

January 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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### USDA Farm Service Agency - Montana

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**State Executive Director:**  
Mike Foster

### From the State Executive Director

Happy New Year from Montana FSA! As we head into colder winter weather and the 2020 calving season near, FSA reminds Montana livestock producers of the importance of record keeping and reporting your losses to FSA within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent. Livestock producers who timely filed 2019 livestock losses have until March 2 to submit applications for payment and all supporting documentation.

Enrollment continues for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs. Signup for the 2019 crop year ends March 15, 2020 and signup for the 2020 crop year ends June 30, 2020. Producers may enroll for both 2019 and 2020 during the same visit to an FSA county office.

**State Committee:** Signup continues for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The deadline to sign up for general CRP is February 28, 2020, while signup for continuous CRP is ongoing.

Carl Mattson, *Chair* (Chester)  
Chaley Harney (Billings)  
Liane Johnson (Cut Bank)  
Bob Lee (Judith Gap)  
Bruce Tutvedt (Kalispell)

For assistance with any FSA program, contact your local USDA service center. To locate your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](http://farmers.gov/service-locator).

We look forward to working with you!

**Directories:** Sincerely,  
Mike Foster

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Offices in Montana](#)

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## Billings USDA Service Center Update

The USDA Service Center in Billings has moved locations. All USDA agencies within the Service Center are now in the new service center office at 1400 S. 24<sup>th</sup> St. West. These agencies include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD). The main service center telephone number (406) 657.6135 remains the same. FSA is extension 2.

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## Keeping Track of Montana FSA Program Dates & Deadlines

**Dec. 9, 2019 to Feb. 28, 2020:** General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Signup Period

**Sept. 3, 2019 to March 15, 2020:** 2019 Agricultural Risk Coverage Price Loss Coverage Enrollment and Program Election Period

**Oct. 15, 2019 to June 30, 2020:** 2020 Agricultural Risk Coverage Price Loss Coverage Enrollment Period

**Sept. 11, 2019:** 2018 and 2019 Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) Signup Began (**Deadline TBA**)

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**Jan. 15:** 2020 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Established Stand Alfalfa Seed, Fall Alfalfa Seed and Cherries. *Please note that this is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2019 reports for these crops.*

**Jan. 30:** 2019 Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) Application for Payment Deadline for timely filed 2019 ELAP notices of losses

**Jan. 31:** Last day to apply for a 2019 crop marketing assistance loan for harvested Mohair, Unshorn Pelts (LDP only) and Wool

**Feb. 28:** Last day of General CRP Signup

**March 2:** Deadline for the 2019 Livestock Indemnity Program Application for Payment and all supporting documentation for timely filed 2019 LIP notices of livestock losses.

**March 15:** Last day of 2019 Agricultural Risk Coverage Price Loss Coverage Enrollment and Program Election Period

**March 16:** 2020 NAP Coverage Application Closing Date for all Spring Crops except Spring-Seeded Canola, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Mixed Forage

**March 31:** Last day to apply for a 2019 crop marketing assistance loan for harvested Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, Wheat and Sesame Seed

**June 1:** Last day to apply for a 2019 crop marketing assistance loan for harvested Corn, Dry Peas, Grain Sorghum, Lentils, Mustard Seed, Rice, Safflower Seed, Chickpeas, Soybeans and Sunflower Seed

**Ongoing:** FSA Loan Applications are accepted and processed year-round.

## FSA Disaster Programs Notice of Loss Requirements

It's important for agricultural producers to report losses immediately as all disaster programs are dependent on the timely reporting of loss. A notice of loss can be filed with USDA Farm Service Agency via phone, email, fax or in-person office visit.

- **ELAP – Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program:** Submit Notice of Loss **30** calendar days of when the loss is apparent.
- **LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program:** Submit Notice of Loss within **30** calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.
- **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. **Note:** A producer's signature is required on form CCC-576 when a Notice of Loss is submitted.
- **TAP - Tree Assistance Program:** Final Date to Submit an Application and Supporting Documentation is within 90 calendar days of: the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent to the producer.

Contact your local FSA office for assistance and visit FSA online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt) and [www.farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov).

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## Conservation Reserve Program General Signup Open

*CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the U.S.*

*General Signup Deadline: February 28, 2020*

USDA opened signup for the Conservation Reserve Program on December 9, 2019. The deadline for agricultural producers to sign up for general CRP is **February 28, 2020**, while signup for continuous CRP is ongoing.

Farmers and ranchers who enroll in CRP receive a yearly rental payment for voluntarily establishing long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands.

