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## Montana FSA: March 2015 eNewsletter

### USDA Montana Farm Service Agency

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Web: [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt)

**State Executive Director:**  
Bruce Nelson

**State Committee:**  
Steve Carney, Chair  
Floyd Dahlman  
Kelly Flaherty-Settle  
Patricia Quisno

### Montana USDA Directories:

[Online Directory of FSA](#)

*\*The March eNewsletter that was sent earlier this morning was revised to include today's extension of the yield update/base reallocation deadline.*

### ARC and PLC Program Deadlines

**Deadline to update yields and/or reallocate base acres has been extended to March 31**

#### March 31 deadline to elect ARC-CO, ARC-Individual or PLC

Key FSA dates for farm owners and producers regarding the new 2014 Farm Bill established programs, Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) are quickly approaching. The new programs are designed to help producers better manage risk for price losses or revenue losses.

**March 31st Yield Update/Base Reallocation Deadline:** For the first time since 1986, farmers can update program payment yields that will help them better select protections offered by the ARC and PLC programs. The deadline to update yield history and/or reallocate base acres has been extended to March 31. If you have not done so already, contact your local FSA office to set up an

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appointment to update yield history and/or reallocate base acres. If you miss the March 31st deadline, your farm's current counter-cyclical yield and base acres will be used for ARC-PLC.

**March 31st ARC/PLC Election Deadline:** By March 31, producers must make a one-time election of either ARC or PLC for the 2014 through 2018 crop years. If producers and owners with a share of the cropland on a farm do not make a unanimous election by March 31, the farm will be ineligible for any 2014 payments and all covered commodities on the farm will have a default PLC election valid from the 2015-2018 crop years. Election is not enrollment; producers must still enroll their farm annually to receive program benefits. The enrollment dates slated for Spring 2015 to Summer 2015 have not yet been announced.

FSA dates associated with ARC and PLC that farm owners and producers need to know:

- **March 31, 2015:** Deadline for land owners to complete their farm's base reallocation and yield update decision.
- **March 31, 2015:** Deadline for producers with risk in cropland acres on the farm to make a one-time election of either ARC-CO or PLC on a crop by crop basis or elect ARC-IC for the farm, for the 2014 through 2018 crop years.
- **Spring 2015 through summer 2015:** Producers sign contracts for 2014 and 2015 crop years. (Exact Dates TBA)
- **October 2015:** ARC or PLC payments for the 2014 crop year are issued, if triggered.

To learn more about which safety net options are most appropriate for specific farming operations, farmers can use new Web tools at [www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc), which can be accessed from the convenience of a home computer or a mobile device at any time.

**ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES:** For more information, visit MSU Extension's Farm Bill website at <http://www.montana.edu/farmbill>, FSA's national Farm Bill website at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/farmbill>, Montana FSA's website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt) and RMA's national Farm Bill website at <http://www.rma.usda.gov/news/currentissues/farmbill/>.

**QUESTIONS:** For more information, contact your local county FSA office.

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## March 16 Deadline for 2015 NAP Coverage

FSA reminds Montana farmers and ranchers that Monday, March 16th is the sales closing deadline for most non-insurable 2015 spring planted crops.

The application deadline for the 2015 Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for all non-insurable crops except for honey, perennial forage crops intended for hay and grazing, fall seeded annual crops, and value loss crops is March 16, 2015. The 2015 sales closing dates for

basic NAP coverage and buy-up level of NAP coverage have already ended for perennial forage crops intended for hay and grazing and fall seeded annual crops (Sept. 30, 2014), honey (Dec. 1, 2014) and value-loss crops (Sept. 1, 2014).

Eligible producers can apply for coverage at their local FSA office using form CCC-471, Application for Coverage. Producers must file the application and pay the applicable service fee on or before the application closing date for the applicable crop. The service fee is the lesser of \$250 per crop or \$750 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,875 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

NAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers when natural disasters cause catastrophic loss of production (low yield) or prevented planting of an eligible noninsurable crop by providing coverage equivalent to the catastrophic risk protection level of crop insurance. In the event of a natural disaster, NAP provides catastrophic level (CAT) coverage based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50 percent of expected production at 55 percent of the average market price for the crop. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized additional coverage levels ranging from 50 to 65 percent of production, in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. This additional "buy-up" coverage must be elected by a producer by the application closing date. Producers who elect additional coverage must pay a premium in addition to the service fee. Crops intended for grazing are not eligible for additional coverage.

