Selected Interest Rates for May 2022](#)

Twitter Livestream on Mental Health Support for Farmers and Ranchers on May 20

America's farmers and ranchers are resilient, but even the most stalwart face mental health challenges. In observance of Mental Health Awareness Month this May, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is hosting "A Conversation on Farm Stress and Mental Health" livestream on Friday, May 20, at 3 p.m. Eastern on Twitter.



The event will be moderated by USDA Rural Health Liaison Kellie Kubena. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Dr. Jewel Bronaugh will be joined by Xochitl Torres Small, Under Secretary for Rural Development, Zach Ducheneaux, administrator for USDA's Farm Service Agency, Brenda Martin, Ph.D., national program leader for USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and Richard Ball, president of National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

[Join the Livestream](#)

USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic, Transitioning Producers

Agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic, along with producers and handlers who are transitioning to organic production, can now apply for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Organic and Transitional Education Certification Program](#) (OTECP) and [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), which help producers and handlers cover the cost of organic certification, along with other related expenses. Applications for OTECP and OCCSP are both due October 31, 2022.



OTECP covers:

- Certification costs for organic producers and handlers (25% up to \$250 per category).
- Eligible expenses for transitional producers, including fees for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan (75% up to \$750).

- Registration fees for educational events (75% up to \$200).
- Soil testing (75% up to \$100).

Meanwhile, OCCSP covers 50% or up to \$500 per category of certification costs in 2022. This cost share for certification is available for each of these categories: crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and State organic program fees.

Producers can receive cost share through both OTECP and OCCSP. Both OTECP and OCCSP cover costs incurred from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. Producers have until October 31, 2022 to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

To apply, producers and handlers should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at their local USDA Service Center. As part of completing the OCCSP applications, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses. Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through participating State agencies. Additional details can be found on the [OTECP](#) and [OCCSP](#) webpages.

USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators

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

Producers can apply for a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. 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 local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/farmloans.

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 CITY 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.

Selected Interest Rates for May 2022

90- Day Treasury Bill	0.375%
Farm Operating Loans - Direct	2.875%
Farm Ownership Loans - Direct	3.375%
Farm Ownership Loans - Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.50%
Emergency Loans	3.75%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 Years)
Commodity Loans 1996 - Present

2.625%
2.750%

USDA-Farm Service Agency North Carolina State Office

4407 Bland Road
Suite 175
Raleigh, NC 27609

Phone: 919-875-4800
Fax: 844-325-6874

Bob Etheridge
State Executive Director

Bob.Etheridge@usda.gov
919-875-4802

STATE COMMITTEE

T. Pender Sharp
John E. Ashe, Jr.
Cynthia Drumwright
Phillip C. Farland
Aaron Martin

DIVISION CHIEFS

Tracie Jones
Administrative Officer

Tracie.Jones@usda.gov
919-875-4848

Rob Satterfield
Chief Farm Programs

Rob.Satterfield@usda.gov
919-875-4824

Paula Nicholls
Chief Farm Loan Programs

Paula.nicholls@usda.gov
919-875-4854

James Davis
Chief Price Support Programs

Jamesa.Davis@usda.gov
919-875-4818

Alicia Best
Acting State Public Affairs/
Outreach Specialist

Alicia.Best@usda.gov
919-875-4803