CRP has 22 million acres enrolled, but the 2018 Farm Bill lifted the cap to 27 million acres. This means farmers and ranchers have a chance to enroll in CRP for the first time or continue their participation for another term.

By enrolling in CRP, producers are improving water quality, reducing soil erosion, and restoring habitat for wildlife. This in turn spurs hunting, fishing, recreation, tourism, and other economic development across rural America.

### CRP Enrollment Options

#### *General Signup*

CRP general signup will be held annually. The competitive general signup will now include increased opportunities for enrollment of wildlife habitat through the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative.

## *Continuous Signup*

While some practices under SAFE will remain available through continuous signup, CRP continuous signup will focus primarily on water quality with the Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative. The 2018 Farm Bill prioritizes water quality practices such as contour grass strips, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetlands and a new prairie strip.

USDA will also be working with Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) partners to relaunch CREP continuous options in each state under new statutory provisions. CREP will continue to target high-priority local, state or regional conservation concerns.

## *Grasslands Signups*

CRP Grasslands signup helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland and certain other lands while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. A separate CRP Grasslands signup will be offered each year following general signup.

## *Pilot Programs*

Later in 2020, FSA will roll out pilot programs within CRP: CLEAR 30, which allows contracts expiring with CLEAR practices to be reenrolled in 30-year contracts and in the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) in the prairie pothole region. More information on these programs will be announced in the new year.

## *Land Transition*

The CRP Transition Incentives Program (TIP) is an option for producers interested in transitioning land to a beginning farmer or rancher or a member of a socially disadvantaged group to return land to production for sustainable grazing or crop production. CRP contract holders no longer need to be a retired or retiring owner or operator to transition their land. TIP participants may have a lease less than five years with an option to purchase, and they have two years before the end of the CRP contract to make conservation and land improvements.

## **Previously Expired Land**

Land enrolled in CRP under a 15-year contract that expired in September 2017, 2018 or 2019, may be eligible for enrollment if there was no opportunity for re-enrollment and the practice under the expired contract has been maintained.

## **CRP Rates and Payments**

FSA recently posted updated soil rental rates for CRP. County average rates are posted on the [CRP Statistics webpage](#). Soil rental rates are statutorily prorated at 90 percent for continuous signup and 85 percent for general signup. The rental rates will be assessed annually. Under continuous signup, producers also receive incentives, including a signup incentive payment and a practice incentive payment.

To enroll in CRP, contact your local FSA county office or visit [fsa.usda.gov/crp](https://fsa.usda.gov/crp). To locate your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

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## **March 15th Deadline for Election & Enrollment of 2019 Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs**

**Schedule an appointment with FSA ASAP to complete your paperwork.**

Agricultural producers can enroll in the [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs, two popular safety net programs, for the 2019 crop year. Interested producers must sign up for either program by **March 15, 2020**.

The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and made updates to these two USDA Farm Service Agency programs. ARC provides income support payments on historical base acres when actual crop revenue declines below a specified guarantee level. PLC program provides income support payments on historical base acres when the price for a covered commodity falls below its effective reference price.

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 rice), safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Updated provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill allow producers with an interest in a farm to enroll and elect coverage in crop-by-crop ARC-County or PLC, or ARC-Individual for the entire farm, for program year 2019. The election applies to both the 2019 and 2020 crop years. If a 2019 election is not submitted by the deadline of March 15, 2020, the election defaults to the current elections of the crops on the farm established under the 2014 Farm Bill. No payments will be earned in 2019 if the election defaults.

For crop years 2021 through 2023, producers will have an opportunity to make new elections. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the farm.

**Once the 2019 election and enrollment are completed, producers on the farm for 2020 can complete an enrollment contract for the 2020 crop year beginning mid-October 2019 and ending June 30, 2020. Producers can enroll in either program for both 2019 and 2020 during the same office visit. During this time, farm owners have a one-time opportunity to update PLC payment yields that takes effect beginning with crop year 2020. If the owner accompanies the producer to the office, the yield update may be completed during the same office visit.**

In partnership with USDA, the University of Illinois and Texas A&M University are offering web-based decision tools to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. These decision tools can be found at [fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](https://fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc).

Producers are reminded that enrolling in ARC or PLC programs can impact eligibility for some forms of crop insurance. Producers who elect and enroll in PLC also have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through the [USDA Risk Management Agency \(RMA\)](#). Producers of covered commodities who elect ARC are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres.

For more information on ARC and PLC, download our [program fact sheet](#) or our [2014-2018 farm bills comparison fact sheet](#), or visit [fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](https://fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc).

