

February 2017



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Workshops Present Options for Expiring CRP Acres

There are currently more than 1.4 million acres of cropland enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Montana. At the close of fiscal year 2017, nearly 400,000 of these contracted acres will expire, which impacts approximately 2,254 CRP contracts.

The 2014 Farm Bill capped CRP enrollment at 24 million acres nationwide, the lowest allotment since the inception of the program in the Food Security Act of

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Montana USDA Office Directories

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[FSA Factsheets Website](#)

Reasonable Accommodations:

People with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in FSA programs and/or events should contact the County Executive Director in the FSA Office in your area or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339. Alternatively, you may also contact Montana FSA Civil Rights Coordinator Jennifer Cole at (406) 654.1333, ext. 117 or jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov.

1985. The acre cap means many producers will not have the option to re-enroll acreage in CRP and will be faced with a monumental decision.

A partnership of federal and state agencies and resource groups have organized meetings to inform landowners of their options once the CRP contracts expire. The informational workshops will be held in locations with the largest number of expiring 2017 CRP acres as listed below.

- **Feb. 8, Ryegate**, Ryegate Fire Hall, contact Ronelia Parry at 406-568-2221 x 2
- **Feb. 9, Billings**, Red Lion Convention Center, contact Julie Winters at 406-657-6135 x 2
- **Feb. 22, Scobey**, Catholic Church Center, contact Jamie Zumbuhl at 406-487-5366 x 2
- **Feb. 23, Froid**, Froid Community Center, contact Jill Davidson at 406-787-6262 x 2
- **Feb. 24, Glasgow**, Cottonwood Inn & Suites, contact Mike Hagfeldt at 406-228-4321 x 2
- **March 1, Choteau**, Stage Stop Inn, contact Lacey Orcutt at 406-466-5351 x 2
- **March 2, Shelby**, Shelby Civic Center, contact Robert Hermance at 406-434-5234 x 2
- **March 8, Havre**, MSU Northern Ag Research Center, contact Leslie Rispens at 406-265-6792 x 2
- **March 9, Great Falls**, Montana Expo Park, contact Rusty Cowan at 406-727-7580 x 2

The workshops run from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Please RSVP to the contact listed as lunch will be provided.

Meeting participants will hear from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, Pheasants Forever, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and others regarding CRP options, cropland conversion, livestock operations, wildlife conservation, and easements.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in a meeting should contact the local meeting contact listed above or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339, and jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov no later than two business days prior to the meeting.

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2017 NAP: USDA Encourages Producers to Consider Risk Protection Coverage: March 15th Deadline

FSA would like to remind Montana producers that they have until **March 15, 2017** to sign-up for the Noninsurable Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage for all 2017 spring planted NAP crops except spring seeded rye, speltz, triticale, wheat, and mixed forage.

NAP provides a catastrophic level (CAT) coverage based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50 percent of the expected production at 55 percent of the average market price for the crop. NAP offers buy-up coverage for the

2015 through 2018 crop years in addition to the basic CAT-level coverage, on all crops except those intended for grazing. These additional coverage levels range from 50-65 percent of the expected production, in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price.

In order to meet eligibility requirements for NAP, crops must be noninsurable, commercially-produced agricultural commodity crops for which the catastrophic risk protection level of crop insurance is not available. If the Risk Management Agency (RMA) offers coverage for a crop in the county, NAP coverage is not available for that crop. For questions regarding insurability of a crop, please contact your local crop insurance agent. For information on whether a crop is eligible for NAP coverage, please contact your local FSA office.

The NAP service fee for all coverage levels is the lesser of \$250 per crop or \$750 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,875 for a producer with farming interest in multiple counties. In addition to the service fee, producers who elect buy-up coverage must pay a premium equal to the lesser of 5.25 percent of the guarantee or 5.25 percent of the payment limit. FSA will waive NAP service fees and reduce buy-up premiums by 50 percent for underserved, limited resource, and beginning farmers. For questions regarding how to calculate the premium, please contact your local FSA office.

For more information, visit the national NAP page at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap>.

