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From Darla's Desk...

Happy spring to all Park County farmers and ranchers!

Please remember the deadline to file your Acreage Report is July 15, 2023. We will need to know your plant dates, intended use, and shares in each crop. Along those lines, if you have any failed crops, FSA needs to be notified within 15 days of when the loss is first apparent. This is especially important for crops covered under our Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), but applies to all crops, as it affects your crop reports, which affect your benefits you receive through FSA programs. Please call the office when you are done planting to schedule an appointment.



County Committee Election—The office is now accepting nomination forms for LAA #2 which includes Cody, Heart Mountain, Southfork, and Northfork. All nomination forms for the 2023 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by August 1, 2023. Agricultural producers may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee if they participate or cooperate in a USDA program and reside in the LAA that is up for election.

I'd like to take this time to thank the Park County FSA Committee including Emily Karst—Chairperson; Lynn George—Vice-Chairperson; and Tim Acord—Regular Member. They are doing a fantastic job for the producers of Park County! If you get a chance, please tell them thank you for representing our county!

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](#).

Applying for Beginning Farmer Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:



- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm.

For more information contact, contact your Park County USDA Service Center at 307-754-9411 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Unveils Efforts to Streamline Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The USDA is streamlining its Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to ultimately better help agricultural producers and private landowners conserve wetlands, productive farmlands and at-risk grasslands. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is rolling out several improvements to this important program, which has more than 5 million acres of land enrolled, in response to feedback from producers, landowners and conservation partners.



Specifically, NRCS is updating its processes around appraisals, land surveys, as well as certifying eligible entities who help NRCS and producers enroll land into easements. These changes are for ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) as well as Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE).

Key program changes include:

- Appraisals for ALE: The threshold for national review of ALE appraisals is now \$3 million, raised from \$1 million. NRCS raised the threshold to align program requirements with increased land values, enabling the agency to better target staff resources and speed up implementation. Appraisals help ensure cost-effective and appropriate use of federal funds that are contributed to a conservation partner for their purchase of the ALE from the farmer or rancher.
- Land Surveys for WRE: NRCS plans to encourage procurement of land surveys earlier in the acquisition timeline, such as when an application has been tentatively selected for a WRE. These surveys help with locating land boundaries, which is needed to purchase and manage the easement. NRCS is also increasing its

use of partnerships to assist with acquiring the land surveys and has simplified the review process for producer-acquired land surveys. This will speed up the time it takes producers and landowners to enroll.

· Certification of Entities for ALE: For ALE, NRCS works with eligible entities, such as American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations, to conserve prime farmland and at-risk grasslands. NRCS is working to expand the number of entities by launching a certification initiative to proactively notify potentially eligible entities that they qualify for administrative flexibilities. Certified entities have greater independence and less oversight in their purchase of easements funded under ALE. Information for entities on how to get certified is available on the ALE webpage.

These improvements are the first step in an ongoing effort to streamline ACEP as well as other NRCS conservation programs to ensure that they are easier and more convenient to utilize, and it will strengthen implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which included \$1.4 billion in additional funding for ACEP over five years. ACEP is administered by NRCS and aids landowners and eligible entities with conserving, restoring, and protecting wetlands, productive agricultural lands, and grasslands at risk to conversion to non-grassland uses. Healthy wetlands, grasslands and farmlands sequester carbon and provide many other natural resource benefits. NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs – including ACEP – year-round. Producers interested in easements should contact their local Service Center or view their state application ranking dates.



Park County USDA Service Center

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COC MEMBERS

Emily Karst – Chairperson
Lynn George – Vice-Chairperson
Tim Acord – Regular Member

Next County Committee Meeting: July 12, 2023