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A Message from the Weston County Executive Director

A year ago this month, I announced that I accepted the job as Weston County's Executive Director and would be starting a yearlong training program with FSA. I am happy to announce my training program has been successfully completed and I am back in our office.

I would like to thank my staff, Jennifer Jones and Kayla Pederson, for working hard to ensure our producers' needs were met and programs were delivered to our customers.

I am looking forward to leading this team to continue delivering FSA programs and meeting our producers' needs, equitably serving all our farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners.

I want to give a reminder our Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) participants as you are wrapping up your harvest. If your production is less than expected, you have 15 days from when the loss becomes apparent to report the loss to our office. You have until December 14, 2023 to file an application for payment.

For our producers who reported livestock losses during our spring storms, please contact our office to discuss the necessary records and to make an appointment to complete your application for payment. The deadline to file your application for payment is February 29, 2024.

Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase 2 and Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) application close out is occurring soon. Please monitor your preferred ag news outlets for payment release announcements.

If you have any questions or concerns, always know you can reach out to me, my office staff, or our committee members.

Take care,

Sherie Hilgenkamp



USDA Expands Eligibility, Enhances Benefits for Key Disaster Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) made updates to several conservation, livestock and crop disaster assistance programs to give more farmers, ranchers, and tribes the opportunity to apply for and access programs that support recovery following natural disasters. Specifically, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) expanded eligibility and enhanced available benefits for a suite of its programs. These updates will provide critical assistance to producers who need to rebuild and recover after suffering catastrophic losses of production and infrastructure due to natural disasters.

FSA has updated the following programs: The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP), the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Conservation Disaster Assistance Updates FSA updated ECP to:

- Allow producers who lease Federally owned or managed lands, including tribal trust land, as well as State land the opportunity to participate.
- Provide advance payments, up to 25% of the cost, for all ECP practices before the restoration is carried out, an option that was previously only available for fence repair or replacement. The cost-share payment must be spent within 60 days.

Additionally, Congress also authorized the Federal government to pay 100% of the ECP and EFRP cost for damage associated with the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire in New Mexico. This fire burned over 340,000 acres from April 2022 to June 2022 and was the largest wildfire in recorded history in New Mexico. ECP and EFRP cost-share assistance is typically capped at 75%. This policy change for 100% cost-share applies only to those locations impacted by the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire. ECP and EFRP provide financial and technical assistance to restore conservation practices like fencing, damaged farmland or forests.

Livestock Disaster Assistance Updates

FSA also expanded eligible livestock under ELAP, LFP and LIP. Many family farms and ranches use their forage for livestock maintained for the purposes of pleasure, roping, pets, or show. FSA recognizes these animals, maintained in a commercial agriculture operation, add value to the operation and could be available for marketing from the farm. FSA regulations have been updated to include these animals as eligible livestock.

Livestock that are used or intended to be used for racing and wagering, used for hunting, or for consumption by the owner remain ineligible.

Ostriches are also now eligible for LFP and ELAP. FSA is making this change because ostriches satisfy more than 50% of their net energy requirement through the consumption of growing forage grasses and legumes and are therefore considered “grazing animals.”

This change for ostriches is effective for the 2022 program year for both LFP and ELAP. ELAP requires a notice of loss to be filed with FSA within 30 days of when the loss is first apparent. Because this deadline may have passed for 2022, FSA is extending the deadline for filing notices of loss through March 31, 2023.

LIP and ELAP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage. LFP provides benefits for grazing losses due to drought and eligible wildfires on federally managed lands.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance

NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters. Basic NAP coverage is equivalent to the catastrophic level risk protection plan of insurance coverage, which is based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50% of expected production at 55% of the average market price for the crop.

Previously, to be eligible for NAP coverage, a producer had to submit an application (Form CCC-471) for NAP coverage on or before the application closing date. For 2022, if a producer has a *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification* (Form CCC-860) on file with FSA, it will serve as an application for basic coverage for all eligible crops having a 2022 application closing date and all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage will be waived for these producers.

FSA will notify all eligible producers who already have the CCC-860 certification form on file of their eligibility for NAP basic coverage for 2022. To potentially receive NAP assistance, producers who suffered losses due to natural disasters in 2022 should file an acreage report as well as a notice of loss with the FSA at their local Service Center.

Producers who are interested in obtaining NAP coverage for 2023 and subsequent years should also contact their local FSA county office for information on eligibility, coverage options and applying for coverage.

