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USDA Announces Payments for 2020 Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced that fiscal year 2020 payments for the Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program (RTCP) began on May 28. The RTCP will help eligible farmers and ranchers outside the contiguous U.S. offset a portion of the cost of transporting agricultural products over long distances.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 reauthorized RTCP and allows farmers and ranchers in Alaska, Hawaii and insular areas including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Virgin Islands of the United States, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Republic of Palau, to recover any costs to transport agricultural commodities or inputs used to produce an agricultural commodity.

RTCP payments are calculated based on the costs incurred for transportation of the agricultural commodity or inputs during a fiscal year, subject to an \$8,000 per producer

cap per fiscal year. Total 2020 claims exceeded available funding, therefore, payments to recipients will be reduced by a National payment factor of 0.8.

Producers with Crop Insurance to Receive Premium Benefit for Cover Crops

Agricultural producers who have coverage under most crop insurance policies are eligible for a premium benefit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) if they planted cover crops during this crop year. The Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP), offered by USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), helps farmers maintain their cover crop systems, despite the financial challenges posed by the pandemic.

The PCCP is part of USDA's [Pandemic Assistance for Producers](#) initiative, a bundle of programs to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions.

About the Premium Benefit

PCCP provides premium support to producers who insured their spring crop with most insurance policies and planted a qualifying cover crop during the 2021 crop year. The premium support is \$5 per acre, but no more than the full premium owed.

Illinois, Indiana and Iowa have existing programs for producers to receive a premium benefit for planting cover crops. In these states, participating producers will receive an additional benefit.

All cover crops reportable to FSA are eligible and include cereals and other grasses, legumes, brassicas and other non-legume broadleaves, and mixtures of two or more cover crop species planted at the same time.

To receive the benefit for this program, producers must file a [Report of Acreage form \(FSA-578\)](#) for cover crops with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) by June 15, 2021, which is distinct from the normal acreage reporting date. The normal acreage reporting deadline with FSA has not changed, but to receive the premium benefit, producers must file by June 15. The cover crop fields reported on the Report of Acreage form must match what the producer reported to their insurance company for crop insurance policies. To file the form, producers must contact and make an appointment with their local [USDA Service Center](#).

Program Details

Certain policies are not eligible because they have underlying coverage, which would already receive the benefit or are not designed to be reported in a manner consistent with the Report of Acreage form (FSA-578). PCCP is not available for Whole-Farm Revenue Protection, Enhanced Coverage Option, Hurricane Insurance Protection – Wind Index, and Supplemental Coverage Option. Stacked Income Protection (STAX) and Margin Protection (MP) policies are only eligible for PCCP when insured as a standalone policy. STAX and MP endorsements to underlying policies are not eligible for PCCP.

PCCP does not change acreage reporting dates, reporting requirements, or any other terms of the crop insurance policy.

Cover Crop Conservation Practice Standard

Meanwhile, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has made the determination not to update its conservation practice standard for cover crops. NRCS originally proposed restricting mechanical harvest of cover crops, but after reviewing input from agricultural producers and groups, NRCS recognizes this could present challenges for producers who use this important conservation practice. The latest version of the conservation practice standard can be found in the [Field Office Technical Guide](#) under Section IV, Conservation Practices and Supporting Documents, by State.

More Information

A [Notice of Funding Availability](#) was posted on the *Federal Register* today. Additional information on PCCP, including [frequently asked questions](#), can be found at farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance/cover-crops. RMA is authorizing additional flexibilities due to coronavirus. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

American Rescue Plan Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Debt Payments

USDA recognizes that socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have faced systemic discrimination with cumulative effects that have, among other consequences, led to a substantial loss in the number of socially disadvantaged producers, reduced the amount of farmland they control, and contributed to a cycle of debt that was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, socially disadvantaged communities saw a disproportionate amount of COVID-19 infection rates, loss of property, hospitalizations, death, and economic hurt.

To address these systemic challenges, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 provides historic debt relief to socially disadvantaged producers including Black/African American, American Indian or Alaskan native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian American or Pacific Islander.

USDA is now reviewing and working to gather feedback to implement the Act, and more guidance will be forthcoming for socially disadvantaged borrowers with direct or guaranteed farm loans as well as Farm Storage Facility Loans. As information becomes available, it will be provided directly to socially disadvantaged borrowers and stakeholder groups representing socially disadvantaged producers, posted here on farmers.gov, and shared through our social media channels, email newsletters, and the media.

Who qualifies for this debt relief?

Any socially disadvantaged borrower with direct or guaranteed farm loans as well as Farm Storage Facility Loans qualifies. The American Rescue Plan Act uses the 2501 definition of socially disadvantaged, which includes Black/African American, American Indian or

Alaskan native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian American or Pacific Islander. Gender is not a criterion in and of itself, but of course women are included in these categories.

