



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Oklahoma Newsletter - February 2024

Oklahoma

Natural Resources Conservation Service



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A Message from the State Conservationist

The 2024 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is well underway in Oklahoma. Through ActNow, an expedited funding process for some key conservation activities, we have already obligated over 300 EQIP contracts on 35,000 acres this year. EQIP and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracting will continue to be a priority for staff over the next few months, and we are hoping to wrap up contracting early this year. Staffing and training are also priorities and there continues to be jobs announced on the USAJobs.gov website on a regular basis. There is currently an announcement for both pathways interns as well as recent graduates (those who will graduate in May or have graduated in the past 2 years), and other entry level positions are coming up on a regular basis. As we hire and onboard new staff, we are excited to get them out in the field and learning all about agriculture and forestry in Oklahoma and how, together with our landowners, we can assist with addressing resource concerns through our conservation planning process.



Jeanne Hamilton

State Conservationist

NRCS Seeks Public Comment on 8 Conservation Practices

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is seeking [public comment](#) on proposed revisions to eight national conservation practice standards. Comments are due March 4, 2024.

Proposed revisions to the national conservation practice standards include:

- Field Border (Code 386);
- Filter Strip (Code 393);
- Grazing Management (Code 528);
- Hedgerow Planting (Code 422);
- Mulching (Code 484);
- Seasonal Water Management for Wildlife (Code 646);
- Structure for Water Control (Code 587); and
- Wetland Restoration (Code 657).

Proposed text can be found on [this NRCS webpage](#). Changes are included in [this notice on the Federal Register](#). Comments should be submitted via regulations.gov or via mail by March 4, 2024.

NRCS regularly reviews all national conservation practices to seek opportunities to increase flexibility and incorporate new technologies to help the nation's farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners better protect natural resources on their working lands. NRCS's conservation practices offer guidelines for planning, installing, operating and maintaining conservation practices nationwide.

Conservation Practice of the Month

Prescribed Burning (code 338)



There are several conservation practices that farmers and ranchers are already doing that are tied to Climate-Smart Agriculture. [Prescribed Burning \(code 338\)](#) practice is applying a planned fire to a predetermined area of land for conservation purposes that include management of unwanted vegetation, improved soil health and others.

More information about [NRCS Conservation Practices](#).

Job Postings

Current Vacancy Announcements:

- [Soil Conservationist Student Trainee](#) closes Feb. 20
- [Engineer Student Trainee](#) closes Feb. 20
- [Rangeland Conservationist \(entry level\)](#) closes Feb. 23
- [Soil Conservationist \(entry level\)](#) closes Feb. 23
- [Civil Engineer/ Agriculture Engineer \(entry level\)](#) closes Feb. 23

The best way to stay updated on job postings is to check [USA Jobs](#) often and sign up for notifications for job announcements.

All jobs with NRCS are listed and posted on USAJobs.

[NRCS Recruitment Video](#) - Your Field, Your World, Your Future

Photo of the Month



Photo by Laina Buellesfeld, Garfield County. Winners are highlighted here and the [Oklahoma NRCS Webpage](#). To enter a photo in this month's contest, email the full resolution photo with photographer's name and county where taken for credit to NRCSinfo-OK@usda.gov.

Dates to Remember

NRCS and FSA will have representatives at the following events/meetings if you have questions or want to visit.

February

- [Crossroads of Oklahoma Farm Show in El Reno, Feb. 22- 24](#)
- [OACD State Meeting in OKC, Feb. 25-27](#)
- [Oklahoma Local Ag Summit in Edmond, Feb. 28- Mar. 1](#)

March

- [Tulsa Home and Garden Show, Mar. 7-10](#)
- [Oklahoma Youth Expo in OKC, Mar. 11-22](#)

April

- [Expo Farm Expo in Woodward, Apr. 5-7](#)
 - [National Land and Range Judging Contest in El Reno, Apr. 30- May 2](#)
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USDA Now Accepting Farm Loan Payments Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that most farm loan borrowers will soon be able to make payments to their direct loans online through the Pay My Loan feature on farmers.gov in early February. Pay My Loan is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, especially for producers who may have limited time during the planting or harvest seasons to visit a local FSA office; modernize and improve customer service; provide additional customer self-service tools; and expand credit access to assist more producers.

