

June 2015



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Montana FSA: June 2015 eNewsletter

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Complete Your 2015 FSA Acreage Certification

Producers are reminded to file their acreage reports/crop certification by the deadline of :

- **July 15, 2015:** 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

Anita Matt
Patricia Quisno

**Montana USDA
Directories:**

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Reasonable

Accommodations: People with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in FSA programs should contact the County Executive Director in the FSA Office in your area or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339. Alternatively, you may also contact Montana FSA Civil Rights Coordinator Jennifer Cole at (406) 587-6786 or jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov.

Past 2015 Reporting Deadlines:

- **Nov. 15, 2014:** Apiculture, Perennial Forage, Pasture, Rangeland & Forage (PRF) including Native Grass, Fall Wheat (Hard Red Winter – HRW), and all other Fall-Seeded Small Grains
- **Jan. 2, 2015:** NAP Honey (or within 30 calendar days of the date colonies of bees are acquired, brought into, or removed from the county)
- **Jan. 15, 2015:** Established Stand Alfalfa Seed, Fall Alfalfa Seed, Cherries

The following exceptions apply to the above acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the above 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 above 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 “cover only,” “green manure,” “left standing,” or “seed,” then the acreage must be reported by July 15th.

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

Any crop reported after the applicable deadline for the crop will be considered late-filed and late-filed fees may be assessed. Producers are encouraged to contact the local FSA county office for an appointment to complete your 2015 acreage report.

Farm Service Agency County Committee Nomination Period Begins June 15

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that the nomination period for local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees begins on June 15, 2015.

It is important for county committees to reflect America's diversity, all eligible farmers and ranchers, including beginning farmers are encouraged to get involved in this year's elections. FSA has seen an increase in the number of nominations for qualified candidates, especially among women and minorities – a trend the Agency would like to see continue.

To be eligible to serve on a FSA county committee, a person must participate or cooperate in an agency administered program, be eligible to vote in a county committee election and reside in the local administrative area where they are nominated.

Farmers and ranchers may nominate themselves or others. Organizations representing minorities and women also may nominate candidates. To become a candidate, an eligible individual must sign an FSA-669A nomination form. The form and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections. **Nomination forms for the 2015 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by close of business on Aug. 3, 2015.**

FSA will mail election ballots to eligible voters beginning Nov. 9, 2015. Ballots will be due back to the local county office either via mail or in person by Dec. 7, 2015. Newly elected committee members and alternates will take office on Jan. 1, 2016.

While FSA county committees do not approve or deny farm ownership or operating loans, they make decisions on disaster and conservation programs, emergency programs, commodity price support loan programs and other agricultural issues. Members serve three-year terms. Nationwide, there are about 7,800 farmers and ranchers serving on FSA county committees. Committees consist of three to 11 members that are elected by eligible producers.

ARC and PLC Acreage Maintenance

Producers enrolled in Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) must protect all cropland and noncropland acres on the farm from wind and water erosion and noxious weeds. Producers who sign ARC county or individual contracts and PLC contracts agree to effectively control noxious weeds on the farm according to sound agricultural practices. If a producer fails to take necessary actions to correct a maintenance problem on a farm that is enrolled in ARC or PLC the County Committee may elect to terminate the contract for the program year. A list of noxious weeds can be found on the following website:
<http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxiousDriver>.

Both 2014 and 2015 program year ARC/PLC enrollment will begin sometime this summer. Exact dates will be announced by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Ongoing Notice of Loss Filing Requirements

NAP - Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program:

The CCC-576, Notice of Loss, documents a producer's loss or damage to a crop or commodity due to an eligible cause of loss, as well as failed acreage and prevented planting. A CCC-576, Notice of Loss must be provided for prevented planting claims, within 15 calendar days after the final planting date established for the crop, and for low yield claims, the earlier of:

- 15 calendar days after the disaster occurrence or date of loss or damage to the crop first becomes apparent
- 15 calendar days after the normal harvest date established for the crop.

Timely filing a Notice of Loss is required for all crops including grasses. For losses on crops covered by the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and crop insurance, you must file a CCC-576, Notice of Loss, in the FSA County Office by the dates previously mentioned.

An acreage report must be on file prior to the Notice of Loss being filed.

ELAP - Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program:

- Submit Notice of Loss the earlier of 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent or November 1 after the end of the program year in which the loss occurred.

LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program:

- Submit Notice of Loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent.

TAP - Tree Assistance Program:

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

To submit a notice of loss, contact your local FSA county office.

Additional 800,000 Acres Dedicated to Conservation Reserve Program for Wildlife Habitat and Wetlands Announced

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that an additional 800,000 acres of highly environmentally sensitive land may be enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under certain wetland and wildlife initiatives that provide multiple benefits on the same land.