I qualify as socially disadvantaged under the American Rescue Plan definition, but I am not late on my payments. Do I still qualify?

Yes. Any socially disadvantaged borrower with direct or guaranteed farm loans as well as Farm Storage Facility Loans qualifies.

When will qualified borrowers begin to see a loan pay-off or other payment in response to the American Rescue Plan?

USDA is now reviewing and working to gather feedback to implement the Act, and more guidance will be forthcoming for socially disadvantaged borrowers with direct or guaranteed farm loans as well as Farm Storage Facility Loans. For borrowers in arrears, the moratorium established on January 26th to stop all debt collections, foreclosures and evictions for all borrowers, including socially disadvantaged producers, remains in effect.

Producers who have worked with USDA's Farm Service Agency previously may have their ethnicity and race on file. A borrower, including those with guaranteed loans, can contact their local their local USDA Service Center to verify, update or submit a new ethnicity and race designation using the AD-2047. Find your nearest service center at farmers.gov/service-locator.

To learn more about USDA's work to implement the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, visit www.usda.gov/arp.

USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

\$4 million in competitive grants is available to support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production projects. USDA will accept applications on Grants.gov for planning and implementation projects until midnight July 30, 2021.

Planning Projects Planning projects initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs. Projects may target areas of food access, education, business and start-up costs for new farmers, urban agroforestry or food forests, and development of policies related to zoning and other needs of urban production.

Implementation Projects Implementation projects that accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor and other agricultural practices that serve multiple farmers. Projects will improve local food access and collaborate with partner organizations and may support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, educational endeavors and urban farming policy implementation.

Find out more about these grants at farmers.gov/urban.

Signature Policy

Using the correct signature when doing business with FSA can save time and prevent a delay in program benefits.

The following are FSA signature guidelines:

- A married woman must sign her given name: Mrs. Mary Doe, not Mrs. John Doe
- For a minor, FSA requires the minor's signature and one from the minor's parent

Note, by signing a document with a minor, the parent is liable for actions of the minor and may be liable for refunds, liquidated damages, etc.

When signing on one's behalf the signature must agree with the name typed or printed on the form or be a variation that does not cause the name and signature to be in disagreement. Example - John W. Smith is on the form. The signature may be John W. Smith or J.W. Smith or J. Smith. Or Mary J. Smith may be signed as Mrs. Mary Joe Smith, M.J. Smith, Mary Smith, etc.

FAXED signatures will be accepted for certain forms and other documents provided the acceptable program forms are approved for FAXED signatures. Producers are responsible for the successful transmission and receipt of FAXED information.

Examples of documents not approved for FAXED signatures include:

- Promissory note
- Assignment of payment
- Joint payment authorization
- Acknowledgement of commodity certificate purchase

Spouses may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and CCC programs in which either has an interest, unless written notification denying a spouse this authority has been provided to the county office.

Spouses cannot sign on behalf of each other as an authorized signatory for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations or other similar entities. Likewise, a spouse cannot sign a document on behalf of the other in order to affirm the eligibility of oneself.

Any member of a general partnership can sign on behalf of the general partnership and bind all members unless the Articles of Partnership are more restrictive. Spouses may sign on behalf of each other's individual interest in a partnership, unless notification denying a spouse that authority is provided to the county office. Acceptable signatures for general partnerships, joint ventures, corporations, estates, and trusts must consist of an indicator "by" or "for" the individual's name, individual's name and capacity, or individual's name, capacity, and name of entity.

For additional clarification on proper signatures contact your local FSA office.

New to Farming Because of the Pandemic? USDA Can Help

USDA Service Centers across the country, are hearing from people who are interested in more space and working the land and we want to let you know we can help. Are you new to farming because of the pandemic? USDA can help you get started in farming – on everything from helping you register your farm to getting financial assistance and advice.

Get Started with USDA

First, you want to make sure your farm is registered. If you purchased land, it might already be established with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) with a farm number on file. If not, FSA can help you register your farm.

To obtain a farm number, you'll bring an official tax ID (Social Security number or an employer ID) and a property deed. If you do not own the land, bring a lease agreement to your FSA representative to show you have control of the property. If your operation is incorporated or an entity, you may also need to provide proof that you have signature authority and the legal ability to enter into contracts with USDA.

Access to Capital

USDA can provide access to capital through its farm loans, which is a great resource when producers aren't able to get a loan from a traditional lender. Loans can help with purchasing land or equipment or with operating costs, and FSA even offers microloans, which are especially popular among producers with smaller farms. For more information, [check out our Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#).

Conservation Practices

We can help you make conservation improvements to your farm, which are good for your bottom line and your operation. We'll help you develop a conservation plan and apply for financial assistance that'll cover the bulk of the costs for implementing. To learn more about some of the conservation practices that we help producers with, [check out our Conservation at Work Video Series](#).