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## **Farm and Ranch Financial and Production Management Workshops Featured at Montana's Next Generation Conference Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 in Shelby**

### ***Registration Open for the 2020 Next Generation Conference***

Registration is now open for the 2020 [Montana's Next Generation Conference](#). The conference, which will take place Friday and Saturday, January 31 and February 1, 2020, in Shelby, Mont., will focus on business planning for the farm or ranch and production workshops.

The conference begins Friday at 11 a.m. at the Coyote Club and Events Center (137 Main Street, Shelby). Dan Manternach, ag economist, will kick the event off with "The Big Picture in Ag" and follow that up in the afternoon session with "Financial Management Skills and Business Planning" and "Farming is a Blessing and not a Punishment."

Friday evening will conclude with a trade show and social including a roast beef dinner and time for networking with neighbors, sponsors, and industry professionals.

Saturday's events at the Shelby High School will feature industry speakers and professionals offering 36 workshop options covering crops and livestock production, financial management, record keeping, leasing, succession planning, and more. Saturday's workshops will provide pertinent information for both the beginning and experienced producer.

Livestock topics include beef cattle nutrition, fetal programming, livestock marketing, bull selection, animal health, USDA programs, plants to identify on your ranch, grazing management and more. Crops producers will have opportunities to learn about equipment maintenance and valuing equipment, grain marketing, crop fertility, crop insurance, and more. There will also be numerous financial and accounting topics in addition to one workshop room devoted to succession planning topics.

The February 1 workshops will fulfill USDA [Farm Service Agency's](#) production and financial management training requirements for producers. Pesticide applicator points will be available throughout the day.

Online registration is available at [www.ticketriver.com](http://www.ticketriver.com) or registration forms are available on the conference website, <https://mtnextgen.com/>, or by calling 406-873-2239. Updates will be available via the Montana's Next Generation Conference Facebook page.

Early bird registration is \$25/day for individuals or \$40/day for couples if registrations are submitted by January 17. Late registrations will be accepted until January 24 at \$30/day for individuals or \$50/day for couples. Daycare will be available for both days at \$15/child, which includes snacks and meals.

For more information see <https://mtnextgen.com/> or contact Lacy Roberts at (406) 873-5618 or Kari Lewis at (406) 873-2239.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in this event should contact Lacy Roberts at (406) 873-5618, ext. 2 or Federal Relay Service at 1 (800) 877-8339 by Jan. 21, 2019.

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## Livestock Losses

The [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP), administered by USDA Farm Service Agency, provides assistance to eligible producers for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law. LIP compensates livestock owners and contract growers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather, including losses due to hurricanes, floods, blizzards, wildfires, extreme heat or extreme cold.

For disease losses, FSA county committees can accept veterinarian certifications that livestock deaths were directly related to adverse weather and unpreventable through good animal husbandry and management.

In addition, LIP provides assistance for injured livestock that are sold within 30 days of an eligible loss condition at a reduced price due to adverse weather or attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law.

**For livestock death losses, eligible livestock owners must file a notice within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.**

Participants must provide all supporting documentation to their local FSA office no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred. Livestock owners and contract growers must record all pertinent information, including the number and kind of all livestock adversely impacted. Some examples of required supporting documentation include:

- **Beginning Inventory Records**
- **Proof of death loss documentation**
- **Purchase and sales records**
- **Calving records (include date of birth, date of death and cause of death)**
- **Preg test records (completed by 3<sup>rd</sup> party)**
- **Copy of growers contracts**
- **Proof of normal mortality documentation**

USDA has established normal mortality rates for each type and weight range of eligible livestock, i.e. Adult Beef Cow = 1.0% and Non-Adult Beef Cattle (less than 400 pounds) = 3.6%. These established percentages reflect losses that are considered expected or typical under “normal” conditions.

**2019 Livestock Losses:** In addition to filing a timely notice of loss, producers must submit an application for payment and all supporting documentation by **March 2, 2020**.

**2020 Livestock Losses:** In addition to filing a timely notice of loss, producers must submit an application for payment and all supporting documentation by **March 2, 2021**.

Additional Information about LIP is available at your local FSA office or online at: [fsa.usda.gov/mt](https://fsa.usda.gov/mt) or [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov).

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## 2020 NAP: USDA Encourages Producers to Consider NAP Risk Protection Coverage before March 16

The Farm Service Agency encourages Montana producers to examine available USDA crop risk protection options, including federal crop insurance and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage, before the following 2020 NAP coverage application closing dates:

- **March 16:** Spring Crops except Spring-Seeded Canola, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Mixed Forage

Deadlines for coverage vary by state and crop. Producers are reminded that crops not covered by insurance may be eligible for NAP. Beginning, underserved, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers are now eligible for free catastrophic level coverage.