- [2017 NAP Program Factsheet](#) (pdf)

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FSA's 2017 Annual Notification to Montana Producers

The following annual policy notification was issued electronically to Montana FSA GovDelivery eNews subscribers on Jan. 20. Producers without computer and/or email access can pick up a hard copy of the 2017 notification and any monthly FSA eNewsletter at their local FSA office.

- [2017 Annual FSA Policy Reminders/Notification](#) (pdf)

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Ongoing FSA Notice of Loss Requirements

Montana farmers and ranchers are reminded to timely report all crop and livestock losses to your local FSA office. For any questions, please contact your local FSA office.

NAP – Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program: Submit Notice of Loss within 15 calendar days of the earlier of a natural disaster occurrence, the final planting date if planting is prevented by a natural disaster, the date that damage to the crop or loss of production becomes apparent; or the normal harvest date.

ELAP – Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program: Submit Notice of Loss the earlier of 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent or Nov. 1st after the end of the program year in which the loss occurred.

LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program: Submit Notice of Loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent. File an Application for payment and supporting documentation no later than 90 days after the calendar year in which the loss occurred.

TAP - Tree Assistance Program: Final Date to Submit an Application and Supporting Documentation is the later of 90 calendar days of the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent

Visit FSA's national disaster assistance [website](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/index) at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/index> and [FSA's program factsheets](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/factsheets/index) page at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/factsheets/index>.

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Cover Crop Guidelines

Recently the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) worked together to develop consistent, simple and a flexible policy for cover crop practices.

The termination and reporting guidelines were updated for cover crops.

Termination:

The cover crop termination guidelines, which provide the timeline for terminating cover crops, are based on zones and apply to non-irrigated cropland. To view the zones and additional guidelines visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/crops/> and click "Cover Crop Termination Guidelines."

Reporting:

Beginning in 2017, cover crops will be reported as "Cover Crop". There are four types of cover crops as follows; cereals and other grasses, legumes, brassicas and other broadleaves, and mixtures. This includes crops that were terminated by tillage and reported with an intended use code of green manure. Cover crops can be hayed and grazed. Program eligibility for the cover crop that is being hayed or grazed will be determined by each specific program. If a cover crop is reported, and is harvested for any use other than haying or grazing and is not terminated properly, then that crop will no longer be considered a cover crop. Cover crops reported with an intended use of haying or grazing will not count toward the total cropland on the farm. In these situations a subsequent crop of fallow will be reported to account for all cropland on the farm.

Cover crops include grasses, legumes, and forbs, for seasonal cover and other conservation purposes. Cover crops are primarily used for erosion control, soil health improvement, and water quality improvement. The cover crop may be terminated by natural causes, such as frost, or intentionally terminated through chemical application, crimping, rolling, tillage or cutting. A cover crop managed and terminated according to NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines is **not** considered a crop for crop insurance purposes. Cover crops can be planted before an initial crop, after an initial crop, after a prevented crop, with no subsequent crop planted, or into a standing crop. The acreage reporting date for cover crops is July 15th.

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Final Planting Dates

All producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for more information on the final planting date for specific crops. The final planting dates vary by crop, planting period and county so please contact your local FSA office for a list of county-specific planting deadlines. The timely planting of a crop, by the final planting date, may prevent loss of program benefits.

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2017 CRP Spring Managed Grazing Period: March 16-May 14

Spring Managed Grazing: Livestock must be removed from CRP by May 14

Primary Nesting Season: May 15 to July 15

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) 2017 Spring Managed Grazing Period is March 16 to May 14, 2017. Livestock must be removed when the calculated AUMs have been utilized but no later than May 14th.

Summer/Fall Managed Harvesting Period begins July 16 following Montana's Primary Nesting Season and ends no later than Sept. 30. Summer/Fall Grazing Period begins July 16 and ends when the calculated AUMs have been utilized or no later than Sept. 13.

Producers are reminded to sign up at their local FSA office and complete a CRP-117 form for FSA office approval before conducting any managed harvesting and/or grazing activity.

