

December 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Louisiana FSA Newsletter

Louisiana Farm Service Agency

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Alexandria, LA 71302

State Executive Director:
Craig A. McCain

State Committee:
Ray Young, Chairperson
John Earles
Kristy Jones

Message from Craig A. McCain, FSA State Executive Director

I hope that you had an enjoyable and safe Thanksgiving. This holiday season certainly has its challenges. With that in mind, I want to make you aware that due to the significant increase in COVID cases in several parishes across the State, we have begun to evaluate the operational status of our Service Centers. Unfortunately, in our efforts to mitigate the risk for employees as well as customers, we have been required to cease allowing customers into some of our offices which have previously been allowed to have limited interaction with you. While this is an ongoing and daily process of evaluation, the requirement to "roll back" our operational status has primarily affected parishes in Northeast and East Central Louisiana. While I would much rather

Julie Richard
Donna Winters

Next State Committee Meeting:

To be determined

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or parish.

To find contact information for your local office go to www.fsa.usda.gov/la

Do Right and Feed Everyone!

write about many other subjects, I think it necessary to remind you that we need your cooperation and assistance as we work to meet your capital needs and deliver program benefits. Until the Pandemic is over, we must all respect the threat to our own health, to the health of our family and to our neighbor's health. We can best do that by following all the protocols in place relative to "social distancing", use of face coverings, hand washing and sanitation of commonly touched surfaces. In addition, from a professional standpoint, even mild cases and/or exposures of employees, disrupt our office operations and limit our ability to serve you.

As we move forward with the closing out of crop year 2020 and we plan for a new year, we are hopeful for an end to the current situation with COVID. However, you can greatly assist us as we work to assist you by applying for loans and/or program benefits early on. We will struggle to meet the demand for service if we have a large number of requests which are filed at the "last minute". In addition, please respect that it may be necessary for you to conduct your business electronically, via mail or even through a "drop box", due to the limit on face to face interactions. This environment will also slow communications, so please recognize the challenge faced by both you and our employees and plan accordingly. In these circumstances, we simply cannot have the approach that we can succeed by doing "business as usual".

On behalf of Louisiana FSA, I thank you for what you do each day to meet the needs of the World and I pray that you have a safe and joyful Christmas!

Upcoming Important Dates

- **Dec. 15** deadline to certify wheat and oat acreage
- **Dec. 24** USDA Service Centers will be closed for the Christmas Eve holiday
- **Dec. 25** USDA Service Centers will be closed for the Christmas Day holiday
- **Jan. 1** USDA Service Centers will be closed for the New Year's Day holiday
- **Jan. 4 – Feb.12** General signup for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- **Jan. 15** Seafood Trade Relief Program signup deadline
- **Feb. 8** ECP and EFRP signup deadline
- **March 15** CRP Grasslands signup deadline
- **March 15** election and enrollment for ARC/PLC for 2021 deadline

Louisiana FSA now offers SMS texting; receive text message alerts on your cell phone regarding important deadlines, reporting requirements and updates. Contact your local FSA Office for more information.

More information on the CFAP process is available on farmers.gov/cfap or call 877-508-8364.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Our program delivery

staff will continue to work with our producers by phone, email, and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Annual Financial Check-Up

With the 2020 harvest season coming to an end, now is a good time for an annual financial check-up. This involves reviewing 2020 production and financial records and preparing for 2021. One of the most important keys to success is record keeping. This must be done throughout the year, including through the busy times of the year.

Record keeping should include a detailed breakdown of all financial inflows and outflows. Some of the inflows may include production records, income, program payments, other farm income, non-farm income and capital sales (sale of equipment or real estate). Outflows that should be tracked and recorded are all annual operating expenses, living expenses and personal debt payments, loan advances and/or debt repayment, as well as capital expenses (buying equipment, real estate, etc.). A capital sale or expense is a non-annual type inflow or outflow; this may include the purchase of a tractor or other farm equipment, overhauling equipment, and improving real estate.

An annual review of your records will help plan for the 2021 crop year. Good records will help determine where expenses may need to be reduced or whether more needs to be invested in the operation. FSA customers are encouraged to schedule an appointment with their loan officer as soon as possible to begin the application process.

The same holds true if finances are obtained through a local lender with an FSA guaranteed loan or non-guaranteed. Record keeping provides the lender with the necessary information to process the loan request and also helps prepare for the tax season.

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Deadline Extended to Feb. 8

FSA is accepting ECP applications in Acadia, Allen, Avoyelles, Beauregard, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Calcasieu, Cameron, Catahoula, DeSoto, Evangeline, Franklin, Grant, Iberia, Jackson, Jeff Davis, Lincoln, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Rapides, Red River, Sabine, St. Landry, Union, Vernon, and Winn parishes. If you've suffered a loss from a natural disaster you may contact your local FSA County Office and request assistance until Feb. 8, 2021.

