

March 2021



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Montana FSA: March 2021 eNews

Service Centers Currently Closed to Visitors in Montana

Montana USDA Customers Can Call their Service Centers to Schedule an Appointment

USDA Service Centers in Montana are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, but Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools.

Call your Service Center to schedule an appointment. You can find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator.

USDA Farm Service Agency - Montana

P.O. Box 670
Bozeman, MT 59771

Phone: 406.587.6872
Fax: 855.546.0264
Web: www.fsa.usda.gov/mt

Acting State Executive Director:

Les J. Rispens

State Committee:

Carl Mattson, Chair (Chester)
Chaley Harney (Billings)
Liane Johnson (Cut Bank)
Bob Lee (Judith Gap)
Gene Curry (Valier)

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

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

Montana FSA Program Deadlines

There are several important upcoming program deadlines approaching. Contact your local FSA office to sign up and with any questions.

Underway: Conservation Reserve Program ([CRP](#)) [General Signup](#) (Deadline TBD)

March 1 to May 14: 2021 [CRP](#) Spring Non-emergency Haying and Grazing Period (prior approval required)

March 15: Last day of the 2021 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) [ARCPLC](#) Enrollment and Election Period

March 15: 2021 [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) Coverage Application Closing Date for all Spring Crops except Spring-Seeded Canola, Rye, Speltz, Triticale, Wheat and Mixed Forage

March 15: [CRP Grassland Signup](#) begins and will end on April 23.

March 31: Final availability date for [Loans and LDPs](#) for prior year harvested Wheat, Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, and Sesame Seed

April 9: Deadline for [Quality Loss Adjustment](#) (QLA) Program Signup

April 15: NAP producers with 2021 Perennial Forage intended for mechanical harvest or grazing are required to report their crop acreage 15 calendar days before the onset of harvest or grazing of the specific crop acreage.

April 23: Last day of [CRP Grassland Signup](#)

May 31: Final availability date for Loans and LDPs for prior year harvested Corn, Dry Peas, Grain Sorghum, Lentils, Mustard Seed, Rice, Safflower Seed, Chickpeas, Soybeans and Sunflower Seed

June 15: 2021 Nominations open for 2021 FSA County Committee Elections

July 15: 2021 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Annually Seeded Spring Crops, Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Perennial Forage not covered under the NAP, and all other crops not required to be

reported by a previous reporting date. *This is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2020 reports for these crops.*

March 15 Last Day to Complete Enrollment for 2021 Agriculture Risk Coverage, Price Loss Coverage Programs

Call Today About 2021 Crop Year Eligibility

Agricultural producers who have not yet enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for 2021 must do so by March 15. Producers who have not yet signed a 2021 enrollment contract or who want to make an election change should contact their local USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to make an appointment. Program enrollment for 2021 is required in order to participate in the programs, but elections for the 2021 crop year are optional and otherwise remain the same as elections made for 2020.

ARC and PLC provide income support to farmers from substantial drops in crop prices or revenues and are vital economic safety nets for most American farms.

Producers who do not complete enrollment by close of business local time on Monday, March 15 will not be enrolled in ARC or PLC for the 2021 crop year and will be ineligible to receive a payment should one trigger for an eligible crop.

ARC and PLC contracts can be emailed, faxed or physically signed and mailed back to FSA. Producers with level 2 eauthentication access can electronically sign contracts. Service Center staff can also work with producers to sign and securely transmit contracts electronically through two commercially available tools: Box and OneSpan. You can learn more about these solutions at farmers.gov/mydocs. Producers may also make arrangements to drop off signed contracts at the FSA county office. Please call ahead for local mailing or drop off information and options for submitting signed contracts electronically.

Producers are eligible to enroll on farms with base acres for the following commodities: barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium- and short-grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Yield Data and Web-Based Decision Tools Available

FSA recently updated the [annual and benchmark yields](#) for ARC/PLC program years 2019, 2020 and 2021. This data is useful to producer in choosing to participate in either ARC or PLC.

For added assistance with ARC and PLC decisions, USDA partnered with the University of Illinois and Texas A&M University to offer web-based decision tools to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Tools include:

- [Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator](#), the University of Illinois tool that offers farmers the ability to run payment estimate modeling for their farms and counties for ARC-County and PLC.
- [ARC and PLC Decision Tool](#), the Texas A&M tool that allow producers to analyze payment yield updates and expected payments for 2019 and 2020. Producers who have used the tool in the past should see their username and much of their farm data will already be available in the system.

Crop Insurance Considerations

Producers are reminded that enrolling in ARC or PLC programs can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products. Producers who elect and enroll in PLC also have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO)

through their Approved Insurance Provider. Producers of covered commodities who elect ARC are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres.

Unlike SCO, RMA's Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by participating in ARC for the same crop, on the same acres. You may elect ECO regardless of your farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC including web-based decision tools, visit farmers.gov/arc-plc.