Beginning farmers or ranchers, limited resource producers, and underserved producers, including minorities and women, are eligible for a waiver of the service fee and a 50 percent premium reduction when they file form CCC-860, "Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource and Beginning Farmer or Rancher Certification." If you have questions regarding beginning, limited resource, and underserved farmer definitions and eligibility, please contact your local FSA office.

NAP is available on commercially-produced agricultural commodity crops for which the catastrophic risk protection level of crop insurance is not available. If the Risk Management Agency (RMA) offers coverage for a specific crop and intended use in the county, then NAP coverage is not available for that crop.

A copy of a Montana NAP Factsheet is available at: [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/15\\_mtnap.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/15_mtnap.pdf). For more information on NAP and other FSA programs, contact your local FSA office and visit us online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt).

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## Schedule of Upcoming Local FSA Farm Bill Meetings

Producers are invited to attend any of the upcoming Farm Bill public informational meetings hosted by local FSA offices to learn about FSA programs. For questions about a meeting in your area, contact your local FSA office.

### Upcoming Local Meetings:

- **March 4 at 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in MILES CITY** the Miles City USDA Service Center (3120 Valley Drive East). Topics are Livestock and NAP.
- **March 5 at 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. in MILES CITY** the Miles City USDA Service Center (3120 Valley Drive East). Topics are Livestock and NAP.
- **March 13 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in BLAINE COUNTY.** Location TBA. This is an ARC-PLC workshop facilitated by Dr. George Haynes of MSU Extension. You do not need to RSVP but please bring copies of your FSA Base and Yield Documents or request a copy of your records from the FSA office in Chinook prior to the workshop. Call the Blaine County

FSA office at 406.357.2320, ext. 2.

**Reasonable Accommodations:** Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to participate can contact Jennifer Cole, Montana FSA State Civil Rights Coordinator at 406.587.6786 and/or [jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov) or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339. Please submit your request by two business days prior to the meeting. You may also contact the local FSA County Executive Director.

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## 2015 CRP Managed Haying and Grazing

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

**Primary Nesting and Brood-Rearing Season: May 15 to July 15**

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) 2015 Spring Managed Grazing Period is March 16 to May 14th. Livestock must be removed when the calculated AUMs have been utilized but no later than May 14th. Summer/Fall Managed Haying and Grazing begins July 16th following the Primary Nesting and Brood Rearing Season. Producers are reminded to sign up at their local FSA office and complete a CRP-117 form for county office approval before conducting any managed haying and/or grazing activity.

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## Farm Loan Program Availability

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agricultural production. As a farmer or rancher, whether you are just starting out or have many years of experience, loans are available for farm operating purposes and/or to purchase or improve a farm or ranch. All qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs. As the “Lender of First Opportunity” FSA targets some of the direct and guaranteed loan funds for beginning and/or socially disadvantaged 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; socially disadvantaged 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](#).

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## Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. The Farm Service Agency administers this program for USDA. All individuals who are not U.S. citizens, and have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county, are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the AFIDA form (FSA-153) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements. [Click Here to View and/or Download the FSA-153 AFIDA Form](#).

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## Important FSA Dates to Remember

- **March 16:** Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Sales Closing Date for

2015 Spring Seeded Crops

- **March 16:** Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Managed Spring Grazing Period Begins (with County Committee Approval of Request)
- **March 31:** Deadline for Land Owners to Update Yield History and/or Reallocate Base Acres
- **March 31:** Deadline for Producers to Make a One-time Election of Either ARC or PLC for the 2014 through 2018 Crop Years
- **March 31:** Final Loan/LDP Availability Dates for Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, Sesame seed and Wheat
- **May 14:** CRP Managed Spring Grazing Period Ends
- **June 1:** Final LDP Availability Dates for Corn, Dry Peas, Grain Sorghum, Lentils, Mustard Seed, Safflower, Small Chickpeas, Large Chickpeas, Soybeans and Sunflower Seed
- **July 15:** 2015 Acreage Reporting Deadline 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.
- **July 16:** CRP Summer/Fall Managed Haying and Grazing Begins (with County Committee Approval of Request)

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## **Other USDA News: Montana NRCS Offers Renewal of Expiring Conservation Stewardship Program Contracts through March 31, Extends Deadline for General Sign-up to March 13**

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering a renewal option through Tuesday, March 31, 2015, for eligible agricultural producers and forest landowners with expiring Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts. These producers must be willing to adopt additional conservation activities aimed at helping them achieve higher levels of conservation on their farms, forests and ranches.