ECP helps you with the cost to restore damaged farmland to pre-disaster conditions. You may receive up to 75 percent of the cost of approved restoration activity. Limited resource, socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers may receive up to 90 percent cost-share.

In most cases, you must apply for assistance prior to beginning reconstructive work. FSA's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and environmental compliance review process is required to be completed before any actions are taken. Submitting an application after reconstructive work has been completed may not qualify for ECP. Conservation concerns that were present on the land prior to the disaster are not eligible for ECP assistance.

FSA County Committees will evaluate applications based on information provided and if applicable, an on-site inspection of the damaged land, taking into consideration the type and extent of the damage. Submission of an application does not guarantee that cost-share funding will be provided.

Contact your local FSA office for approved ECP practices

Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) Deadline Extended to Feb. 8

FSA is accepting EFRP applications in Allen, Beauregard, Bienville, Caddo, Calcasieu, Caldwell, Claiborne, Evangeline, Grant, Jackson, LaSalle, Lincoln, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Rapides, Sabine, Union, Vernon, Webster and Winn parishes. If you've suffered a loss from a natural disaster you may contact your local FSA County Office and request assistance until Feb. 8, 2021.

EFRP provides payments to eligible owners of nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) land to enable them to carry out emergency measures to restore land damaged by a natural disaster. After applications are received, local FSA County Committees determine land eligibility using information provided and if applicable, an on-site damage inspection to assess the type and extent of damage.

Eligible forest restoration practices include debris removal, such as down or damaged trees, in order to establish a new stand or provide natural regeneration; site preparation, planting materials and labor to replant forest land; restoration of forestland roads, fire lanes, fuel breaks or erosion control structures; fencing, tree shelters and tree tubes to protect trees from wildlife damage; and wildlife enhancement to provide cover openings and wildlife habitat.

In order to meet eligibility requirements, NIPF land must have existing tree cover or had tree cover immediately before the natural disaster occurred and be sustainable for growing trees. The land must also be owned by any nonindustrial private individual, group, association, corporation or other private legal entity that has definitive decision-making authority over the land. The natural disaster must have resulted in damage that if untreated would impair or endanger the natural resources on the land and/or materially affect future use of the land.

USDA Announces Increase to Certain Incentive Payments for Continuous Conservation Reserve Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is increasing incentive payments for practices installed on land enrolled in the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is upping the Practice Incentive Payment for installing practices, from 5 percent to 20 percent. Additionally, producers will receive a 10 percent incentive payment for water quality practices on land enrolled in CRP's continuous signup. FSA administers CRP on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Under continuous CRP, producers can enroll environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices with signup available at any time. FSA automatically accepts offers provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the number of acres FSA is allowed to enroll in CRP, which was set by the 2018 Farm Bill.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended primarily to control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits. The program marks its 35-year anniversary this month. Program successes include:

- Preventing more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, which is enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks;
- Reducing nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95% and 85%, respectively;
- Sequestering an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases, equal to taking 9 million cars off the road;

- Creating more than 3 million acres of restored wetlands while protecting more than 175,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, which is enough to go around the world seven times; and
- Benefiting bees and other pollinators and increasing populations of ducks, pheasants, turkey, bobwhite quail, prairie chickens, grasshopper sparrows and many other birds.

The successes of CRP contribute to USDA's [Agriculture Innovation Agenda](#) and its goal of reducing the environmental footprint of U.S. agriculture by half by 2050. Earlier this year, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the Department-wide initiative to align resources, programs, and research to position American agriculture to better meet future global demands.

For more information on CRP, visit fsa.usda.gov, or contact your [local FSA county office](#).

Heirs' Property Landowners

USDA recently launched a new website for producers to find information on heirs' property.

Heirs' property is family owned land that is jointly owned by descendants of a deceased person whose estate did not clear probate. The descendants, or heirs, have the right to use the property, but they do not have a clear or marketable title to the property since the estate issues remain unresolved.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized alternative documentation for heirs' property operators to establish a farm number. A farm number is required to be eligible for many different USDA programs, including lending, disaster relief programs, and participation in county committees.

For more information visit farmers.gov/manage/HeirsPropertyLandowners.

Additional USDA Programs and Services

USDA offers a variety of farm loan, risk management, disaster assistance, and conservation programs to support farmers, including heirs' property landowners once they have a farm number.

USDA also has several special provisions and resources for heirs' property landowners, including:

- Targeted funding through farm loans
- Crop insurance benefits
- Conservation program benefits

Is the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program Right for You?