USDA will accept new offers to participate in CRP under a general signup to be held Dec. 1, 2015, through Feb. 26, 2016. Eligible existing program participants with contracts expiring Sept. 30, 2015, will be granted an option for one-year extensions. Farmers and ranchers interested in removing sensitive land from agricultural production and planting grasses or trees to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and restore wildlife habitat are encouraged to enroll.

For 30 years, the Conservation Reserve Program has helped farmers and ranchers prevent more than 8 billion tons of soil from eroding, reduce nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to cropland by 95 and 85 percent respectively, and even sequester 43 million tons of greenhouse gases annually, equal to taking 8 million cars off the road.

The voluntary Conservation Reserve Program allows USDA to contract with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is conserved. Participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

CRP protects water quality and restores significant habitat for ducks, pheasants, turkey, quail, deer and other important wildlife which spurs economic development like hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation and tourism across rural America. The announcement allows an additional 800,000 acres for duck nesting habitat and other wetland and wildlife habitat initiatives to be enrolled in the program.

Farmers and ranchers should consider the various CRP continuous sign-up initiatives that may help target specific resource concerns. Financial assistance is offered for many practices including conservation buffers and pollinator habitat plantings, and initiatives such as the highly erodible lands, bottomland hardwood tree and longleaf pine.

Farmers and ranchers may visit their FSA county office for additional information. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized the enrollment of grasslands in CRP and information on grasslands enrollment will be available after the regulation is published later this summer.

Changes to CRP "Early Land Preparation" Regulations

Local FSA County Committees are authorized to provide a waiver, on a case-by-case basis, to allow chemical destruction for intent to plant fall-seeded crop (s) on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage during the primary nesting season which runs from May 15-July 15th. These provisions apply ONLY for the waiver to allow chemical destruction prior to July 16th on CRP acreage in the final year of the CRP contract.

The acreage may not be hayed, grazed, or mechanically tilled prior to July 16th following the end of the primary nesting season. A payment reduction will be assessed on all contracts where "early land preparation" is approved.

Early Land Preparation regulations state that the CRP payment will not be earned from the date that cover destruction is initiated through the contract expiration date. Therefore, if a producer chooses to begin cover destruction on June 1st, no CRP payment will be earned from June 1st through September 30th. For example, a CRP contract that normally generates a \$40/acre annual rental payment, would have a payment reduction amount of \$13.37/acre.

CRP participants wishing to obtain approval for early land preparation activities must sign form CRP-IG prior to beginning cover destruction.

General CRP Reminders

CRP participants are reminded to notify their local FSA County Office when there are ownership or operator changes on an applicable CRP contract. If there is a change in ownership, whether it is the result of a sale of land or death of a CRP participant, the successor to the CRP contract has 60 calendar days in which to complete the succession to the contract. It is very important that current CRP owners and/or operators inform their local FSA County Office timely of such changes so the County Office can update the CRP contract(s) so the annual rental payments can be issued to the correct participant.

Furthermore, CRP participants are to timely inform their local FSA County Office of any acreage that needs to be terminated from a CRP contract for activities such as oil well development, gravel pits, housing developments, and so on. CRP acreages that no longer provide approved vegetative cover must be terminated from the CRP contract and refunds of annual rental payments, SIP, PIP and cost-share payments may be required.

CRP participants are reminded that the period between May 15 and July 15 is the Primary Nesting and Brood Rearing Season (PNS). CRP acreages shall not be accessed during this time, as various types of wildlife are using the acreage to nest and/or raise their young. However, if weed control is necessary during this period, CRP participants must receive approval from the local FSA County Office prior to conducting spot-treatment. Only affected areas within the specific CRP field shall be accessed during the PNS to control weeds. All other maintenance activities shall take place outside of the PNS.

CRP Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds Initiative

Montana has 10,000 acres available to eligible offers on a first-come, first-serve basis; Pivot corners can now be installed under the initiative

The Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds Initiative is a practice under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) designed to convert marginally productive cropland along the borders of agricultural fields into grass buffers to create more habitats for upland birds. The continuous signup practice allows producers to create habitat for upland and grassland dependent birds. Upland birds include the northern bobwhite quail, pheasant, prairie chicken, mourning dove, wild turkey, finches, sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, meadowlark, bobolinks and other species.

In January 2015, USDA revised policy to now allow producers to enroll pivot corners under this initiative. Montana recently received 10,000 acres that may be enrolled under this practice. The acres are available to eligible producers on a first-come, first-serve basis through 10 or 15-year contracts.

This practice may be applied to pivot corners that meet the provisions of eligible land. The pivot corners must be installed around a cropped field. A connecting boundary is no longer required. There are no minimum or maximum size requirements.

Participants are eligible for annual rental payments, a signing incentive payment equal to \$150 per acre, cost-share for up to 50 percent of the eligible cost of establishing a permanent cover and a practice incentive payment equal to 40 percent of the total eligible cost to establish the practice.

Interested producers can submit offers to their local FSA office. For more information, visit your local FSA office and visit us online at www.fsa.usda.gov/mt.

