

In This Issue:

- [USDA Launches New Farmers.gov Features to Help Farmers Hire Workers](#)
- [USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change](#)
- [American Rescue Plan Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Debt Payments](#)
- [Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting](#)
- [New Farmers.gov Features Help You Manage Your USDA Business Online](#)
- [Share Your Planting Season Experience for #Plant2021](#)

USDA Launches New Farmers.gov Features to Help Farmers Hire Workers

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced new features on the <http://www.farmers.gov/> website designed to help facilitate the employment of H-2A workers.

USDA's goal is to help farmers navigate the complex H-2A program that is administered by Department of Labor, Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department so hiring a farm worker is an easier process.

The primary new H-2A features on Farmers.gov include:

- A real-time dashboard that enables farmers to track the status of their eligible employer application and visa applications for temporary nonimmigrant workers;
- Streamlining the login information so if a farmer has an existing login.gov account they can save multiple applications tracking numbers for quick look-up at any time; Enables easy access to the Department of Labor's (DOL) Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG);
- Allows farmers to track time-sensitive actions taken in the course of Office of Foreign Labor Certification's (OFLC) adjudication of temporary labor certification applications;
- Allowing for farmers to access all application forms on-line.

All information can be found at www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a.

In 2018, [Secretary Perdue unveiled farmers.gov](#), a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where customers can apply for programs, process transactions and manage accounts. With feedback from customers and field employees who serve those customers, farmers.gov delivers farmer-focused features through an agile,

iterative process to deliver the greatest immediate value to America's agricultural producers – helping farmers and ranchers do right, and feed everyone.

USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change

USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including \$330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and \$25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials.

Conservation Reserve Program

USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.

New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing 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. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

- **Adjusting soil rental rates.** This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.
- **Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%.** This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.

- **Increasing payments for water quality practices.** Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.
- **Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate.** This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

To learn more about updates to CRP, download our [“What’s New with CRP” fact sheet](#), or visit the [Conservation Reserve Program page](#) of farmers.gov.

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.

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 [local County USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov.

New Farmers.gov Features Help You Manage Your USDA Business Online

Last June, NRCS’ Conservation Client Gateway moved to farmers.gov enabling USDA customers to access multiple conservation features through a platform that provides a customer-centric digital experience. Farmers.gov provides a secure, single desktop- and mobile device-accessible authenticated portal for FSA, NRCS and RMA customer-facing features.

As we’ve continued to add more content and capabilities, farmers.gov has quickly become the premier online hub for customers to find resources, submit applications and assistance requests, and make connections.

Another new feature is coming to farmers.gov to help you manage your USDA business. You’ll now receive an email letting you know that an NRCS document needs your signature, which you can quickly and easily sign online in the portal.

The farmers.gov portal also enables you to:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices and plans.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View detailed information on all previous and ongoing contracts.
- Have the authority as an FSA and/or NRCS customer to work in the portal and act on behalf of your active power-of-attorney entitlements and your current authorities for business entities.

These conservation features join several others already available through the farmers.gov portal, including the ability to view farm loan information. We'll continue to update you about new features as they become available.

If you do not have login information for farmers.gov, you can create your login profile, or eAuthentication by following the instructions at farmers.gov/sign-in.

The [Conservation Features User Guide](#) gives you step-by-step instructions on how to navigate farmers.gov and the [how-to video instructions](#) explain some of the popular features. If you need additional help, personal assistance is available at the farmers.gov Service Desk by selecting the "Help" link located at the top of the all authenticated portal pages and submitting a "Contact Us" request. NRCS field office staff are always available to assist you with your conservation questions and other needs.

Share Your Planting Season Experience for #Plant2021

After a long winter and a challenging year, spring has finally come. As the world around us bursts into song and color, our farmers will begin to work the soil they've protected all winter and plant the seeds they will nurture for months to come. Later this year, the fruits of their labor will become the food that feeds our communities, the fiber that clothes our families, and the fuel that powers industries.

For many, 2020 was the first year they'd ever seen an empty shelf at the grocery store. And for the first time, many people realized how much they take farming and the people who make it possible for granted. Fewer and fewer Americans understand what our farmers do, who they are, and the hard work they put in. Let's change that.

This planting season, let Farmers.gov showcase your work by participating in the #Plant2021 campaign. We'll share your story on @FarmersGov on social media and a nationwide [storymap](#). Here's how:

Using your smartphone or digital camera, take photos of what's happening on your operation during planting season. Videos may be too large to email as attachment, so you can email them to us via mail drop (iPhone), Google Photos (Android), or any other file sharing service. A few ideas:

- If you're comfortable, we'd love to see the people that make it happen set against the backdrop of your agricultural operation.
- Take a photo from inside the tractor cab so we can see what you see.
- Photos at sunrise or sunset are always beautiful!
- Behind-the-scenes photos showing us the amount of planning and preparation it takes to have a successful planting season are welcomed.
- Emerging (baby) crops.

Submit your photos/videos along with the following information to us at SM.FP.Social@usda.gov:

- Your name if you're comfortable sharing.

- Location of the operation (city or county and state).
- Information about what's in the photo/video and what's being planting.
- Your thoughts about this year's planting season. Is this year different from previous years? How do you feel about the season? What are you hopeful about?
- If your operation has a Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram account, please include it so that we can tag you.

Please note that by submitting your photo/video, you are granting USDA permission to use these materials for outreach and education purposes. Follow @FarmersGov on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#), and we look forward to sharing your story!

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