

June 2018



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Montana FSA: June 2018 Newsletter

USDA Farm Service Agency - Montana

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From the State Executive Director

It's that time of year where FSA begins the annual county committee election process across Montana and the United States. Nominations open on June 15th and will close on Aug. 1st. County committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs. I encourage you to consider nominating yourself or a fellow farmer or rancher to serve on the local FSA county committee in your area.

This newsletter has details on important updates to FSA disaster assistance programs, the July 16th 2018 crop certification/acreage reporting deadline, Aug. 1st Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) 2018 enrollment deadline and other upcoming deadlines, the Conservation Reserve Program and farm loans. For more information about any FSA program, contact your local FSA office for assistance.

Best Regards,
Mike Foster

Directories:

[Online Directory of FSA Offices in Montana](#)

[PDF of Montana FSA Directory](#)

[PDF of Montana USDA Directory](#)

Online Resource Links:

[FSA Factsheets](#)

[FSA Disaster Programs](#)

[FSA Farm Loan Programs](#)

[FSA Conservation Programs](#)

[FSA Price Support Programs](#)

[FSA ARC-PLC Programs](#)

[FSA Organic Certification Cost-Share Program](#)

[FSA Energy Programs](#)

[Montana NRCS](#)

[Montana RD](#)

[USDA New Farmers](#)

[Montana Department of Agriculture's Hay Hotline](#)

Special Accommodations:

Special accommodations will be made upon request for individuals with disabilities, vision impairment or hearing impairment. If accommodations are required, individuals should contact the county FSA office directly or by phone or the Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339. Alternatively, you may contact Montana FSA Civil Rights Coordinator Jennifer Cole at (406) 654.1333, ext. 117 or jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov.

July 16th Deadline for 2018 Crop Certification/Acreage Reporting

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers, including livestock producers, are encouraged to visit their local FSA office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

The 2018 Acreage Reporting/Crop Certification Deadline is **Mon., July 16, 2018** for **Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Fruit (except cherries), Vegetables, Christmas Trees, and all Spring-Seeded Crops and any other crops not required to be reported by previously announced deadlines.**

The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the applicable acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the applicable acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.
- If a perennial forage crop is reported with the intended use of "green manure," "left standing," or "seed," then the acreage must be reported by July 16th.

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

Reporting Organic Crops

Producers who want to use the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) organic price and selected the "organic" option on their NAP application must report their crops as organic.

When certifying organic acres, the buffer zone acreage must be included in the organic acreage.

Producers must also provide a current organic plan, organic certificate or documentation from a certifying agent indicating an organic plan is in effect. Documentation must include:

- name of certified individuals
- address
- telephone number
- effective date of certification
- certificate number
- list of commodities certified
- name and address of certifying agent
- a map showing the specific location of each field of certified organic, including the buffer zone acreage

Certification exemptions are available for producers whose annual gross agricultural income from organic sales totals \$5,000 or less. Although exempt growers are not required to provide a written certificate, they are still required to

provide a map showing the specific location of each field of certified organic, transitional and buffer zone acreage.

Important reminder: All crops and acreage must be reported no later than the crop's subsequent year's acreage reporting date. If a crop report is not submitted by the subsequent year's reporting date, the acreage report cannot be considered acceptable and producers will not receive planting credit for the crop nor will the crop be eligible for any FSA program benefits for the applicable program year.

For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact your local FSA office.

Link to [FSA Acreage Reporting Factsheet](#) (pdf)

Nominations Open for the 2018 County Committee Elections

USDA Farm Service Agency encourages all farmers, ranchers, and FSA program participants to take part in the county committee election nomination process.

Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision making and farm program delivery process.

A county committee is comprised of three to 11 elected members from local administrative areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. One-third of the seats on these committees are open for election each year. County committees may have an appointed advisor to further represent the local interests of underserved farmers and ranchers. Underserved producers are beginning, women and other minority farmers and ranchers and land owners and/or operators who have limited resources. Other minority groups including Native American and Alaska Natives; persons under the poverty level, and persons that have disabilities are also considered underserved.

All **nomination forms** for the 2018 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA service center by **Aug. 1, 2018**. County committee election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters on Nov. 5, 2018. The last day to return completed ballots to FSA is Dec. 3, 2018.

For more information on FSA county committee elections and appointments, refer to the FSA fact sheet: Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a COC Member available online at: www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

USDA Reopens Application Period for Producers Recovering from Cattle Loss, Other Disasters

Signup Begins June 4 for Livestock Indemnity Program and Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-raised Fish

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will begin accepting disaster assistance program applications on June 4 from agricultural producers who suffered livestock, honeybees, farm-raised fish and other losses due to natural disasters.