On average, local USDA Service Centers process more than 225,000 farm loan payments each year. Pay My Loan gives most borrowers an online repayment option and relieves them

from needing to call, mail, or visit a Service Center to pay their loan installment. Farm loan payments can now be made at the borrower's convenience, on their schedule and outside of FSA office hours.

Pay My Loan also provides time savings for FSA's farm loan employees by minimizing manual payment processing activities. This new service for producers means that farm loan employees will have more time to focus on reviewing and processing new loans or servicing requests.

The Pay My Loan feature can be accessed at farmers.gov/loans. To use the payment feature, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). This initial release only allows individuals with loans to make online payments. For now, borrowers with jointly payable checks will need to continue to make loan payments through their local office.

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate the Farm Loan Program customer-facing business process. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a direct loan application annually, FSA has made various improvements including:

- The [Online Loan Application](#), an interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet, and build a farm operating plan.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the direct loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.
- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), which reduced loan applications by more than half, from 29 pages to 13 pages.

More Information

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

Oklahoma USDA Encourages Producers Participating in Conservation Reserve Program to Consider Forest Management Incentive



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering financial assistance to agricultural producers and private landowners enrolled in its Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to improve the health of their forests. The Forest Management Incentive, available through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), can help participants with forest management practices, such as brush management and prescribed burning.

The Forest Management Incentive is available to participants with active CRP contracts with forest cover that are not within two years of expiring. The incentive is a payment to eligible CRP participants who properly completed authorized forest management practice activities to improve the condition of resources, promote forest management and enhance wildlife habitat.

Forest management practices include brush management, herbaceous weed control, prescribed burning, firebreaks, development of early successional habitat and forest stand improvement. Additional information is available in our Forest Management Incentive [fact sheet](#).

Participants can now submit offers for the Forest Management Incentive. Interested producers should contact the FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (Pub. L. 117-169) and the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), extended the authority and provided funding for the Forest Management Incentive until 2031.

The Forest Management Incentive was launched in 2020 and is one of the many natural resource conservation options available through CRP. Currently, the Forest Management Incentive has participants in 27 states.

Producers not currently participating in CRP can now submit offers for Continuous CRP. [Learn more](#).

USDA to Issue \$306 Million in Final Payments to Producers Impacted by 2020 and 2021 Natural Disasters

The U. S Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing final [Emergency Relief Program](#) (ERP) payments totaling approximately \$306 million to eligible commodity and specialty crop producers who incurred losses due to natural disasters in 2020 and 2021. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will begin issuing these additional payments to eligible producers this week.

Recipients of the additional payment are limited to those producers who received ERP Phase One payments from FSA that were calculated based on crop insurance indemnities. Initially, ERP Phase One payments to producers who were indemnified through Federal crop insurance, were subject to a 75% payment factor. FSA has since determined that adequate funding exists to provide an additional 3.5% ERP Phase One payment to producers who had

crop insurance increasing the overall payment factor to 78.5%. These additional ERP Phase One payments are subject to FSA payment limitation provisions as outlined in the [ERP Phase One fact sheet](#).

Because ERP Phase One payments to producers of noninsured crops covered by FSA NAP policies were originally paid at 100%, there will be no additional payments issued to these producers for 2020 and 2021 losses.

The *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act, 2021* (P.L. 117-43) provided \$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. In 2022, FSA implemented ERP Phase One, which delivered \$7.5 billion in payments to commodity and specialty crop producers. For Phase One, ERP used a streamlined process with pre-filled application forms, leveraging crop insurance indemnities or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) payments on file with USDA.

Separately, through the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328) Congress allocated approximately \$3.2 billion in funding to cover necessary expenses related to losses of revenue, quality or production losses of crops. Enrollment is ongoing for ERP 2022, which covers losses to crops, trees, bushes and vines due to qualifying, calendar year 2022 natural disaster events including wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture, qualifying drought and related conditions.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).



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