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USDA Allows for Transfer of Certain Conservation Reserve Program Land to New Farmers; Provides Priority Enrollment in Working Lands Conservation Programs

Beginning Jan. 9, 2017, signup began for an early termination opportunity for certain Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts if the land is transferred by sale, or lease to own transaction, to either a beginning farmer or rancher or a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, including family members. The repayment of all previous payments plus interest is waived. Land that was transferred prior to January 9, 2017, is not eligible.

The land that is eligible for the early termination must have an Erodibility Index (EI) of less than 15.

Acres terminated early from CRP will be eligible for priority enrollment consideration into the CRP Grasslands, if eligible; or the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) or Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), as determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

This change to the CRP program is just one of many that USDA has implemented based on recommendations from the Land Tenure Advisory Subcommittee formed in 2015.

With CRP enrollment close to the Congressionally-mandated cap of 24 million acres, the early termination will also allow USDA to enroll other land with higher conservation value elsewhere.

According to the Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land survey, conducted by USDA in 2014, U.S. farmland owners expect to transfer 93 million acres to new ownership during 2015-2019. This represents 10 percent of all farmland across the nation. Details on the early termination opportunity will be available starting

on Jan. 9, 2017, at local USDA service centers. For more information about CRP and to find out if your acreage is eligible for early contract termination, contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office or go online at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp and/or www.fsa.usda.gov/mt. To locate your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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USDA Grasslands Conservation Program

Montana received 97 accepted offers on 12,219.47 acres during the Third Ranking Period of the CRP Grasslands Program with emphasis placed on small-scale livestock operations. The ranking period ended December 16, 2016.

Under this ranking period and for future periods, small-scale livestock operations with 140 or fewer head of grazing cows (or the equivalent) can submit applications to enroll up to 200 acres of grasslands per FSA farm. Larger operations may still make offers through the normal process.

Participants in CRP Grasslands establish or maintain long-term, resource-conserving grasses and other plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. CRP Grasslands participants can use the land for livestock production (e.g. grazing or producing hay), while following their conservation and grazing plans in order to maintain the cover. A goal of CRP Grasslands is to minimize conversion of grasslands either to row crops or to non-agricultural uses. Participants receive annual rental payments and up to 50 percent of the cost to cover practices like fencing or water developments.

Offers are based on six ranking factors: (1) current and future use, (2) new farmer/rancher or underserved producer involvement, (3) maximum grassland preservation, (4) vegetative cover, (5) environmental factors, and (6) pollinator habitat. Offers not selected in a ranking period are rolled over into the next ranking period.

Small livestock operations or other farming and ranching operations interested in participating in CRP Grasslands should contact their local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

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Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) Eligible Material Owner Signup Deadline March 15

Beginning Jan. 9, 2017, through **March 15, 2017**, FSA will accept applications from eligible material owners to remove biomass residues from fields or national forests for delivery to approved Biomass Conversion Facilities. Payments are provided at a match of \$1 for \$1, up to \$20 per dry ton. Eligible crops include corn residue, orchard waste or diseased or insect-infested wood materials.

To learn more about BCAP or to enroll in updates, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/bcap or contact your local FSA county office. To find your local county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

[BCAP Program Factsheet](#) (pdf)

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Organic Producers and Handlers May Apply for Certification Cost Share Reimbursements; Expanded Eligibility for Transition and State Certification Cost

USDA announced that starting March 20, 2017, organic producers and handlers will be able to visit over 2,100 USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices to apply for federal reimbursement to assist with the cost of receiving and maintaining organic or transitional certification.

USDA reimburses organic producers up to 75 percent of the cost of organic certification, but only about half of the nation's organic operations currently participate in the program. Starting March 20, USDA will provide a uniform, streamlined process for organic producers and handlers to apply for organic cost share assistance either by mail or in person.

USDA is making changes to increase participation in the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance Organic Certification Cost Share Program, and at the same time provide more opportunities for organic producers to access other USDA programs, such as disaster protection and loans for farms, facilities and marketing. Producers can also access information on nonfederal agricultural resources, and get referrals to local experts, including organic agriculture, through USDA's Bridges to Opportunity service at the local FSA office.