NRCS will also extend the deadline for general sign-up CSP applications until Friday, March 13, 2015, providing farmers, ranchers, and private forest managers two additional weeks to apply for this funding round of \$100 million.

Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill will allow CSP participants with expiring contracts to renew them by exceeding stewardship thresholds for two or more existing natural resource concerns specified by NRCS or by meeting stewardship thresholds for at least two new natural resource concerns such as improving water quality or soil health.

About 9,300 contracts covering more than 12.2 million acres are nearing the end of their five-year term and can be renewed for an additional five years. The agricultural producer or forest landowner must complete all conservation activities contained in the initial contract before a renewal can be granted.

The renewal process is optional but benefits CSP participants with expiring contracts because it is non-competitive. In order to renew, an agricultural producer or forest landowner must meet the minimum criteria established by NRCS. Contract renewal also offers these agricultural producers and forest landowners an opportunity to add new conservation activities to meet their conservation goals and protect the natural resources on their farms, forests or ranches. The 2014 Farm Bill includes an expanded conservation activity list that offers producers more options to address natural resource challenges. New conservation activities include cover crops, intensive rotational grazing and wildlife-friendly fencing.

USDA's largest conservation program by acreage, CSP pays participants for conservation performance—the better the performance, the higher the payment. Nearly 70 million acres have been enrolled in the program since its launch in 2009.

Along with the renewal option, NRCS announced last month that it will make available \$100 million this year through the CSP. Although CSP applications are accepted all year, farmers, ranchers and forest landowners should submit applications by the funding deadline, extended to Friday, March 13, to ensure they are considered for this year's funding. Applications should be submitted to local NRCS offices, and as part of the CSP application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land, which will help determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

To learn more about CSP contract renewals, visit your [local NRCS office](#). Visit the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) page for more information about this program.

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## **Other USDA News: Upcoming Deadlines & Workshops for Rural Development's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP)**

### ***REAP Program Reduces Energy Costs for Ag Producers and Small Businesses, Boosts Economy, Reduces Dependence on Foreign Oil***

USDA is making more than \$280 million available nationally to eligible applicants through the [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\)](#). Application deadlines vary by project type and the type of assistance requested. Details on how to apply are on page 78029 of the December 29, 2014 [Federal Register](#) or are available by contacting [state Rural Development offices](#).

USDA is offering grants for up to 25 percent of total project costs and loan guarantees for up to 75 percent of total project costs for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements. The REAP application window has been expanded. USDA will now accept and review loan and grant applications year-round.

USDA Rural Development Montana has already held four "Making Energy Work for Your Rural Business," workshops in Missoula, Kalispell, Bozeman, and Billings. Also presenting at the workshop are the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT.) For many businesses, energy costs are some of their highest variable expenses. This workshop will spotlight how businesses from Montana have realized a return on investment as a result of improvements with the help of REAP, and other programs. Rural business owners, agriculture producers, and system installers will take away tools, templates, and business case studies to make their energy efficiency improvements or renewable energy system become a reality.

Future workshops dates and contacts:

- **Havre - March 11th**  
Contact - Lea McGiboney at [lea.mcqiboney@mt.usad.gov](mailto:lea.mcqiboney@mt.usad.gov) or 406-727-7580 ext.103
- **Cut Bank – March 18th**  
Contact - Lad Barney at [lad.barney@mt.usda.gov](mailto:lad.barney@mt.usda.gov) or 406-756-2005 ext. 118
- **Hamilton – March 25th**  
Contact - Lad Barney at [lad.barney@mt.usda.gov](mailto:lad.barney@mt.usda.gov) or 406-756-2005 ext. 118

The application window for REAP funding is currently open! During 2015 competitions for grant funding will occur subsequent to the April 30, 2015 and June 30, 2015 window closing dates. Note: The April 30, 2015 application window has an additional special funding set aside for grant amounts of \$20,000 or less. Contact Montana's Rural Development State Office (Business Programs Section) at 406-585-2540 for application materials and to locate your local specialist or find us online at [www.rd.usda.gov/mt](http://www.rd.usda.gov/mt).

For more information on other future workshops please contact Brent Donnelly at (406) 585-2549 or at [brent.donnelly@mt.usda.gov](mailto:brent.donnelly@mt.usda.gov).

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