Review of Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Continues

USDA's review of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) is ongoing and a decision is anticipated in the weeks ahead. CFAP Additional Assistance, which expanded eligibility for some agricultural producers and commodities, is under review. The Farm Service Agency is eliminating the February 26 deadline for CFAP Additional Assistance and will continue to accept applications during the evaluation period. Producers will be given at least an additional 30 days to sign up after any decision is announced. Payments from the CFAP 2 signup that ended December 11 have not been impacted in any way.

USDA remains focused on helping producers who have been hurt by market disruptions due to the pandemic, trade disputes and extreme weather. USDA has been gathering feedback to identify gaps in the previous rounds of assistance.

USDA Extends Application Deadline for the Quality Loss Adjustment Program

Signup extended to April 9, 2021

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is extending the deadline from March 5 to April 9 for agricultural producers to apply for the Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) Program because of recent winter storms and some clarifications to program rules. This program assists producers who suffered crop quality losses due to qualifying 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.

The QLA program assists producers whose eligible crops suffered quality losses due to qualifying drought, excessive moisture, flooding, hurricanes, snowstorms, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity, or wildfires.

Eligible crops include those for which federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage is available, except for grazed crops and value loss crops, such as honey, maple sap, aquaculture, floriculture, mushrooms, ginseng root, ornamental nursery, Christmas trees, and turfgrass sod. Additionally, crops that were sold or fed to livestock or that are in storage may be eligible.

Assistance is available in counties that received a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or Secretarial Disaster Designation, or for drought, a county rated by the U.S. Drought monitor as having a D3 (extreme drought) or higher. Producers in counties that did not receive a qualifying declaration or designation may still apply but must also provide supporting documentation.

FSA will issue payments once the application period ends. If the total amount of calculated QLA payments exceeds available program funding, payments will be prorated.

More Information

FSA began accepting applications on January 6 and has received more than 8,100 applications so far.

To apply, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#). Additional information is also available at farmers.gov/quality-loss. Producers can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364.

While USDA offices are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local [USDA Service Center](#). Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Noninsured Crop Coverage Helps Producers Manage Risks: March 15 Deadline

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 Deadline

- **March 15, 2021** for 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.

USDA Announces Emergency Haying and Grazing Eligibility

Last year, USDA Farm Service Agency announced changes for emergency haying and grazing use of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. This included changes outlined in the 2018 Farm Bill that streamlines the authorization process for farmers and ranchers.

Drought conditions are tough for our livestock producers, but emergency haying and grazing use of Conservation Reserve Program acres provides temporary relief to these producers. Thanks to a streamlined authorization process, Montana producers will be able to more quickly obtain emergency use approval to begin emergency haying or grazing of CRP acres.

Program Changes

Previously emergency haying and grazing requests originated with FSA at the county level and required state and national level approval. Now approval will be based on drought severity as determined by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#).

To date, 18 counties in Montana have triggered eligibility for emergency haying and grazing on CRP acres. A [list by state and map](#) of eligible counties are updated weekly and available on FSA's website.

Producers located in a county that is designated as severe drought (D2) or greater on March 1st are eligible for emergency haying and grazing on all eligible acres. Counties that trigger for [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) (LFP) payments based on the U.S. Drought Monitor may haying only certain practices on less than 50% of eligible contract acres. Producers should contact their local FSA county office for eligible CRP practices.

Producers who don't meet the drought monitor qualifications but have a 40% loss of forage production may also be eligible for emergency haying and grazing outside of the primary nesting season.

CRP Emergency Haying and Grazing Provisions

Before haying or grazing eligible acres, producers must submit a request for CRP emergency haying or grazing to FSA and obtain a modified conservation plan from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Emergency grazing is authorized for up to 90 days and emergency haying is authorized for up to 60 days outside of the primary nesting season which is May 15-July 15. Under the emergency grazing provisions, producers can use the CRP acreage for their own livestock or may grant another livestock producer use of the CRP acreage. The eligible CRP acreage is limited to acres located within the approved county.

For emergency haying, producers are limited to one cutting and are permitted to sell the hay. Participants must remove all hay from CRP acreage within 15 days after baling and remove all livestock from CRP acreage no later than 1 day after the end of the emergency grazing period. There will be no CRP annual rental payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing authorizations.

More Information

For more information on CRP emergency haying and grazing visit fsa.usda.gov/crp or contact your FSA county office. To locate your FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator. For more disaster recovery assistance programs, visit farmers.gov/recover.

USDA Offers New Forest Management Incentive for Conservation Reserve Program

Existing Conservation Reserve Program participants are eligible for forest management incentives to encourage proper tree thinning leading to more healthy benefits for natural resources.

The USDA is making available \$12 million to forest landowners enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) who want to implement healthy forest management practices. Producers can now sign up for the Forest Management Incentive (FMI), which provides incentives to landowners with land in CRP to encourage proper tree thinning and other practices.

Right now, less than 10% of land currently enrolled in CRP is dedicated to forestland. But these nearly 2 million acres of CRP forestland, if properly managed, can have enormous benefits for natural resources by reducing soil erosion, protecting water quality, increasing water quantity and diversifying local farm operations and rural economies.