Historically, many state departments of agriculture have obtained grants to disburse reimbursements to those producers and handlers qualifying for cost share assistance. FSA will continue to partner with states to administer the programs. For states that want to continue to directly administer the programs, applications will be due Feb. 17, 2017.

Eligible producers include any certified producers or handlers who have paid organic or transitional certification fees to a [USDA-accredited certifying](#) agent. Application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/ arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage are all eligible for a cost share reimbursement from USDA.

Once certified, producers and handlers are eligible to receive reimbursement for up to 75 percent of certification costs each year up to a maximum of \$750 per certification scope—crops, livestock, wild crops and handling. This announcement also adds transitional certification and state organic program fees as additional scopes.

To learn more about organic certification cost share, please visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic or contact a local FSA office by visiting <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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2017 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Enrollment Period Continues: Aug. 1 Deadline

Producers on farms with base acres under the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, can begin visiting FSA county offices starting Nov. 1, 2016, to sign contracts and enroll for the 2017 crop year. The enrollment period will continue until Aug. 1, 2017.

Since shares and ownership of a farm can change year-to-year, producers on the farm must enroll by signing a contract each program year.

If a farm is not enrolled during the 2017 enrollment period, the producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs for the 2017 crop should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. Producers who made their elections in 2015 must still enroll during the 2017 enrollment period.

The ARC and PLC programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for covered commodities. Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain and sweet rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity. For more details regarding these programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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Farm Loan Program Availability

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agricultural production. As a farmer or rancher, whether you are just starting out or have many years of experience, loans are available for farm operating purposes and/or to purchase or improve a farm or ranch. As the “Lender of First Opportunity” FSA targets some of the direct and guaranteed loan funds for beginning and/or underserved farmers or ranchers. For purposes of this program, a beginning farmer/rancher is defined as someone who started in farming or ranching less than 10 years ago; underserved individuals are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere. For more information, contact your local FSA office who can schedule an appointment with the Farm Loan Program (FLP) staff serving your area and/or visit the [National FLP Web site](#).

- [FSA Factsheet: Farm Loan Program Overview](#) (pdf)

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Emergency Loans – Disaster Designations in Montana

FSA’s Emergency Loan Program is available for agricultural producers in counties designated as primary or contiguous natural disaster areas. See map below of current Disaster Designations in Montana by County. Contact your local FSA office for specific designations in your area and time frames to apply. Eligible producers have **eight months** from the date of the disaster designation to apply for low-interest emergency loans to 1.) restore or replace essential property; 2.) pay all or part of production costs associated with the disaster year; 3.) pay essential family living expenses; or 4.) refinance certain debts, excluding real estate. Producers interested in applying for an emergency loan, or other FLP loans, should contact their local FSA office to set up an appointment with the Farm Loan Program staff serving your area.

- [Current Disaster Designations in Montana](#) - (by county)
- [Emergency Loan Factsheet](#) (pdf)

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Montana FSA Upcoming Deadlines