USDA's [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) is reopening the application period for two disaster assistance programs in response to statutory changes made by Congress earlier this year.

Beginning June 4, FSA will accept new applications for losses for calendar year 2017 or 2018 filed under the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP) or [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP). **Producers who already submitted applications and received decisions on their applications for these years cannot file again for the same loss. However, producers should contact their local FSA office if they have additional losses, sold livestock at a reduced rate due to injury or their application was disapproved because it was late filed.**

In February, Congress passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, which made several changes to these two disaster programs, including:

- Removing ELAP's \$20 million fiscal year funding cap, enabling FSA to pay producers' 2017 applications in full and their 2018 applications as soon as they are approved.
- Removing the per-person and legal entity annual program payment limitation of \$125,000 for LIP for 2017 and future years. (The income limitation applies as it did before, meaning producers with an adjusted gross income of more than \$900,000 are not eligible.)
- Changing LIP to allow producers to receive a payment for injured livestock that are sold for a reduced price due to an injury that was directly related to an eligible loss event. Previously, the program only covered financial loss for livestock death above normal mortality.

Producers interested in LIP or ELAP should contact their [local USDA service center](#). To apply, producers will need to provide verifiable and reliable production records and other information about their operation.

Drought, wildfires and other disasters continue to impact farmers and ranchers, and LIP and ELAP are two of many programs available through USDA to help producers recover. Learn more at <https://www.usda.gov/disaster>.

Enrollment Period Continues for 2018 ARC-PLC Safety Net Coverage; Aug. 1, 2018 Deadline

Montana farmers and ranchers with base acres in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) safety net program may enroll for the 2018 crop year. The enrollment period, which began on Nov. 1, will end on **Aug. 1, 2018**.

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

The producers on a farm that are not enrolled for the 2018 enrollment period will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs for the 2018 crop should crop prices, county revenues, or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. Producers who made their elections in previous years must still enroll during the 2018. For more information, contact your local FSA office and visit https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/arcplc_program/index.

Grazing or Feed Loss Assistance Available for Livestock Producers

Producers who have livestock feed or grazing losses that occur, could be eligible for assistance through the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP).

Adverse natural disaster conditions, including wildfire, winter storms, blizzards, and flood conditions, have recently affected many producers. ELAP may provide recovery assistance for losses due to grazing shortages, loss of harvested feed, water shortages, or disease, due to adverse weather or other conditions, which are not adequately addressed by other disaster programs.

ELAP covers up to 150 lost grazing days in instances when a producer has been forced to remove livestock from a grazing pasture during the normal grazing period due to a natural disaster condition other than fire. Grazing losses due to fire covers up to 180 lost grazing days. .

ELAP also covers physically damaged livestock feed that was purchased or mechanically harvested forage or feedstuffs intended for use as feed for the producer's eligible livestock. In order to be considered eligible, harvested forage must have been baled. Forage that is only cut, raked or windrowed in the field is not eligible.

Producers with a qualifying loss must contact the FSA Office to **file an ELAP Notice of Loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent**.

Producers should also maintain records and receipts documenting livestock removed from the grazing pasture due to adverse conditions, costs of transporting livestock feed to eligible livestock, receipts for equipment rental fees for hay lifts, feed purchase receipts, and the number of gallons of water transported to livestock due to water shortages, if applicable. Producers must also file an ELAP Application for Payment no later than November 1, 2018.

For more information regarding ELAP, please contact your local FSA office.

USDA Resumes Continuous Conservation Reserve Program Enrollment

One-Year Extension Available to Holders of Many Expiring Contracts through Continuous Signup

As part of a 33-year effort to protect sensitive lands and improve water quality and wildlife habitat on private lands, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will resume accepting applications for the voluntary [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP). Eligible farmers, ranchers, and private landowners can sign up at their local [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#) office between June 4 and Aug. 17, 2018.

FSA stopped accepting applications last fall for the CRP continuous signup (excluding applications for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and CRP grasslands). This pause allowed USDA to review available acres and avoid exceeding the 24 million-acre CRP cap set by the 2014 Farm Bill. New limited practice availability and short sign up period helps ensure that landowners with the most sensitive acreage will enroll in the program and avoid unintended competition with new and beginning farmers seeking leases. CRP enrollment currently is about 22.7 million acres.

2018 Signup for CRP

For this year's signup, limited priority practices are available for continuous enrollment. They include grassed waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetland restoration and others. [View a full list of practices.](#)

FSA will use updated soil rental rates to make annual rental payments, reflecting current values. It will not offer incentive payments as part of the new signup.

USDA will not open a general signup this year, however, a one-year extension will be offered to existing CRP participants with expiring CRP contracts of 14 years or less. Producers eligible for an extension will receive a letter with more information.

