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Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance

The term “sodbusting” is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you’re proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.



Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification,” with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

Farm Service Agency Now Accepting Nominations for Farmers and Ranchers to Serve on Local County Committees

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is now accepting nominations for county committee members for elections that will occur later this year. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is unveiling a new GIS tool to make it easier for producers to participate in the nomination and election processes for county committee members, who make important decisions on how federal farm programs are administered locally.

All nomination forms for the 2023 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2023.

June 15, 2023. The nomination period begins.

August 1, 2023, Last day to file nomination forms at the local USDA Service Center.

November 6, 2023. Ballots mailed to eligible voters.

December 4, 2023, Last day to return voted ballots to the USDA Service Center.

January 1, 2024, Newly elected county committee members take office.

Producers serving on FSA county committees play a critical role in the day-to-day operations of the agency, and they serve as the eyes and ears for the producers who elected them. In order for county committees to be both effective and equitable in their decision-making at the local level, they must reflect the full diversity of American agriculture. I am excited that we have another opportunity through this year's nominations and elections cycle to make our committees more inclusive, and in turn, better equipped to best serve all our customers. I encourage you to consider serving the farmers, ranchers and producers in your community on your local FSA county committee, and I thank you in advance for your public service."

Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for members. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction and they may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area.

Customers can locate their LAA through a new GIS locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Based on feedback from stakeholders, including the USDA Equity Commission, we are unveiling this new tool to make it easier for producers to effectively participate in the process.

Agricultural producers may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee if they:

- Participate or cooperate in a USDA program; and
- Reside in the LAA that is up for election this year.

A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority producers, women and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote and hold office.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 dedicated members of the agricultural community serve on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment and other agricultural issues.

USDA Seeks Members for Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

USDA is seeking nominations for four positions on the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. Nominations will be open to public from May 15, 2023, to July 15, 2023. The 12-member Committee, which first convened in March 2022, is part of USDA's efforts to increase support for urban agriculture and innovative production. Members of the Committee provide input on policy development and help identify barriers to urban agriculture as USDA works to promote urban farming and the economic opportunities it provides in cities across the country.

Members of the Committee include agricultural producers and representatives from the areas of higher education or extension programs, non-profits, business and economic development, supply chains and financing. The Committee last met in April 2023.

Nominations

USDA is seeking nominations for individuals representing a broad spectrum of expertise. Four positions are open for nominations including:

- One individual representing urban agriculture.
- One individual representing an institution of higher education or extension program.
- One individual representing business and economic development, which may include a business development entity, community development initiatives, a chamber of commerce, a city government or a planning organization.
- One individual representing related experience in urban, indoor and other emerging agriculture production practices.

Individuals who wish to be considered for membership must submit a nomination package including the following:

- A completed background disclosure form (Form AD-755) signed by the nominee; <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-755.pdf>.

- A brief summary explaining the nominee's interest in one or more open vacancies including any unique qualifications that address the membership composition and criteria described above.
- A resume providing the nominee's background, experience, and educational qualifications.
- Recent publications by the nominee relative to extending support for urban agriculture or innovative production (optional).
- Letter(s) of endorsement (optional).

Nomination packages must be submitted by email to UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov or postmarked by July 15, 2023. If sending by mail, packages should be addressed to the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 4627-S, Washington, DC 20250. Any interested person or organization may nominate qualified individuals for membership, including self-nominations. For special accommodations, contact Markus Holliday at UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov.

[Additional details are available in the Federal Register notice.](#)

USDA Expands Margin Protection for Corn and Soybean Farmers



USDA is expanding its [Margin Protection insurance plan](#), adding more than a thousand counties to the insurance option that provides coverage against an unexpected decrease in operating margin for corn and soybean producers. This expansion, which is in direct response to growing interest among producers, will be available by June 30, 2023. Interested producers will need to purchase their coverage by Sept. 30, 2023, to be eligible for the 2024 crop

year.

Margin Protection, first implemented for the 2016 crop year, protects against decreases in margin caused by reduced county yields, reduced commodity prices, increased price of certain inputs or any combination of these issues. It is area-based, using county-level estimates of average revenue and input costs to establish the amount of coverage and indemnity payments.

RMA's expansion of the Margin Protection plan will add 1,255 counties for soybeans and 1,729 counties for corn. This will add coverage in 22 states for soybeans with 34 states being covered in total. It will also make Margin Protection available for corn in the contiguous United States ([see maps](#)). The plan is available in select counties for rice (Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas), and wheat (Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota).