If you purchase land, and you don't want to farm all of it, you can look at either a conservation easement or managing for native shrubs and grasses through either the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) or Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Easements are long-term, while a CRP contract is 10-15 years. These are good options for land that is not optimal for production or sensitive lands like wetlands and grasslands.

Additional Resources

Depending on your farm, you may want to look at crop insurance. The USDA's Risk Management Agency provides crop insurance to help you manage risks on your farm.

There are many types of insurance products available for a wide variety of production practices, including organic and sustainable agriculture.

Your local communities also have great resources for farmers including conservation districts, Rural Development, cooperative extensions, and different farming groups. To get started with USDA, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Announces New Initiative to Quantify Climate Benefits of Conservation Reserve Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced an initiative to quantify the climate benefits of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts. This multi-year effort will enable USDA to better target CRP toward climate outcomes and improve existing models and conservation planning tools while supporting USDA's goal of putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation Projects

FSA has historically worked with partners to identify [Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation \(MAE\)](#) projects to quantify CRP environmental benefits to water quality and quantity, wildlife and rural economies. The agency will now invest \$10 million through this program to measure and monitor the soil carbon sequestration and other climate and environmental benefits of conservation practices over the life of CRP contracts.

This effort will allow USDA to better target climate outcomes through CRP while gaining critical data to calibrate, validate and further improve quantification methods within existing models and tools. One model of focus is the Daily Century Model, or DayCent, which simulates the movement of carbon and nitrogen through agricultural systems and informs the [National Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#). Data will also be used to strengthen the [COMET-Farm](#) and [COMET-Planner](#) tools, which enable producers to evaluate potential carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions based on specific management scenarios.

Request for Proposals

USDA is seeking proposals for projects to survey, sample and measure the climate benefits of land enrolled in the following CRP practice types over time:

1. Predominately Perennial grass with legumes and shrubs, depending on the practice
2. Tree
3. Wetland, including both mineral and organic soils and both floodplain and non-floodplain wetlands

A project can cover one or more of the above practice types and should be for a three- to five-year term, with the potential for renewal. Projects should be a minimum of \$1 million and not exceed \$9 million.

Applications are welcome from all types of organizations, including public, private and nonprofit institutions. Project proposals can be from a single entity or from a group of partners who coordinate efforts. Applications from or in partnership with Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU), Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCU) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) or organizations will be considered as part of the selection process.

The deadline for proposals is July 2, 2021. Visit the [request for proposals](#) for more information on requirements, project deliverables, evaluation criteria and how to submit your proposal. Visit [FSA's Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation page](#) for additional information on CRP MAEs.

Conservation Reserve Program

CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with an established track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, reducing nitrogen runoff and providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

In exchange for a yearly rental payment, agricultural producers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Land is enrolled in CRP for 10 to 15 years, with the option of re-enrollment. [FSA offers multiple CRP signups](#), including the general signup and continuous signup – both currently open – as well as CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

In April, [USDA announced updates to CRP](#) including higher payment rates, new incentives for environmental practices and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. This included a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. [Download our "What's New" fact sheet](#) to learn more about program updates.

U.S Drought Monitor Now Searchable by Tribal Area

Every Thursday morning, the U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM) provides the latest snapshot of evolving drought conditions across the United States and its territories. Now, USDM users can also search for drought conditions for tribal areas across the country.

When you visit the [Drought Monitor](#) and search the USDM's numerous data and mapping products, "Tribal Areas" now appears in the dropdown menu of area types. Users can then view drought data or maps for 323 tribal areas. As with other defined territories, information and maps of the tribal areas can be cross-referenced with data from more

than 20 years of USDM maps. For example, the searchable tools allow you to quickly find the highest percentage of exceptional drought that's been recorded on the Wind River Reservation during the USDM's history (28.3% in January of 2003), graphs that show what percentage of the Navajo Nation is currently experiencing exceptional (D4) to extreme (D3) drought (95%, with 64% in D4) and much more.

Tribal areas are currently represented in the USDM's map archive, data tables and time series products. The USDM change maps, which provide a week-to-week picture of where conditions improved or grew worse, will soon be available by tribal areas as well.

Drought monitor data is used to determine eligibility to certain USDA drought assistance programs like the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program \(LFP\)](#).

The Drought Monitor is produced jointly by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in these meetings and/or events should contact the Northern County FSA Service Center, at (907) 895-4242, ext. 150, Southern County FSA Service Center, at (907) 761-7754 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

Alaska State Farm Service Agency

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Northern County FSA Service Center

PO Box 585
Delta Junction, AK 99737

Phone: 907-895-4242 ext. 150

Fax: 855-711-9095

Hours:

Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Southern County FSA Service Center

800 E Palmer-Wasilla Hwy.
Ste 216 Palmer, AK 99645

Phone: 907-761-7754

Fax: 907-761-7789

County Committee Meetings

Northern Co TBA

www.fsa.usda.gov/ak

Southern Co July 13, 10 a.m.

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