Farmers and ranchers rely on crop insurance to protect themselves from disasters and unforeseen events, but not all crops are insurable through the USDA's Risk Management Agency. The Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides producers another option to obtain coverage against disaster for these crops. NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insured crops impacted by natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevents crop planting.

Commercially produced crops and agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available are generally eligible for NAP. Eligible crops include those grown specifically for food, fiber, livestock consumption, biofuel or biobased products, or be commodities such as value loss crops

like Christmas trees and ornamental nursery, honey, maple sap, and many others. Contact your FSA office to see which crops are eligible in your state and county.

Eligible causes of loss include drought, freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, earthquake, flood. These events must occur during the NAP policy coverage period, before or during harvest, and the disaster must directly affect the eligible crop. For guidance on causes of loss not listed, contact your local FSA county office.

Interested producers must apply for coverage using FSA form [CCC-471](#), "Application for Coverage," and pay the applicable service fee at the FSA office where their farm records are maintained. These must be filed by the application closing date. Closing dates vary by crop, so it is important to contact your local FSA office as soon as possible to ensure you don't miss an application closing date.

At the time of application, each producer will be provided a copy of the [NAP Basic Provisions](#), which describes how NAP works and all the requirements you must follow to maintain NAP coverage. NAP participants must provide accurate annual reports of their production in non-loss years to ensure their NAP coverage is beneficial to their individual operation.

Producers are required to pay service fees which vary depending on the number of crops and number of counties your operation is located in. The NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Premiums also apply when producers elect higher levels of coverage with a maximum premium of \$15,750 per person or legal entity depending on the maximum payment limitation that may apply to the NAP covered producer. The service fee can be waived for beginning, qualifying veteran, and limited resource farmers and rancher., These farmers and ranchers can also receive a 50 percent reduction in the premium.

For more detailed information on NAP, download the [NAP Fact Sheet](#). To get started with NAP, we recommend you contact your [local USDA service center](#).

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.

Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be successful. FSA staff will provide guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower's graduation to commercial credit. While it is FSA's commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower's responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses
- The development of problem situations
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

If a farm loan borrower can't make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally-funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an

environmental review, the request will be denied. Although there are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies, it's important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions.

Applications cannot be approved until FSA has copies of all permits and plans. Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

USDA Reminds Producers to Complete Crop Acreage Reports for Fall-Seeded Crops

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers in Louisiana to complete [crop acreage reports](#) by the Dec. 15 deadline for fall-seeded small grains.

The following acreage reporting date is applicable for Louisiana:

Dec. 15, 2020 Wheat and Oats

To complete your acreage report, please call your local FSA office to schedule an appointment. FSA can work with producers to file timely acreage reports by phone, email, online tools and virtual meetings as well as by appointment in person.

Your local FSA office provided/will provide maps to producers along with instructions for completing and returning the maps through either [mail, email or through commercially available free and secure online tools such as Box for file sharing and OneSpan for eSignature solutions]. After planting is complete, producers must return the signed form certifying their acreage report to the FSA office through [mail, email, or Box] by Dec. 15.

The following exception applies to acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting date, the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP-covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

For questions, please contact your local FSA office.

Sign-up for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP)

If you're an orchardist or nursery tree grower who experienced losses from natural disasters during calendar year 2020, you must submit a TAP application either 90 calendar days after the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent.

TAP provides financial assistance to help you replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Eligible tree types include trees, bushes or vines that produce an annual crop for commercial purposes. Nursery trees include ornamental, fruit, nut and Christmas trees that are produced for commercial sale. Trees used for pulp or timber are ineligible.

To qualify for TAP, orchardists must suffer a qualifying tree, bush or vine loss in excess of 15 percent mortality from an eligible natural disaster, plus an adjustment for normal mortality. The eligible trees, bushes or vines must have been owned when the natural disaster occurred; however, eligible growers are not required to own the land on which the eligible trees, bushes and vines were planted.

If the TAP application is approved, the eligible trees, bushes and vines must be replaced within 12 months from the date the application is approved. The cumulative total quantity of acres planted to trees, bushes or vines, for which you can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 1,000 acres annually.

FSA is Accepting CRP Continuous Enrollment Offers

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Continuous Signup](#).

In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and to plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. The program's long-term goal is to re-establish valuable land cover to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods. Instead they are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

For more information, including a list of acceptable practices, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Current Interest Rates for December

- Farm Operating Loans — Direct 1.250%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 2.375%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher — 1.50%
- Emergency Loans — 2.250%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years) — 0.250%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) — 0.375%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) — 0.625%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) — 0.875%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) — 1.000%
- Sugar Storage Facility Loans (15 year term) — 1.125%
- Commodity Loans — 1.125%

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).