

September 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Montana FSA: September 2020 News

All Montana USDA Service Centers are open for business, including some that are open to visitors to conduct business in person by appointment only. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors may also be required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. Our program delivery staff will be in the office, and they will be working with our producers in office, by phone, by mail, by email and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

USDA Farm Service Agency - Montana

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State Executive Director:
Mike Foster

State Committee:
Carl Mattson, Chair (Chester)
Chaley Harney (Billings)
Liane Johnson (Cut Bank)
Bob Lee (Judith Gap)

Policy Reminders: [2020 Annual Notification to FSA Customers](#)

To find contact information for your local office, visit: www.farmers.gov.

Reasonable Accommodations: Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in FSA programs should contact the County Executive Director in the local FSA office or Jennifer Cole, FSA state civil rights coordinator, at 406.654.1333, ext. 117, or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339, or jennifer.cole@usda.gov.

From the State Executive Director

Coronavirus Food Assistance Program for Montana Producers *CFAP resources and the September 11 deadline to apply*

Montana is home to approximately 27,000 agricultural operations. At USDA, we know that these farms, and our farmers and ranchers, have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. We're here to provide support through a range of programs and services, including the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, or CFAP.

As of Aug. 31, Montana FSA administered more than \$166.5 million in CFAP relief to 9,523 applicants, including \$150.6 million in CFAP livestock payments.

Whether you raise cattle or corn, or one of the many other commodities that provide for our state and nation, you may be eligible for CFAP. And, whether you've worked with Farm Service Agency for years or you're a new customer, we're here to make sure the application process is as simple for you as possible.

Getting started is easy. First, visit the pages below to check eligibility for the commodities you grow or raise. Next, visit farmers.gov/cfap for multiple options to apply by the September 11 deadline.

- [CFAP for Non-Specialty Crop Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Livestock Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Specialty Crop Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Dairy Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Wool Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Aquaculture Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Egg Producers](#)
- [CFAP for Nursery Crop Producers](#)

We offer a call center at 877-508-8364 for producers interested in one-on-one assistance with the application, and your [local USDA Service Center](#) staff are always available to help as well.

Farmers and ranchers support our nation, and we are here to support our farmers and ranchers. Visit farmers.gov/cfap to learn more about this program, and don't forget to submit your application by September 11.

Sincerely,
Mike Foster

Montana FSA Program Dates and Deadlines

March 23: Signup Began for Excess Moisture and Drought (D-3 and Above) Losses Under [WHIP+](#). Signup deadline to be determined.

Sept. 1: 2021 Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Coverage Application Closing Date for all Canola (Winter and Spring Seeded) and Value-Loss Crops such as Nursery, Christmas Trees, Grass Sod, Ginseng, Aquaculture, Floriculture, Root Stock Sets and Mushrooms

Sept. 11: Last day of [Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Signup](#)

Sept. 30: Deadline to update Price Loss Coverage (PLC) payment yields

Sept. 30: 2021 NAP Application for Coverage Deadline 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

Oct. 12: First day of 2021 Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) Sign-up

Nov. 1: Last day of 2020 CRP Summer/Fall Non-Emergency Grazing Period (*prior approval required*)

Early November: 2020 County Committee Election Ballots to be Mailed to Voters

Nov. 16: 2021 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Apiculture, Fall Wheat (Hard Red Winter), and all other Fall-Seeded Small Grains. *Please note that this is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2020 reports for these crops.*

Nov. 20: Last day of [CRP Soil Health and Income Protection Program \(SHIPP\) Pilot](#) Signup Period

Dec. 1: 2021 NAP Coverage Application Closing Date for Honey

Dec. 7: Voted FSA County Committee Election Ballots due to FSA

Dec. 11: Last day of 2021 Dairy Margin Coverage Sign-up

Ongoing: FSA [Farm Loan](#) Applications are accepted and processed year-round.

Ongoing: Contact FSA right away for notice of loss deadlines and disaster program requirements.

For more information, contact your local FSA office and/or visit www.farmers.gov.

One-Time PLC Yield Updates – Deadline September 30

Farm owners have a one-time opportunity to update PLC yields of covered commodities on the farm, regardless of Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program election. The deadline to request a PLC yield update is September 30, 2020.

The updated yield will be equal to 90 percent of the average yield per planted acre in crop years 2013-2017 (excluding any year where the applicable covered commodity was not planted), subject to the ratio obtained by dividing the 2008-2012 average national yield by the 2013-2017 average national yield for the covered commodity. If the reported yield in any year is less than 75 percent of the 2013-2017 average county yield, then the yield will be substituted with 75 percent of the county average yield.