Reporting Losses

Producers impacted by a natural disaster should report losses and damages and file an application with their [FSA county office](#). Timelines for reporting losses and applying for payments differ by program.

For LIP and ELAP, producers will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For LFP, producers must provide a completed application for payment and required supporting documentation to their FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the grazing loss occurred.

For NAP, producers should contact their local FSA office for guidelines on submitting a notice of loss and filing an acreage certification.

Additional Resources

On [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance](#) fact sheet, and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, contact the Weston County [USDA Service Center](#). For wildfire mitigation cost share programs, contact the [Weston County Natural Resource District](#).

Reminders for FSA Direct and Guaranteed Borrowers with Real Estate Security

Farm loan borrowers who have pledged real estate as security for their Farm Service Agency (FSA) direct or guaranteed loans are responsible for maintaining loan collateral. Borrowers must obtain prior consent or approval from FSA or the guaranteed lender for any transaction that affects real estate security. These transactions include, but are not limited to:

- Leases of any kind
- Easements of any kind
- Subordinations
- Partial releases
- Sales

Failure to meet or follow the requirements in the loan agreement, promissory note, and other security instruments could lead to nonmonetary default which could jeopardize your current and future loans.

It is critical that borrowers keep an open line of communication with their FSA loan staff or guaranteed lender when it comes to changes in their operation. For more information on borrower responsibilities, read [Your FSA Farm Loan Compass](#).

Protect Your Investments in the Soil: USDA's Modernized Lab Data Mart Website Provides User-Friendly, State-of-the-Art Data

Understanding your specific soil and its dynamic properties, which can change over time due to human impacts, land management, and climate change, can be invaluable. The USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#), through the [National Cooperative Soil Survey \(NCSS\)](#), has a team of soil and data scientists who are bringing customers the best soil information using the newest technology through the Lab Data Mart.

The newly updated [Lab Data Mart](#) website, also known as the National Cooperative Lab Characterization Database, brings valuable soil data to the public's fingertips through a user-friendly, state-of-the-art interactive map. It includes data estimating soil properties such as organic carbon, clay content, calcium carbonate equivalent, and pH, which is beneficial in soil health assessments. Architects, educators, engineers, farmers, landowners, researchers, scientists, and anyone looking to learn more about their soil can access the latest data to make more informed decisions and reduce potential [soil risks and hazards](#).

The Lab Data Mart includes mid-infrared (MIR) soil spectroscopy data gathered during soil analysis at the NRCS' Kellogg Soil Survey Laboratory, one of the largest libraries of such data in the world. MIR soil spectroscopy uses the interactions between soil matter and infrared radiation to estimate soil properties.

The Lab Data Mart's interactive map also links to a national database of soil characterization data, allowing users to locate soil samples and "pedons" analyzed in the lab. A pedon is the smallest unit of soil, containing all the soil horizons of a particular soil type. The customized data in the Lab Data Mart is downloadable to multiple applications and web services and is continuously updated as more sampled soil sites are added or re-visited.

How Can the Lab Data Mart Help You?

- **Determining carbon credits or improving carbon sequestration:** The data can help you determine how much carbon is currently in the top 12 inches of soil and decide whether you want to sequester more carbon and consider methods and management practices to do so.
- **Leasing or buying land:** The data may help determine if your planned management practices will work; and if not, what could be the added cost to do things differently. Understanding the mineralogy of your soil can help you determine if it requires soil amendments, a new tool or piece of equipment to accomplish your goals, or a change to what you farm or your tillage operation.
- **Taking a more systematic view of your land:** Whether working with an NRCS conservation planner or on your own, the data helps you know more about your soil and ties into how you look at the whole [ecological site](#).

Who Can Help You Use Lab Data Mart and Help You Understand Your Data?

NRCS State Soil Scientists and their staff, as well as technical service providers, can assist with obtaining the data in Lab Data Mart and understanding it. Visit the [Lab Data Mart website](#), or learn more about NRCS' [Soil Science](#).



Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Farm Storage Facility Loans

In this *Ask the Expert*, Toni Williams answers questions about how Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFLs) provide low-interest financing to help producers build or upgrade commodity storage facilities. Toni is the Agricultural Program Manager for FSFLs at the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Toni has worked for FSA for more than 32 years and is responsible for providing national policy and guidance for Farm Storage Facility Loans.

What are Farm Storage Facility Loans?

Farm Storage Facility Loans provide low-interest financing for eligible producers to build or upgrade facilities to store commodities.