In the 2022 crop year, there were 1.7 million acres of corn and 1 million acres of soybeans insured under the Margin Protection insurance plan.

Margin Protection can be purchased by itself, or in conjunction with a Yield Protection or Revenue Protection policy purchased from the same Approved Insurance Provider that issued the Margin Protection policy. Margin Protection cannot be purchased with the Supplemental Coverage Option or the Enhanced Coverage Option.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA](#)

[Agent Locator](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov or by contacting your [RMA Regional Office](#).

Deadline July 26 to Apply for Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance

The Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) was created to assist certified organic dairy producers facing a unique set of challenges in recent years, including higher costs attributed to the pandemic and drought conditions across the country.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is providing financial assistance for a producer's projected marketing costs in 2023 based on 2022 costs. ODMAP provides a one-time cost-share payment, based on marketing costs, on pounds of organic milk marketed in the 2022 calendar year.

Organic dairy producers should apply by July 26, 2023 at their local USDA Service Center.

[Learn more](#).

Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. Foreign persons who have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the [AFIDA form](#) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements. The data gained from these disclosures is used in the preparation of periodic reports to the President and Congress concerning the effect of such holdings upon family farms and rural communities. Click [here](#) for more information on AFIDA.

USDA Announces Historic Investment in Wildlife Conservation, Expands Partnership to Include Additional Programs

USDA is expanding its work on wildlife conservation by investing at least \$500 million over the next five years and by leveraging all available conservation programs, including the [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP), through its [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW) effort. These commitments will ramp up the conservation assistance for farmers, ranchers, private forest owners and tribes with a focus on working lands in key geographies across the country as well as hiring for key conservation positions.

The funding will help deliver a series of cohesive [Frameworks for Conservation Action](#), which establish a common vision across the partnership of public and private interests and goals for delivering conservation resources in a given ecosystem, combining cutting-edge science with local knowledge.

The new funding includes \$250 million from the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and \$250 million from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This announcement builds off more than a decade of growing Farm Bill investments in wildlife habitat, and serves as a roadmap to leveraging both Farm Bill funding and the historic investments from the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) to guide conservation

efforts. USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) and [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) will coordinate this work through WLFW, which focuses on voluntary, locally-led efforts that benefit wildlife and agricultural communities.

This funding will immediately benefit two of WLFW's newest priorities. In the western U.S., at least \$40 million of EQIP and ACEP funding will go toward USDA's ongoing efforts to help conserve migratory big game habitat, allowing a continuation of an existing partnership with the state of Wyoming and an expansion to the neighboring states of Idaho and Montana. In 25 central and eastern U.S. states, an additional \$14 million in new EQIP funding will be dedicated to conservation of bobwhite quail and associated species in the grasslands and savannas of the central and eastern U.S. Additionally, Inflation Reduction Act funding will also build outcomes for northern bobwhite recovery as over 3.5 million acres will help mitigate greenhouse gases.

About USDA's Working Lands for Wildlife

WLFW is USDA's premier approach for conserving American working lands to benefit people, wildlife and rural communities. While NRCS and FSA work every day at all levels to assist producers, states, tribes and other conservation partners with their conservation priorities, WLFW steps in to facilitate their work on cross-cutting, national priorities that can only be addressed through coordination at an ecosystem scale.

Established in 2010, WLFW has teamed up with leading scientists and conservation partners as well as more than 8,400 producers to conserve or restore nearly 12 million acres of working lands, with tremendous benefits. WLFW has helped many sensitive species in their recovery, including the greater sage-grouse in the West, New England cottontail in the Northeast, golden-winged warbler in Appalachia and gopher tortoise in the Southeast. In large part because of the voluntary conservation efforts on private lands through WLFW, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has in some cases determined that species listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was no longer warranted thanks to recoveries made possible by these WLFW efforts.

To learn more about NRCS and FSA programs, landowners and operators can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

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.

Update Your Records



FSA is cleaning up our producer record database and needs your help. Please report any changes of address, zip code, phone number, email address or an incorrect name or business name on file to our office. You should also report changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase. You should also report any changes to your operation in which you reorganize to form a Trust, LLC or other legal entity.

FSA and NRCS program participants are required to promptly report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and to update their *Farm Operating Plan* on form CCC-902.

To update your records, contact your local County USDA Service Center.

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State Executive Director
Thaddeus Fairley, Sr.

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