Federal crop insurance covers crop losses from natural adversities such as drought, hail and excessive moisture. NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops. Producers can determine if crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP by visiting <https://webapp.rma.usda.gov/apps/ActuarialInformationBrowser2018/CropCriteria.aspx>.

The 2018 Farm Bill reinstates higher levels of coverage, from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Producers of organics and crops marketed directly to consumers also may exercise the “buy-up” option to obtain NAP coverage of 100 percent of the average market price at the coverage levels of between 50 and 65 percent of expected production. NAP basic coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production.

**NAP Service Fees:** For all coverage levels, the new NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. These amounts reflect a \$75 service fee increase for crop, county or multi-county coverage. The fee increases apply to obtaining NAP coverage on crops on or after April 8, 2019.

**NAP Enhancements for Qualified Military Veterans:** The 2018 Farm Bill NAP amendments specify that qualified veteran farmers or ranchers are now eligible for a service fee waiver and premium reduction, if the NAP applicant meets certain eligibility criteria.

**Beginning, limited resource and targeted underserved farmers or ranchers remain eligible for a waiver of NAP service fees and premium reduction when they file form CCC-860, “Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource and Beginning Farmer or Rancher Certification.”**

Producers can use the USDA Cost Estimator, <https://ewebapp.rma.usda.gov/apps/costestimator/Default.aspx>, to predict insurance premium costs. For NAP application, eligibility and related program information, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/nap](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap) or contact your local USDA Service Center. To locate your local FSA office, visit [www.farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov).

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# Montana Farmers Incurring Losses to Unharvested Crops due to Early Fall Snowstorms May be Eligible for WHIP+

## Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) Eligibility

WHIP+ may be available for eligible producers who have incurred eligible losses of certain crops, trees, bushes, and vines in counties where heavy snowfall occurred within the growing season. Eligible crops include those for which federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage is available, excluding crops intended for grazing.

For instance, producers that incurred losses on unharvested crops due to the early snowstorms this fall are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to file a WHIP+ application, form FSA-894 or to be placed on an appointment list.

To be eligible for WHIP+, the first criteria is that incurred losses were a result of a **qualifying disaster event** such as snowstorms. A notice of loss must be on file with crop insurance or at FSA for NAP covered crops. For uninsured crops, a notice of loss must be filed with FSA as part of the WHIP+ application. Producers must provide documentation to support the loss was due to snow as a result of the snowstorms.

Both insured and uninsured producers are eligible to apply for WHIP+. However, all producers receiving WHIP+ payments will be required to purchase crop insurance or NAP, at the 60 percent coverage level or higher to meet linkage. Regulations state that coverage must be obtained for the next two available, consecutive crop years after the crop year for which WHIP+ payments were paid. The definition of 2 consecutive crop years for WHIP+ is 2022 and 2023. Producers who fail to purchase crop insurance in 2022 and 2023 may be required to pay back the WHIP+ payment.

At the time of sign-up, producers may be asked to provide verifiable and reliable production records. If a producer is unable to provide production records, they can certify their production. WHIP+ payments will be determined based on the lower of either the actual loss certified by the producer and determined acceptable by FSA or the county expected yield and county disaster yield. The county disaster yield is the production that a producer would have been expected to make based on the eligible disaster conditions in the county.

The [WHIP+ Fact Sheet \(October 2019\)](#) provides additional information regarding the WHIP+ program. County office employees can also address questions you may have regarding the WHIP+ program. For questions, contact your local FSA office and visit: <https://www.farmers.gov/recover/whip-plus>.

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## Submitting Loan Requests for Financing

The Farm Loan team in Montana is working on operating loans for 2020 so it is important that potential borrowers submit their requests early so they can be timely processed. The farm loan team can help determine which loan programs are best for applicants.

FSA offers a wide range of low-interest loans that can meet the financial needs of any farm operation for just about any purpose. The traditional **farm operating and farm ownership loans** can help large and small farm operations take advantage of early purchasing discounts for spring inputs as well expenses throughout the year.

**Microloans** are a simplified loan program that will provide up to \$50,000 for both Farm Ownership and Operating Microloans to eligible applicants. These loans, targeted for smaller operations and non-traditional operations, can be used for operating expenses, starting a new agricultural enterprise, purchasing equipment, and other needs associated with a farming operation. FSA farm loan staff can provide more details on farm operating and microloans and provide loan applications. Loans to beginning farmers and members of underserved groups are a priority.

Other types of loans available include:

**Marketing Assistance Loans** allow producers to use eligible commodities as loan collateral and obtain a 9-month loan while the crop is in storage. These loans provide cash flow to the producer and allow them to market the crop when prices may be more advantageous.