CRP Grasslands

Additionally, FSA established new [ranking criteria](#) for [CRP Grasslands](#). To guarantee all CRP grasslands offers are treated equally, applicants who previously applied will be asked to reapply using the new ranking criteria. Producers with pending applications will receive a letter providing the options.

About CRP

In return for enrolling land in CRP, USDA, through FSA on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Landowners enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP pays producers who remove sensitive lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and increase wildlife habitat.

The new changes to CRP do not impact the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a related program offered by CCC and state partners.

Producers wanting to apply for the CRP continuous signup or CRP grasslands should contact their USDA service center. To locate your local FSA office, visit <https://www.farmers.gov>. More information on CRP can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Producers with CRP contracts expiring on September 30, 2018 may wish to contact FSA concerning the Transition Incentives Program (TIP). The TIP offers incentive payments to retiring producers that sell or lease their expiring CRP acreage to beginning farmers or ranchers. All requirements of the TIP contracting process must be finalized by **September 15, 2018**.

The CRP "Land Tenure" provisions authorize the early termination of CRP contracts (without penalty) when eligible lands are sold to a beginning farmer or rancher, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher. If the CRP acreage meets the "Land Tenure" eligibility requirements, the seller will receive a partial 2018 CRP annual rental payment, as payment will be earned through the date of sale of the property. The "Land Tenure" provisions expire on September 30, 2018.

Haying or grazing of CRP acreage may be authorized after receiving written permission from FSA. The authorized grazing periods are March 16, 2018 through May 14, 2018, and July 16, 2018 through September 13, 2018. CRP haying may be authorized on certain acreage on or after July 16, 2018. The cost of authorized haying or grazing is 25 percent of the CRP payment on the acreage that is hayed or grazed.

Producers with 10 year CRP contracts are required to complete mid-contract management activities prior to the end of the 6th contract year. Producers with 15 year CRP contracts are required to complete mid-contract management activities prior to the end of the 9th contract year. Mid-contract management activities may NOT be completed during the nesting season (May 15th through July 15th). Producer's MUST report performance of mid-contract management activities to FSA within 30 days of completion.

Early land preparation may be performed during the last year of a CRP contract, after receiving written permission from FSA. If the acreage will be planted to a fall-seeded crop, early land prep may begin as early as May 1st. If the acreage will not be planted to a fall-seeded crop, early land prep may begin as early as July 16th. No CRP payment will be earned from the date that early land prep begins through September 30, 2018.

For more information, please contact your local FSA office.

Farm Loans Available

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](#).

Farm Service Agency Loan Rates for June 2018

Price Support Loans

- [Farm Storage Facility Loan](#) (FSFL) Program
- 3 year loan – 2.625%
- 5 year loan – 2.875%
- 7 year loan – 3.000%
- 10 year loan – 3.000%
- 12 year loan – 3.000%
- 15 year loan - 3.000%

FSFL Microloans are also available for the 3, 5, and 7 year terms at the 3, 5, and 7 year term rates for a maximum aggregated loan amount of \$50,000 and at a reduced down payment of 5% (regular FSFL loans require 15% down and have a maximum loan amount of \$500,000).

- [Commodity Loan](#) – 3.250%

Farm Loans

- [Operating Loan](#) – 3.625%
- [Operating Microloan](#) – 3.625%
- [Farm Ownership Loan](#) – 4.000%
- [Farm Ownership Microloan](#) – 4.000%
- [Emergency Loan \(Actual Loss\)](#) – 3.750%

Download a [Microloan Application](#) and [instructions](#)

Call your [local county office](#) for additional information

Requesting Emergency Conservation Program Assistance for Flood Damage

Farmers and ranchers suffering severe damage from flooding can request assistance through FSA's Emergency Conservation Program (ECP). Affected producers can request ECP assistance through their local FSA office.

The types of ECP practices that can be available under this program include:

- removing debris from farmland
- grading, shaping, or releveling severely damaged farmland
- restoring permanent fences
- restoring conservation structures and other similar installations

ECP is administered by FSA to assist producers with the cost of recovery activities required to restore the agricultural land to pre-disaster conditions. Producers who sustained damage from this disaster event are encouraged to submit their request for assistance prior to beginning reconstructive work. Submitting a request after completing qualified reconstructive work may result in forfeiture of program eligibility.

Producers can submit ECP applications through the FSA county office. FSA county committees will complete an evaluation of submitted requests and will request national funding based on an on-site inspection of the damaged land, taking into consideration the type and extent of the eligible damage. Completion of the on-site inspection does not guarantee that cost-share funding will be allocated. The use of obligated funds is limited to return the land to the relative pre-disaster condition. Conservation concerns that were present on the land prior to the disaster are not eligible for ECP assistance. Approved ECP applicants may receive up to 75 percent of the cost of completing the approved restoration activity.

