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## Staci's Corner

June- the days get longer, the sun gets hotter and the hay fields start getting ready to be cut. We are processing the 2023 Spring Crop Acreage Reports right now, so remember to check your appointment date and let us know if you planted, what you planted, where it was planted, you get the idea. The deadline is July 17<sup>th</sup>. If you report after this there may be fees assessed per farm and could jeopardize your participation in current and future programs with FSA.



Remember if you have crops that have failed, there is a 15 day deadline to report that loss so that your coverage under NAP can be applied correctly.

If you have sold your wool, remember to bring in the weight ticket(s) so we can timely file your application.

### IMPORTANT DATES

**June 19<sup>th</sup>** – Office CLOSED – Juneteenth

**July 4<sup>th</sup>** – Office CLOSED – 4<sup>th</sup> of July

**July 14<sup>th</sup>** – DEADLINE to sign up for ERP Phase II and PARP

**July 17<sup>th</sup>** – DEADLINE for Spring Crop Acreage Reporting

Very Sincerely,

Staci

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## Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently made several policy updates for acreage reporting for cover crops, revising intended use, late-filed provisions, grazing allotments as well as updated the definitions of “idle” and “fallow.”

### Reporting Cover Crops:

Cover crop types can be chosen from the following four categories:

- **Cereals and other grasses**
- **Legumes**
- **Brassicas and other broadleaves**
- **Mixtures**



If the cover crop is harvested for any use other than forage or grazing and is not terminated according to policy guidelines, then that crop will no longer be considered a cover crop and the acreage report must be revised to reflect the actual crop.

#### **Permitted Revision of Intended use After Acreage Reporting Date:**

New operators or owners who pick up a farm after the acreage reporting deadline has passed and the crop has already been reported on the farm, have 30 calendar days from the date when the new operator or owner acquired the lease on land, control of the land or ownership and new producer crop share interest in the previously reported crop acreage. Under this policy, appropriate documentation must be provided to the County Committee's satisfaction to determine that a legitimate operator or ownership and producer crop share interest change occurred to permit the revision.

#### **Acreage Reports:**

In order to maintain program eligibility and benefits, you must timely file acreage reports. Failure to file an acreage report by the crop acreage reporting deadline may result in ineligibility for future program benefits. FSA will not accept acreage reports provided more than a year after the acreage reporting deadline.

#### **Reporting Grazing Allotments:**

FSA offices can now accept acreage reports for grazing allotments. You will use form "FSA-578" to report grazing allotments as animal unit months (AUMs) using the "Reporting Unit" field. Your local FSA office will need the grazing period start and end date and the percent of public land.

#### **Definitions of Terms**

FSA defines "idle" as cropland or a balance of cropland within a Common Land Unit (CLU) (field/subfield) which is not planted or considered not planted and does not meet the definition of fallow or skip row.

Fallow is considered unplanted cropland acres which are part of a crop/fallow rotation where cultivated land that is normally planted is purposely kept out of production during a regular growing season.

For more information, contact your Crook County USDA Service Center at 307-283-2870 ext. 2 or visit [fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov).

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## **Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance**



The term "sodbusting" is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you're proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.

Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 "Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification," with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to

implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

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## USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a simplified direct loan application to provide improved customer experience for producers applying for loans from the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The simplified direct loan application enables producers to complete a more streamlined application, reduced from 29 to 13 pages. Producers will also have the option to complete an electronic fillable form or prepare a traditional, paper application for submission to their local FSA farm loan office. The paper and electronic versions of the form will be available starting March 1, 2023.



Approximately 26,000 producers submit a direct loan application to the FSA annually, but there is a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. Coupled with the Loan Assistance Tool released in October 2022, the simplified application will provide all loan applicants access to information regarding the application process and assist them with gathering the correct documents before they begin the process. This new application will help farmers and ranchers submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete, rejected, or withdrawn applications.

In October 2022, USDA launched the Loan Assistance Tool, an online step-by-step guide that provides materials to help an applicant prepare their farm loan application in one tool. Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting [farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool](https://farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool) and clicking the 'Get Started' button. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser. A version compatible with mobile devices is expected to be available by the summer. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

The simplified direct loan application and Loan Assistance Tool are the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:

- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA took action in October 2022 to [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](#) while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.

Soon, all direct loan borrowers will receive a letter from USDA describing the circumstances under which additional payments will be made to distressed borrowers and how they can work with their FSA local office to discuss these options. Producers can explore all available options on all FSA loan options at [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov) or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](#).

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## NRCS Delivering Climate Solutions through the Inflation Reduction Act

The [Inflation Reduction Act](#) of 2022 represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history. It provides \$19.5 billion from fiscal years 2023 to 2027 for climate smart agriculture through several of the conservation programs that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) implements. Last February, NRCS announced it was making \$850 million of those funds available in fiscal year 2023 for its oversubscribed conservation programs – the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).



NRCS is well on its way to implementing IRA in fiscal year 2023, and we're planning for 2024 and beyond. In past years, producer demand for conservation assistance through these programs has outpaced available funding. We're excited that many producers can now benefit from this additional funding, and we're preparing for the additional help they will need to implement these climate change mitigation practices.

**Locally, we're getting funding out to individual producers, and we're improving and streamlining programs to make it easier to sign up.**

- So far in fiscal year (FY) 2023, NRCS is ahead of historical rates in obligating financial assistance for conservation programs and has obligated more than 19,500 contracts, compared to an average of just over 12,000 at this same time over the last 4 years.
- Since announcing the availability of FY 2023 IRA funds in February, we have had over 10,000 applications for IRA in EQIP and CSP—and that number is growing every day. We're currently receiving an average of 29 IRA applications per hour for CSP and EQIP combined.

Producers need to know that NRCS accepts applications for our conservation programs year-round. And, no matter when they apply, their application will automatically carry over for consideration in future funding cycles. We encourage producers to apply now so that they can take advantage of this opportunity for additional funding over the next few years. To receive consideration for the current funding cycle in FY23, producers should apply by their [state's program ranking dates](#).

We expect to announce funding recommendations for ACEP soon. The national ranking date for ACEP closed on March 17, 2023, and we received over \$174 million in request for the \$65 million of available funding. And, as part of the ongoing effort to streamline our conservation programs, ensure that they are more convenient to utilize, and to help strengthen IRA implementation, we announced [improvements to ACEP](#) on May 9.

**We're getting funding out to partners.**

We are also getting funding out to partners through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, a partner-driven program that leverages partner resources to advance innovative projects that address issues such as climate change. On May 19, we announced that applications were being accepted through August 18, 2023, for RCPP Classic and RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA). Projects selected under this funding opportunity may be awarded through either Farm Bill 2018 or IRA funding, however applications for RCPP climate-related projects will receive priority consideration for IRA funding.

These and many other efforts are continuing in 2023 and beyond. NRCS will continue to keep partners and producers informed about new funding opportunities, recruitment efforts, partnerships available, and plans for IRA implementation in the years ahead.



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