**Farm Storage Facility Loans** can be used to build permanent structures used to store eligible commodities, or for storage and handling trucks, or portable or permanent handling equipment. A variety of structures are eligible under this loan, including bunker silos, grain bins, hay storage structures and refrigerated structures for vegetables and fruit. A producer may borrow up to \$500,000 per loan.

Please call FSA if you have questions about any of the loans available through FSA.

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## Emergency Loans Available in Montana Disaster Areas

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. 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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## Guaranteed Conservation Loans

Guaranteed Conservation Loans are available for applicants to install a conservation practice. These funds may be used for any conservation activities included in a conservation plan or Forest Stewardship Management plan. A copy of the conservation plan is required to complete the application. These loans are not limited to just family farmers. In some cases, applicants can operate non-eligible enterprises. Loan funds are issued by a participating commercial lender and guaranteed up to 80 percent by FSA or up to 90 percent for beginning and historically underserved producers.

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## USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Producers' Costs for Organic Certification

USDA Farm Service Agency announced that organic producers and handlers can apply for federal funds to assist with the cost of receiving and maintaining organic certification through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP). Applications for fiscal 2020 funding are due **Oct. 31, 2020**.

OCCSP received continued support through the 2018 Farm Bill. It provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products for the costs of obtaining or maintaining organic certification under the USDA's National Organic Program. Eligible producers include any certified producers or handlers who have paid organic certification fees to a USDA-accredited certifying agent. Eligible expenses for cost-share reimbursement include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, travel expenses for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage.

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, including crops, livestock, wild crops, handling and state organic program fees.

**More Information:** To learn more about organic certification cost share, please visit the [OCCSP webpage](#), view the [notice of funds availability on the Federal Register](#), or contact your [FSA county office](#). To learn more about USDA support for organic agriculture, visit [usda.gov/organic](https://usda.gov/organic).

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## **Agriculture News from USDA Rural Development in Montana**

### **Registration Open: 2020 Soil Health Innovations Conference March 30-31 in Bozeman, MT**

In March 2020, the inaugural Soil Health Innovations Conference will bring together leading experts and innovative farmers from around the U.S. to share the latest in soil science, best practices in soil management, and the emerging technologies that will drive the future of sustainable and regenerative agriculture. The [National Center for Appropriate Technology](#) (NCAT) is sponsoring the conference in cooperation with [USDA Rural Development](#), [Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\)](#), and [Montana State University](#). The conference will be held March 30-31 in Bozeman, Montana.

Registration remains open. To register and for more information, visit <https://soilinnovations.ncat.org/>.

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## **USDA Seeks Applications for Grants to Help Agricultural Producers and Rural Small Businesses Develop New Products**

***Application Deadline: March 10, 2020***

The USDA Rural Development is accepting applications for grants to help farmers, ranchers, and producer-based businesses develop new products and expanding marketing opportunities.

Rural Development is making approximately \$37 million in grants available nationwide under the [Value Added Producer Grant \(VAPG\) Program](#). The grants can be used to develop new products from raw agricultural products, to develop additional uses for already developed product lines, or to market value-added agricultural products.

Independent producers, agricultural operators, farmer or rancher cooperatives, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures are eligible to apply. Priority will be given to veterans, socially-disadvantaged groups, beginning farmers and ranchers, operators of small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches, and farmer and rancher cooperatives.

Electronic applications must be submitted to [grants.gov](https://grants.gov) by **10:00 pm MST on March 5, 2020**. Paper applications must be submitted by **4:30 pm MST on March 10, 2020**. In Montana, applications should be submitted to your [local USDA Rural Development office](#).

We strongly encourage you to contact a local [Business and Cooperative Program Specialist](#) prior to beginning work on your application for more details about the requirements and process. VAPG toolkits and other useful resources can be found on our [website](#).

For additional information, see page 67703 of the [December 11, 2019, Federal Register](#).

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USDA Rural Development's Real Energy for American Program (REAP) has two types of funding assistance:

### **REAP Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Application Deadline: March 31, 2020**

The [REAP Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements](#) will provide funds to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to install renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements. The Rural Energy

for America Program is designed to help agricultural producers and rural small businesses reduce energy costs and consumption and help meet the nations critical energy needs. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis. The application deadline is March 31, 2020.

## **REAP Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Program - Application Deadline: January 31, 2020**

The [REAP Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Grants Program](#) assists rural small businesses and agricultural producers by conducting and promoting energy audits and providing Renewable Energy Development Assistance (REDA). The application deadline is Jan. 31, 2020. For more information, contact Montana RD online at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/mt> and 406-585-2540.

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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).