



- [From Lisa's Desk](#)
- [Hot Springs County Producers May be Eligible for Emergency Conservation Program Assistance](#)
- [USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity](#)
- [Save Time – Make an Appointment with NRCS](#)
- [High Tunnels Provide More Locally Grown Fresh Fruits, Veggies](#)

From Lisa's Desk

Hello Washakie and Hot Springs County Producers:

FSA is still holding office days at the Thermopolis NRCS office on the first Tuesday of the month from 9:00 a.m. to 3 p.m.

If you live in Hot Springs County and have experienced flood damage, please read the article below.

Give the Washakie-Hot Springs County office a call if you have questions or need assistance with an application. The phone number is 307-347-2456 ext. 2.

Best wishes,

Lisa Bower

County Executive Director



Hot Springs County Producers May be Eligible for Emergency Conservation Program Assistance

Floods have caused severe damage in the Owl Creek area(s) of the County.

If you've suffered severe damage, you may be eligible for assistance under the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) administered by the Washakie-Hot Springs County Farm Service Agency (FSA)

For land to be eligible, the natural disaster must create new conservation problems that, if untreated, would:

- be so costly to rehabilitate that Federal assistance is or will be needed to return the land to productive agricultural use
- is unusual and is not the type that would recur frequently in the same area
- affect the productive capacity of the farmland
- impair or endanger the land

If you qualify for ECP assistance, you may receive cost-share levels not to exceed 75 percent of the eligible cost of restoration measures. Eligible socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers can receive



up to 90 percent of the eligible cost of restoration. No one is eligible for more than \$500,000 cost sharing per natural disaster occurrence.

If you've suffered a loss from a natural disaster may contact the local FSA County Office and request assistance from August 4, 2023 to September 8, 2023.

To be eligible for assistance, practices must not be started until all the following are met:

- an application for cost-share assistance has been filed
- the local FSA County Committee (COC) or its representative has conducted an onsite inspection of the damaged area
- the Agency responsible for technical assistance, such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), has made a needs determination, which may include cubic yards of earthmoving, etc., required for rehabilitation

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), FSA must complete an environmental compliance review prior to producers taking any actions.

For more information about ECP, contact your Washakie-Hot Springs County USDA Service Center at 307-347-2456 ext. 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.



The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.

- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the Federal Register](#).

More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) (also [available in Spanish](#)) or by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

Save Time – Make an Appointment with NRCS

Producers are encouraged to call their local NRCS office to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of their time and to make sure NRCS staff is available to tend to their important business needs. Please call your local NRCS office ahead to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that might be needed during your appointment. To find your local NRCS office, visit: farmers.gov/service-center-locator.



High Tunnels Provide More Locally Grown Fresh Fruits, Veggies

It's hard to beat produce grown in the Big Horn Basin. It's often fresher and tastier, uses less energy for transport, and helps farmers in your community. But the off-season presents a big challenge for farmers who grow fruits and vegetables and for consumers who want to find local produce throughout the year.



When farmers can lengthen the growing season, even by several weeks, their options change. That's why the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service promotes seasonal high tunnel as such a powerful tool. High tunnels are plastic-wrapped, metal-framed structures that are fairly easy and inexpensive to build. They are designed to extend the growing season into the colder months, helping to increase the availability of local produce, keep plants at a steady temperature and even conserve water and energy.

High tunnels are similar to greenhouses, except they are considered "passively heated." That means they do not require electricity to heat – only sunlight. The plastic on the frame actually provides enough insulation to add up to 12 extra weeks to the growing season, depending on location. The inside of a high tunnel boasts its own microclimate, often producing crops of higher quality and quantity than those in traditional farm fields. High tunnels are also different than greenhouses in that the plants are actually in the ground, not in pots or on tables. You can think of it as a plastic covering over a field.

High tunnels can cut costs for the producer by conserving water and requiring fewer inputs, like fertilizers or pesticides. In high tunnels, these inputs are often applied through tubes that run along the base of the plants, allowing water and fertilizer to be delivered directly above the soil. Outside of high tunnels, these inputs are often dispersed on a larger scale and require more to ensure the plants receive an adequate amount.

NRCS helps farmers build high tunnels, providing technical expertise and funding. Local and regional markets often provide farmers with a higher share of the food dollar, and money spent at a local business often continues to circulate within community, creating a multiplier effect and providing greater economic benefits to the area.

For more information, contact your Washakie County USDA Service Center at 307-347-2456 or visit nrcs.usda.gov.



USDA Worland Service Center

208 Shiloh RD
Worland, WY 82401

Phone: 307-347-2456
Fax: NRCS 855-415-3405
FSA 855-415-3445
RD 855-415-3424

FSA:

County Executive Director

Lisa Bower 307-347-2456 x 112
lisa.bower@usda.gov

Program Technician

Sarah Sinn 307-347-2456 x 100 sarah.sinn@usda.gov

Program Technician, temp

Jennifer Ray 307-347-2456 x 105
jennifer.ray@usda.gov

Farm Loan Manager

Jolene Beiswenger 307-347-2456 x 111
jolene.beiswenger@usda.gov

Farm Loan Analyst

Kelli Emmett 307-347-2456 x 102
kelli.emmett@usda.gov

NRCS:

District Conservationist

Emma Allen 307-347-2456 x 108
emma.allen@usda.gov

Civil Engineer

Allen Croft 307-347-2456 x 122 allen.croft@usda.gov

Multi County Rangeland Management Specialist

Blaise Allen 307-347-2456 x 109
blaise.allen@usda.gov

Natural Resources Specialist

Kaile Brant 307-347-2456 x 119 kaile.brant@usda.gov

Soil Conservationist

Errick Hayes 307-347-2456 x 107
errick.hayes@usda.gov

Rangeland Management Specialist

Caleb Salzman 307-347-2456 x114
caleb.salzman@usda.gov

County Committee:

Julie Haun, Chairperson
Jim Butterfield, Vice Chairperson
Billie Jo Norsworthy, Member

Cameron Roady, Member
Marilyn Vass, Member