The chart below provides the ratio obtained by dividing the 2008-2012 average national yield by the 2013-2017 average national yield for each covered commodity.

It is the owner's choice whether to update or keep existing PLC yields. If a yield update is not made, then no action is required to maintain the existing PLC yield. An existing or updated PLC yield will be maintained and effective for crop years 2020 through 2023 (life of the 2018 Farm Bill).

PLC yields may be updated on a covered commodity-by-covered commodity basis using FSA form [CCC-867](#).

For more information, reference resources and decision tools, visit farmers.gov/arc-plc. Contact your local Farm Service Agency Office for assistance – farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

Covered Commodity	National Yield Factor
Barley	0.9437
Canola	0.9643
Chickpeas, Large	1.0000
Chickpeas, Small	0.9760
Corn	0.9000
Crambe	1.0000
Flaxseed	1.0000
Grain Sorghum	0.9077
Lentils	1.0000
Mustard Seed	0.9460
Oats	0.9524
Peanuts	0.9273
Peas, Dry	0.9988
Rapeseed	1.0000
Rice, Long	0.9330
Rice, Medium	0.9887
Rice, Temp Japonica	0.9591
Safflower	1.0000
Seed Cotton	0.9000
Sesame Seed	0.9673
Soybeans	0.9000
Sunflower Seed	0.9396
Wheat	0.9545

Noninsured Crop Coverage Helps Producers Manage Risks

The Farm Service Agency's Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) helps you manage risk through coverage for both crop losses and crop planting that was prevented due to natural disasters. The eligible or "noninsured" crops include agricultural commodities not covered by federal crop insurance.

You must be enrolled in the program and have purchased coverage for the eligible crop in the crop year in which the loss incurred to receive program benefits following a qualifying natural disaster.

MONTANA'S 2021 CROP YEAR NAP APPLICATION DEADLINES

- **Sept. 1, 2020:** Canola (Winter and Spring Seeded) and Value-Loss Crops such as Nursery, Christmas Trees, Grass Sod, Ginseng, Aquaculture, Floriculture, Root Stock Sets and Mushrooms
- **Sept. 30, 2020:** 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
- **Dec. 1, 2020:** Honey

- **March 15, 2021:** all Spring Crops except Spring-Seeded Canola, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Mixed Forage

NAP Buy-Up Coverage Option

NAP offers 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.

Buy-up coverage is not available for crops intended for grazing.

NAP Service Fees

For all coverage levels, the 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.

NAP Enhancements for Qualified Military Veterans

Qualified veteran farmers or ranchers are 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, including females and entities with 50 percent female ownership, 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.”

For NAP application, eligibility and related program information, contact your local USDA Service Center and/or visit fsa.usda.gov/nap.

2020 Livestock Forage Disaster Program Triggered in Powder River County

Producers in **Powder River County** are eligible to apply for 2020 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on small grain, native pasture, and/or improved pasture.

LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or leased land or fire on federally managed land.

County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire. At this time, Powder River is the only Montana county that has met the drought criteria for LFP eligibility. You must complete a CCC-853 and submit the required supporting documentation no later than **Feb. 1, 2021**, for 2020 losses.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock, contact the Powder River County USDA Service Center in Broadus at 406-436-2321, ext. 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Reporting 2020 NAP Losses

NAP provides financial assistance to you for crops that aren't eligible for crop insurance to protect against lower yields or crops unable to be planted due to natural disasters including freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, flood, excessive heat and qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing), among others.

To receive payment, you had to purchase NAP coverage for 2020 crops and file a notice of loss the earlier of 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 days of the final harvest date.

For hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops, you must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes apparent.

Eligible crops must be commercially produced agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops.

For more information on NAP, contact your local USDA Service Center and visit fsa.usda.gov/nap

FSA Outlines MAL and LDP Policy

The 2018 Farm Bill extends loan authority through 2023 for Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs)

MALs and LDPs provide financing and marketing assistance for wheat, feed grains, soybeans, and other oilseeds, pulse crops, rice, peanuts, cotton, wool and honey. MALs provide you with interim financing after harvest to help you meet cash flow needs without having to sell your commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows. A producer who is eligible to obtain a loan, but agrees to forgo the loan, may obtain an LDP if such a payment is available. Marketing loan provisions and LDPs are not available for sugar and extra-long staple cotton.

FSA is now accepting requests for 2020 MALs and LDPs for all eligible commodities after harvest. Requests for loans and LDPs shall be made on or before the final availability date for the respective commodities.