Restart of Biomass Crop Assistance Program for Renewable Energy Announced

USDA announced that incentives will resume this summer for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners interested in growing and harvesting biomass for renewable energy. The support comes through the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), which was reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. BCAP provides financial assistance to establish and maintain new crops of energy biomass, or

who harvest and deliver forest or agricultural residues to a qualifying energy facility.

Financial assistance is available through BCAP for costs associated with harvesting and transporting agriculture or forest residues to facilities that convert biomass crops into energy. Eligible crops may include corn residue, diseased or insect infested wood materials, or orchard waste. The energy facility must first be approved by USDA to accept the biomass crop. Facilities can apply for, or renew, their BCAP qualification status beginning today. \$11.5 million of federal funds will be allocated to support the delivery of biomass materials through December 2015. Last year, more than 200,000 tons of dead or diseased trees from National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands were removed and used to produce renewable energy, while reducing the risk of forest fire. Nineteen energy facilities in 10 states participated in the program.

Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners can also receive financial assistance to grow biomass crops that will be converted into energy in selected BCAP project areas. New BCAP project area proposals will be solicited beginning this summer and accepted through fall 2015, with new project area announcements and enrollments taking place in early spring 2016. The extended proposal submission period allows project sponsors time to complete any needed environmental assessments and allows producers enough lead time to make informed decisions on whether or not to pursue the BCAP project area enrollment opportunity. This fiscal year USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will allocate up to \$8 million for producer enrollment to expand and enhance existing BCAP project areas. Additionally, in accordance with the 2014 Farm Bill, underserved farmers are eligible for a higher establishment cost share. BCAP projects have supported over 50,000 acres across 74 counties in 11 different project areas.

For more information, visit www.usda.gov.

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 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](#).

Montana FSA: Upcoming Dates and Deadlines

June 15: Nomination Period Begins for County Committee Elections. Request Nomination Forms from FSA at the local USDA Service Center or obtain online at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections>.

July 1 to Sept. 30: Registration/Coverage Election Period for 2016 Margin Protection Program – Dairy (MPP-Dairy)

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 15: Final 2014 Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Production Reports Are Due

July 16: CRP Summer/Fall Managed Haying and Grazing Begins (with County Committee Approval of Request)

Aug. 1: Deadline to Request a Reconstitution or Farm Transfer for 2015

Aug. 3: Deadline to Submit County Committee Election Nomination Form (FSA-669A) to FSA (or postmarked) at the local USDA Service Center

Sept. 1: 2016 NAP Application Closing Date for Value-Loss Crops

Sept. 30: 2016 NAP Application Closing Date for Annual Fall-Seeded Crops, Perennial Forage and Grazing, Mixed Forage Crops, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, and Wheat

Sept. 30: Last day of the Registration/Coverage Election Period for 2016 MPP-Dairy Program

OTHER USDA NEWS: Rural Development (RD) Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) available for Montana Ag Producers

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.

In MONTANA - 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. 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.

For AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS (at least 50% of gross income from agricultural operations) – REAP Grant and Loan Guarantee funds may be used for the purchase, installation and construction of renewable energy systems (solar, hydro, wind, geothermal, renewable biomass) and to make energy efficient improvements, such as: switch from diesel to electric irrigation motor, electric, solar or gravity pumps for sprinkler pivots, replacement of energy inefficient equipment, replace or update cooling and refrigeration units, doors, windows & insulation, lighting upgrades and high efficiency heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems (HVAC) amongst others. Rural Small Businesses are also eligible for REAP assistance.

For more information please contact the Montana State Office Business Programs section at 406-585-2540, your local Area Office or the Rural Development Montana website at www.rd.usda.gov/mt.

RD's Value-Added Producer Grant Program Available for Food Entrepreneurs and Agricultural Producers to Develop New Products

Funding to support beginning, veteran, and socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to expand businesses

USDA is making \$30 million available nationally to farmers, ranchers and food entrepreneurs to develop new product lines. Funding will be made available through USDA's [Value-Added Producer Grant \(VAPG\)](#) program.

More information on how to apply is on page 26528 of the May 8 [Federal Register](#). The deadline to submit paper applications is July 7. Electronic applications submitted through [grants.gov](#) are due July 2.

VAPG grants can be used to develop new product lines from raw agricultural products or additional uses for already developed product lines. Military veterans, socially disadvantaged, and beginning farmers and ranchers; operators of small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches; farmer and rancher cooperatives; and applicants that propose mid-tier value chain projects are given special priority in applying for VAPGs. Additional priority is given to group applicants who seek funding for projects that "best contribute" to creating or increasing marketing opportunities for these type of operators.

Montana has awarded more than \$340 thousand in Value-Added Producer Grants since 2009. Last year Woolly Bugger Studios, Inc. in Sheridan, Montana was awarded \$15,750 to assist in starting a cheese making operation.

For more information on the VAPG program in Montana, visit [Value-Added Producer Grants](#) or www.rd.usda.gov/mt.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 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).