- **March 15:** 2017 NAP Application Closing Date for Spring Crops (except spring seeded rye, speltz, triticale, wheat, and mixed forage)
- **March 15:** Deadline for Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) Eligible Material Owner Signup for foresters and farmers seeking incentives to remove biomass residues from fields or national forests for delivery to energy generation facilities.
- **March 16:** 2017 CRP Spring Grazing Period Begins (with prior written approval)
- **March 31:** Deadline for 2016 Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) to file an Application for Payment and supporting documentation. (Producers must file a 2016 LIP Notice of Loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.)
- **March 31:** Final availability date for Loans and LDPs for Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, Wheat and Sesame Seed
- **May 14:** 2017 CRP Spring Grazing Period Ends
- **May 15 to July 15:** Montana Primary Nesting Season
- **May 31:** Final availability date for Loans and LDPs for Corn, Dry Peas, Grain Sorghum, Lentils, Mustard Seed, Rice, Safflower Seed, Chickpeas, Soybeans and Sunflower Seed
- **June 15:** 2017 FSA County Committee Election Nomination Period Begins
- **July 15:** Last day of Montana Primary Nesting Season
- **July 15:** 2017 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Fruit (except cherries), Vegetables, Christmas Trees, all Spring-Seeded Crops and all other crops
- **July 16:** 2017 CRP Summer/Fall Grazing Period Begins (with prior written approval)
- **July 16:** 2017 CRP Managed Harvesting Period Begins (with prior written approval)
- **Aug. 1:** Deadline for 2017 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) & Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Enrollment
- **Aug. 1:** 2017 FSA County Committee Election Nomination Period Deadline
- **Aug. 1:** Last day to request farm transfers for FY' 2017
- **Sept. 13:** 2017 CRP Summer/Fall Grazing Period Ends
- **Sept. 30:** 2017 CRP Managed Harvesting Period Ends
- **Sept. 1:** 2018 NAP Application Closing Date Value-Loss Crops such as nursery, Christmas trees, grass sod, ginseng, aquaculture, floriculture, root stock sets and mushrooms.
- **Sept. 30:** 2018 NAP Application Closing Date for Annual Fall-Seeded Crops, Perennial Forage and Grazing, Mixed Forage Crops including spring seeded annual types of mixed forage, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Garlic

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News from Montana NRCS: Conservation Initiatives for 2017 Announced

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering additional funding through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to target specific resource concerns in Montana in 2017: On-Farm Energy, Organic, High Tunnel Systems, Honey Bee Pollinators, Sage Grouse Initiative Invasive Conifer Removal, and Sage Grouse Initiative Cropland Seeding.

While NRCS accepts applications for EQIP on a continuous basis, NRCS has set a deadline of **Feb. 24, 2017**, to apply for 2017 initiatives funding.

Below is an overview of each initiative:

National On-Farm Energy Initiative (NOFEI): NOFEI has two components. In the first component, agricultural producers work with an NRCS-approved Technical Service Provider to develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. In the second component, NRCS may also provide assistance to implement various recommended measures identified in the energy audit through the use of conservation practice standards offered through this initiative.

National Organic Initiative (NOI): NRCS will assist producers with installation of conservation practices on agricultural operations related to organic production. Producers currently certified as organic, transitioning to organic, or National Organic Program exempt will have access to a broad set of conservation practices to assist in treating their resource concerns while fulfilling many of the requirements in an Organic System Plan.

High Tunnel Systems: NRCS helps producers implement high tunnels that extend growing seasons for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality and fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment.

Honey Bee Pollinators: NRCS will work with agricultural producers to combat future declines by helping them to implement conservation practices that provide forage for honey bees while enhancing habitat for other pollinators and wildlife and improving the quality of water, air and soil.

Sage Grouse Initiative Invasive Conifer Removal: Conifer encroachment into sagebrush rangelands affects the sustainability and productivity of grazing lands and can be detrimental for sage-grouse and other species that depend on sagebrush-steppe habitat. Private landowners will be able to mitigate these threats by implementing science-based conservation practices. The most cost-effective approach for conifer treatment is to target early encroachment stands, where small trees can be completely removed and the existing sagebrush community sustained. This funding opportunity will assist private landowners with targeting early stages of encroachment in intact sagebrush landscapes to improve the habitat for wildlife and the sustainability and productivity of grazing lands.

Sage Grouse Initiative Cropland Seeding: Loss and fragmentation of sage-grouse habitat is the primary threat to sage-grouse and Montana has recently seen large tracts of rangeland cultivated for crop production. Through this funding opportunity, landowners can work with the NRCS to seed cropland in sage-grouse habitat back to perennial species to improve the connectivity for not only sage-grouse, but the many other species that depend on large, intact landscapes.

EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. Conservation practices must be implemented to NRCS standards and specifications. In Montana, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

Applicants that operate as an entity are required to have a DUNS number and have that number registered with SAM.gov prior to submitting their application for consideration.

For more information about EQIP, or other programs offered by NRCS, please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov.

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