Commodity certificates are available to loan holders who have outstanding nonrecourse loans for wheat, upland cotton, rice, feed grains, pulse crops (dry peas, lentils, large and small chickpeas), peanuts, wool, soybeans and designated minor oilseeds. These certificates can be purchased at the posted county price (or adjusted world price or national posted price) for the quantity of commodity under loan, and must be immediately exchanged for the collateral, satisfying the loan. MALs redeemed with commodity certificates are not subject to Adjusted Gross Income provisions.

To be considered eligible for an LDP, you must have form [CCC-633EZ](#), Page 1 on file at your local FSA Office before losing beneficial interest in the crop. Pages 2, 3 or 4 of the form must be submitted when payment is requested.

Marketing loan gains (MLGs) and loan deficiency payments (LDPs) are no longer subject to payment limitations, actively engaged in farming and cash-rent tenant rules.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provisions state that if your total applicable three-year average AGI exceeds \$900,000, then you're not eligible to receive an MLG or LDP. You must have a valid CCC-941 on file to earn a market gain of LDP. The AGI does not apply to MALs redeemed with commodity certificate exchange.

For more information and additional eligibility requirements, contact your local service center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

FSA Distress Loans Available in Cascade, Chouteau and Liberty counties

USDA Farm Service Agency in Montana recently announced the availability of distress loans for crop producers in **Cascade, Chouteau and Liberty counties** for the 2020 harvest. FSA is offering the distress loan program because there is not enough storage available for the 2020 crop harvest in Cascade, Chouteau and Liberty counties.

There may be additional distress loans available in other counties with limited storage opportunities for the high production in other areas in the state. FSA will look at each request on a county-by-county basis.

Producers will be able to pledge their commodity as loan collateral to receive a 90-day distress loan on 75 percent of their eligible quantity. The only storage restrictions are that the commodity must be protected from animals and must be located so that water drainage will not seriously impact the quality or quantity of the crop.

Loan rates for distress loans are based on the county where the crop is stored. Distress loans mature not later than 90 days after the date the loan is disbursed and must be repaid at principal, plus interest. If a producer can find an approved storage facility within the 90-day distress loan period, the commodity can be transferred into a non-recourse loan, also called a Marketing Assistance Loan, for up to nine months including the time the commodity was placed in the distress loan. Loan requests must be completed and signed within 30 calendar days after the completion of the producer's harvest.

Producers can consider FSA's Farm Storage Facility Loan program for low-interest financing to build or upgrade farm storage and handling facilities. The maximum storage facility loan amount is \$500,000 per loan request. Loan terms are three, five, seven, 10 or 12 years depending on the amount of the loan. The September 2020 interest rate for a farm storage facility loan ranges from 0.125 to 0.750 percent, depending on the length of the loan.

To apply for distress loans or for questions on any FSA program contact the local FSA office. To locate an office near you or learn more about FSA programs, visit <https://www.farmers.gov>.

USDA Extends Sign Up Deadline for New Conservation Pilot Program in Prairie Pothole Region

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is extending the deadline to November 20, 2020, for the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP), a new pilot program that enables farmers to receive payments for planting perennial cover for conservation use for three to five years. Signup opened March 30, 2020, for the pilot program, which is part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and available to producers in Iowa, Minnesota, **Montana**, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Through SHIPP, producers have the option of three-, four-, or five-year CRP contracts to establish perennial cover on less productive cropland in exchange for payments. This pilot enables producers to plant perennial cover that, among other benefits, will improve soil health and water quality while having the option to harvest, hay, and graze during certain times of the year. Up to 50,000 acres can be enrolled.

The SHIPP pilot is the latest option in a full suite of opportunities available to producers through CRP and other conservation programs offered by USDA. Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to talk to their FSA county office soon about whether this pilot fits their operation or consider another longer-term option such as the CRP General signup or CRP Continuous signup that is ongoing.

For more information about soil health and what you can do in Montana, please contact your local [USDA service center](#).

USDA Offers Annual Installment Deferral Option for Farm Storage Facility Loan Borrowers

To assist Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) borrowers experiencing financial hardship from the pandemic and other challenges in production agriculture, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is offering a one-time annual installment payment deferral option. No fees or prepayment penalties apply for borrowers who choose this FSFL loan flexibility option.

Eligible borrowers can request a one-time only annual installment payment deferral for loans having terms of three, five, seven or ten years. The installment deferral option is not available for 12-year term loans.