The FSFL program was created in May 2000 to address an existing grain shortage. Historically, FSFLs benefitted grain farmers, but a change in the 2008 Farm Bill extended the program to fruit and vegetable

producers for cold storage. An additional change extended the program to washing and packing sheds, where fresh produce is washed, sorted, graded, labeled, boxed up, and stored before it heads to market. Since May 2000, FSA has made more than 40,000 loans for on-farm storage.

Eligible facility types include grain bins, hay barns, bulk tanks, and facilities for cold storage. Drying and handling and storage equipment including storage and handling trucks are also eligible. Eligible facilities and equipment may be new or used, permanently affixed or portable.

Applying for Farm Storage Facility Loans

Eligible commodities include corn, grain sorghum, rice, soybeans, oats, peanuts, wheat, barley, minor oilseeds harvested as whole grain, pulse crops (lentils, chickpeas and dry peas), hay, honey, renewable biomass, fruits, nuts and vegetables for cold storage facilities, floriculture, hops, maple sap, rye, milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, meat and poultry (unprocessed), eggs, and aquaculture (excluding systems that maintain live animals through uptake and discharge of water). Qualified facilities include grain bins, hay barns and cold storage facilities for eligible commodities.

Loans up to \$50,000 can be secured by a promissory note/security agreement, loans between \$50,000 and \$100,000 may require additional security, and loans exceeding \$100,000 require additional security.

You do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply. The loans are designed to assist a diverse range of farming operations, including small and mid-sized businesses, new farmers, operations supplying local food and farmers markets, non-traditional farm products, and underserved producers.

To read the full blog visit farmers.gov/blog/ask-the-expert-qa-on-farm-storage-facility-loans-with-toni-williams.

For more information or to apply for a farm storage facility loan, contact the Weston County USDA Service Center at 307-746-2701 extension 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport.

UPCOMING DEADLINES & IMPORTANT DATES

- **September 4, 2023:** Office Closed in Observance of Labor Day
- **September 12, 2023:** Weston County Natural Resource District Meeting at 3pm
- **September 28, 2023:** Weston County FSA County Committee Meeting at 1pm
- **October 1, 2023:** Start of Fiscal Year 2024

Also remember the following:

NAP Notice of Loss must be filed the earlier of 15 days of the disaster occurrence or when losses become apparent, or 15 days of the final harvest date.

LIP Notice of Loss must be filed 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent. **Leases and/or Land Ownership changes including operational changes** must be reported within 30 calendar days of change to avoid late fees, repayment of funds issued and/or ineligibility for program participation. The deadline to submit changes for 2023 program year is August 1, 2023.

Save Time - Make an Appointment with NRCS and FSA Offices

Producers are encouraged to call ahead to schedule an appointment. Appointments ensure maximum use of your time and ensure staff is available to tend to your important business needs. To contact your agency, use the information below.



Weston County USDA Service Center

FSA Office

1225 Washington Blvd., Ste. 2
Newcastle, WY 82701

Phone: 307-746-2701 ext. 2
Fax: 855-415-3437

Farm Loan Manager:

Eilish Hanson
307-696-4459
eilish.hanson@usda.gov

County Executive Director:

Sherie Hilgenkamp
sherie.hilgenkamp@usda.gov

Program Technicians:

Jennifer Jones
jennifer.jones4@usda.gov

Kayla Pederson
kayla.pederson@usda.gov

FSA County Committee:

Randy Oleson, Chairman
John Riesland, Vice Chairman
Harry Tavegia, Member

Next County Committee Meeting:

September 28, 2023 at 1pm

NRCS Office

1225 Washington Blvd., Ste. 3
Newcastle, WY 82701

Phone: 307-746-3264
Fax: 866-574-1366

District Conservationist:

Paul Eitel
paul.eitel@usda.gov

Rangeland Management Specialist: Tanner Jenks

tanner.jenks@usda.gov

NWTF Co-Operative Forester:

Austin Sommerville austin.sommerville@usda.gov

WCNRD Manager:

Caleb Carter
ccarter.wcnrd@gmail.com

WCNRD Board:

David Tysdal, Chairman, Rural Supervisor
Tucker Hamilton, Vice Chairman, Rural Supervisor
Emily Hartinger, Secretary/Treasurer, Rural Supervisor
Gene Norman, Urban Supervisor
Tom Streeter, At-Large Supervisor

WCNRD Board Meetings are held 3pm the second Tuesday of the month at the Weston County USDA Service Center