For more information on ECP, please contact your local FSA office.

Reporting Prevented Planting and Failed Acres

Producers are reminded to report prevented planting and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility for some programs. Producers should report crop acreage they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were prevented from planting. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, **no later than 15 calendar days** after the final planting date as established by FSA and Risk Management Agency (RMA). For example, winter wheat planted/failed and the acreage is re-seeded to barley in the spring.

FSA cannot accept a CCC-576 prior to the final planting date. Contact your local FSA office for a list of final planting dates by crop.

If a producer is unable to report the prevented planting acreage within the 15 calendar days following the final planting date, a late-filed report can be submitted. Late-filed reports will only be accepted if FSA conducts a farm visit to assess the eligible disaster condition that prevented the crop from being planted. A measurement service fee will be charged.

Producers of hand-harvested crops must notify FSA of damage or loss through the administrative County Office **within 72 hours** of the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent. This notification can be provided by filing a CCC-576, email, fax or phone. Producers who notify the County Office by any method other than by filing the CCC-576 are still required to file a CCC-576, Notice of Loss, within the required 15 calendar days.

For losses on crops covered by the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), producers must file a Notice of Loss within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent. Producers must timely file a Notice of Loss for failed acres on all crops including grasses.

Upcoming FSA Program Dates and Deadlines

[2018 Montana FSA Customer Calendar \(pdf\)](#)

- **Now through August 1, 2018:** 2018 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) & Price Loss Coverage (PLC) annual signup period
- **Now through and Aug. 17, 2018:** Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Signup Period and 1-year Extensions on contracts expiring September 30, 2018
- **Now through Oct. 1, 2018:** 2019 Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program Application Closing Date for Annual Fall-Seeded Crops, Perennial Forage and Grazing, Mixed Forage Crops (including spring seeded annual types of missed forage), Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Garlic
- **May 15 to July 15:** Montana Primary Nesting Season
- **June 15:** 2018 FSA County Committee Election Nomination Period Begins
- **July 16:** 2018 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 not required to be reported by previously announced deadlines. **Please note that this is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2017 reports for these crops.**
- **July 16:** 2018 CRP Summer/Fall Grazing Period Begins (with prior written approval)
- **July 16:** 2018 CRP Managed Harvesting Period Begins (with prior written approval)
- **Aug. 1:** Deadline for 2018 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) & Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Enrollment
- **Aug. 1:** 2018 FSA County Committee Election Nomination Period Deadline
- **Aug. 1:** Last day to request FY 2018 farm reconstitutions on ARC & PLC farms
- **Aug. 1:** Last day to request farm transfers for FY 2018
- **Aug. 17:** Last day of Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Signup Period and 1-year Extensions on expiring contracts
- **Sept. 4:** 2019 NAP Application Closing Date Value-Loss Crops such as nursery, Christmas trees, grass sod, ginseng, aquaculture, floriculture, root stock sets and mushrooms.
- **Sept. 13:** 2018 CRP Summer/Fall Grazing Period Ends
- **Sept. 30:** 2018 CRP Managed Harvesting Period Ends
- **Oct. 1:** 2019 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

For more information, contact your local FSA office and/or visit Montana FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov/mt

USDA Partners with Texas A&M to Help Veterans Seeking Agriculture Loans and Careers

USDA announced a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service to help military veterans obtain loans and pursue careers as farmers and ranchers. Secretary Perdue joined local dignitaries, members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and community leaders at the Dallas Farmers Market to unveil the new pilot program.

USDA's [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) is collaborating with AgriLife Extension Service on the pilot, which is part of the Texas A&M Battleground to Breaking Ground project. The program makes it easier for veterans to meet federal requirements to get FSA direct [farm ownership](#) loans, which can help provide access to land and capital.

The pilot program, which will include 15 to 18 veterans, will roll out in three phases: an introductory workshop, a business planning curriculum, and a production curriculum over a period of 12 to 18 months.

Typically, loan applicants must participate in the business operations of a farm for at least three years during a 10-year period. However, as part of this pilot program, participants can combine the certificate they receive with their military leadership or management experience to satisfy this requirement. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 45 percent of armed service members are from rural America.

Pilot program applications will be accepted from interested veterans between June 15 and July 20, 2018, until 11 p.m. central standard time, [apply here](#). For more information about USDA programs, visit newfarmers.usda.gov/veterans or <https://www.farmers.gov>.

To learn about other ways USDA is supporting veterans, visit <https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/initiatives/veterans>, and watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAeLqXHUU3w>.

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).