The FSFL installment payments will remain the same, except for the last year. The original loan interest rate and annual payment due date will remain the same. However, because the installment payment deferral is a one-year loan term extension, the final payment will be higher due to additional accrued interest.

Borrowers interested in exercising the one-time annual installment deferral option should contact FSA to make the request and to obtain, complete and sign required forms.

FSFLs provide low-interest financing for producers to store, handle and transport eligible commodities.

More Information

In addition to offering flexibilities for FSFLs, FSA has also made other flexibilities to help producers impacted by the pandemic, including relaxing the loan-making process for farm operating and ownership loans and implementing the Disaster Set-Aside provision that enables an upcoming installment on a direct loan to be set aside for the year. More information on these flexibilities can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

For more information, contact your local USDA Service Center. To locate your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

FSA Set-Aside Loan Provision for Customers Impacted by COVID-19

Set-Aside Delays Loan Payments for Borrowers

USDA's Farm Service Agency broadened the use of the Disaster Set-Aside (DSA) loan provision, normally used in the wake of natural disasters, to allow farmers and ranchers with USDA farm loans who are affected by COVID-19, and are determined eligible, to have their next payment set aside. In some cases, FSA may also set aside a second payment for farmers and ranchers who have already had one payment set aside because of a prior designated disaster.

FSA direct loan borrowers were sent a letter with the details of the expanded Disaster Set-Aside authorities, which includes the possible set-aside of annual operating loans, as well as explanations of the additional loan servicing options that are available. **To discuss or request a loan payment Set-Aside, borrowers should call or email the farm loan staff at their local FSA county office.**

The set-aside payment's due date is moved to the final maturity date of the loan or extended up to twelve months in the case of an annual operating loan. Any principal set-aside will continue to accrue interest until it is repaid. This aims to improve the borrower's cashflow in the current production cycle.

FSA previously announced it was relaxing the loan-making process and adding flexibilities for servicing direct and guaranteed loans to provide credit to producers in need. Direct loan applicants and borrowers are encouraged to contact their local FSA county office to discuss loan making and servicing flexibilities and other needs or concerns. Customers participating in FSA's guaranteed loan programs are encouraged to contact their lender. Information on these flexibilities, and office contact information, can be found on farmers.gov/coronavirus.

FSA will be accepting most forms and applications by facsimile or electronic signature. Some services are also available online to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers

can view USDA farm loan information and certain program applications and payments. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in.

Ongoing FSA 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 the 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:** Starting in 2020, producers will have **15 days** from when the loss is first apparent, instead of 30 days, to file a **honeybee** notice of loss. This change provides consistency between ELAP and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which also has a 15-day notice of loss period for honey. **For other covered losses**, including livestock feed, grazing and farm-raised fish losses, the notice of loss deadline for ELAP will remain **30 days** from when the loss is first apparent to the producer.
- **LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program:** Submit Notice of Loss within **30** calendar days of when the livestock 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 within 90 calendar days of: the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent to the producer.

New USDA Survey to Measure Areas for Improvement

The USDA announced a new annual survey of farmers, ranchers and private forestland owners. The survey will help USDA understand what it is doing well and where improvements are needed, specifically at the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

A selection of 28,000 producers will receive the survey over the next few weeks, but all farmers are encouraged to take the survey at farmers.gov/survey.

This survey is part of the President's Management Agenda. It requires High Impact Service Provider agencies across the federal government, including FSA and NRCS, to conduct annual surveys to measure and respond to areas needing improvement.

The survey consists of 20 questions and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Responses are confidential, and individual responses will be aggregated. The survey will be open for at least six weeks and will be closed once USDA receives a 30 percent response rate.

Learn more and take the survey at www.farmers.gov/survey.

Inform FSA Promptly of All Changes in Farming Operation and Contact Information

It is important to promptly report any changes in your farming operation to FSA. These changes can include, but are not limited to, changes in your address, phone, or email, name changes, changes to entity membership or shares, formation or dissolution of any entity (such as a trust, partnership, LLC, LLP or corporation) that owns or operates land or owns other farming assets used in your operation, sale or purchase of land, adding or dropping leases, and any changes to financing or equipment. Participants in FSA and NRCS programs are required to timely report changes in their farming operation to their local FSA office in writing and update their CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan with necessary changes, as applicable. Failure to timely notify your local FSA office may result in ineligibility for program benefits, or delays in

issuance of program payments. If you have any updates or corrections to your records, please call your local FSA office to update your records.

FSA Reminds Producers of Ongoing Disaster Assistance Program Signup

The USDA has started making payments through the [Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program – Plus \(WHIP+\)](#) to agricultural producers who suffered eligible losses because of drought or excess moisture in 2018 and 2019. Signup for these causes of loss opened March 23, and producers who suffered losses from drought (in counties designated D3 or above), excess moisture, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity, snowstorms or wildfires can still apply for assistance through WHIP+.

To be eligible for WHIP+, producers must have suffered losses of certain crops, trees, bushes or vines in counties with a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or a Secretarial Disaster Designation (primary counties only) for qualifying natural disaster events that occurred in calendar years 2018 or 2019. Also, losses located in a county not designated by the Secretary as a primary county may be eligible if a producer provides documentation showing that the loss was due to a qualifying natural disaster event.

For losses due to drought, a producer is eligible if any area of the county in which the loss occurred was rated D3, or extreme drought, or higher on the U.S. Drought Monitor during calendar years 2018 or 2019. Producers who suffered losses should contact their FSA county office.

In addition to the recently added eligible losses of drought and excess moisture, FSA will implement a WHIP+ provision for crop quality loss that resulted in price deductions or penalties when marketing crops damaged by eligible disaster events. To ensure an effective program for all impacted farmers, the Agency is currently gathering information on the extent of quality loss from producers and stakeholder organizations.

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 Loans Website](#)

Document the Drought: USDA U.S. Drought Monitor Offers Producers a Voice to Report Drought Impacts

The U.S. Drought Monitor's reporting feature offers producers an opportunity to submit drought impact and condition reports.

The USDA, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, produced the U.S. Drought Monitor to include a reporting feature that allows producers to report local drought impacts and conditions.

The report allows producers to:

- Provide a written description of drought impacts on livelihood, activities, etc.;
- Select categories to show losses and gains as a result of the drought;
- Report on the duration of drought event;

- Select *Affected Places* – geographic areas ranging from an entire state to a small area within a state;
- Submit images that document the drought and its impact;
- Provide contact information (includes an option to keep information confidential).

The reporting tool for producers to record the effects of the drought can be accessed at the following link:
droughtreporter.unl.edu/submitreport/

More information can be found on the U. S. Drought Monitor site:
<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?MT>

USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs for Organic Certification

USDA's 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 eligible certification expenses paid between Oct. 1, 2019, and Sept. 30, 2020, are due Oct. 31, 2020.

OCCSP 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.

Changes in Reimbursement

Due to expected participation levels for fiscal year 2020, FSA revised the reimbursement amount through fiscal year 2023. Certified producers and handlers are now eligible to receive reimbursement for up to 50 percent of the certified organic operation's eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope.

This change is due to the limited amount of funding available and will allow a larger number of certified organic operations to receive assistance. If additional funding is authorized later, FSA may provide additional assistance to certified operations that have applied for OCCSP, not to exceed 75 percent of their eligible costs, up to \$750 per scope.

The changes to the payment calculation and maximum payment amount are applicable to all certified organic operations, regardless of whether they apply through an FSA county office or a participating state agency. State agencies that are interested in overseeing reimbursements to producers and handlers in their states must establish new agreements with FSA for fiscal 2020.

Opportunities for State Agencies

This announcement also includes the opportunity for state agencies to apply for grant agreements to administer the OCCSP program in fiscal 2020. State agencies that establish agreements for fiscal 2020 may be able to extend their agreements and receive additional funds to administer the program in future years.

FSA has not yet determined whether an additional application period will be announced for later years for state agencies that choose not to participate in fiscal 2020. States that would like to administer OCCSP for future years are encouraged to establish an agreement for 2020 to ensure that they will be able to continue to participate.

FSA will accept applications from state agencies for fiscal year 2020 funding for cost-share assistance from Aug. 10, 2020 through Sept. 9, 2020.

State Agencies must submit the Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form 424 and 424B) electronically via Grants.gov, the Federal grants website, at <http://www.grants.gov>.

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 the [FSA county office](#) at your local USDA Service Center. To learn more about USDA support for organic agriculture, visit usda.gov/organic.

Montana Farm and Ranch Stress Resource Clearinghouse

Montana State University Extension and an associated statewide advisory council have developed an online clearinghouse of resources for a wide range of topics related to stress and mental health. The clearinghouse was created specifically for ag producers and their families, but it contains a wealth of information for anyone interested in learning more about causes of stress, stress prevention and management, and overall mental health. To access the site, please click on this link:

https://msuextension.org/wellness/stress-management/mt_farm_stress_clearing_house/

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