Only landowners and agricultural producers with active CRP contracts involving forest cover can enroll. This does not include active CRP contracts that expire within two years. Existing CRP participants interested in tree thinning and prescribed burning must comply with the standards and specifications established in their CRP contract.

CRP participants receive the incentive payment once tree thinning and other authorized forest management practices are completed.

The incentive payment is the lower of these two options:

- The actual cost of completing the practice; or
- 75% of the payment rate offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), if the practice is offered through NRCS conservation programs.

More Information

CRP signup began January 19, 2021. FSA will announce deadline later this year. Interested producers should contact their [local FSA county office](#).

USDA Extends General CRP Signup

USDA will continue to accept offers as it takes this opportunity for the incoming Administration to evaluate ways to increase enrollment.

The USDA is extending the [Conservation Reserve Program](#) General Signup period, which had previously been announced as ending on Feb. 12, 2021. USDA will continue to accept offers as it takes this opportunity for the incoming Administration to evaluate ways to increase enrollment. Under the previous Administration, incentives and rental payment rates were reduced resulting in an enrollment shortfall of over 4 million acres. The program, administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency, provides annual rental payments for 10 to 15 years for land devoted to conservation purposes, as well as other types of payments.

Before the General CRP signup period ends, producers will have the opportunity to adjust or resubmit their offers to take advantage of planned improvements to the program.

This signup for CRP gives producers an opportunity to enroll land for the first time or re-enroll land under existing contracts that will be expiring Sept. 30, 2021. All interested producers, including those on Indian reservations and with trust lands, are encouraged to contact their local USDA Service Center for more information.

RMA News: Crop Insurance Deadline Nears in Montana

Producers Need to Make Insurance Decisions Soon

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminds producers in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming that the final date to purchase or make changes to crop insurance on spring-planted crops in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming is March 15 for the 2021 crop year. Farmers also need to notify their agent if they have planted winter wheat in a county with only spring wheat coverage by this date.

Federal crop insurance is critical to the farm safety net. It helps producers and owners manage revenue risks and strengthens the rural economy. Producers may select from several coverage options, including yield coverage, revenue protection, and area risk policies.

Producers are encouraged to visit their crop insurance agent soon to learn specific details for the 2021 crop year. Agents can help producers determine what policy works best for their operation and review existing coverage to ensure the policy meets their needs.

RMA is authorizing additional flexibilities due to coronavirus while continuing to support producers, working through Approved Insurance Providers (AIPs) to deliver services, including processing policies, claims and agreements. RMA staff are working with AIPs and other customers by phone, mail, and electronically to continue supporting crop insurance coverage for producers. Farmers with crop insurance questions or needs should continue to contact their insurance agents about conducting business remotely (by telephone or email). More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the RMA Agent Locator. Producers can use the RMA Cost Estimator to get a premium amount estimate of their insurance needs online. Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at www.rma.usda.gov.

Hiring Program Technician in Fallon County

Potential applicants interested in learning more about the following **full-time permanent Program Technician position** with the Montana Farm Service Agency and/or applying for this position at usajobs.gov should click on the vacancy link below:

Fallon County (Baker, MT): <https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/593744300>

Application Period Closes: March 17, 2021

Dates Open: 03/03/2021 to 03/17/2021

Permanent • Full-Time Salary: \$31,520 to \$56,790 per year

USDA Temporarily Suspends Debt Collections, Foreclosures and Other Activities on Farm Loans for Several Thousand Distressed Borrowers Due to Coronavirus

Due to the national public health emergency, USDA recently announced the temporary suspension of past-due debt collections and foreclosures for distressed borrowers.

Due to the national public health emergency caused by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the temporary suspension of past-due debt collections and foreclosures for distressed borrowers

under the Farm Storage Facility Loan and the Direct Farm Loan programs administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

USDA will temporarily suspend non-judicial foreclosures, debt offsets or wage garnishments, and referring foreclosures to the Department of Justice. USDA will work with the U.S. Attorney's Office to stop judicial foreclosures and evictions on accounts that were previously referred to the Department of Justice. Additionally, USDA has extended deadlines for producers to respond to loan servicing actions, including loan deferral consideration for financially distressed and delinquent borrowers. In addition, for the Guaranteed Loan program, flexibilities have been made available to lenders to assist in servicing their customers.

The announcement by USDA expands previous actions undertaken by the Department to lessen financial hardship. According to USDA data, more than 12,000 borrowers—approximately 10% of all borrowers—are eligible for the relief announced today. Overall, FSA lends to more than 129,000 farmers, ranchers and producers.

The temporary suspension is in place until further notice and is expected to continue while the national COVID-19 disaster declaration is in place.

USDA's Farm Service Agency provides several different loans for producers, which fall under two main categories:

- Guaranteed loans are made and serviced by commercial lenders, such as banks, the Farm Credit System, credit unions and other non-traditional lenders. FSA guarantees the lender's loan against loss, up to 95%.
- Direct loans are made and serviced by FSA using funds from the federal government.

The most common loan types are Farm Ownership, Farm Operating and Farm Storage Facility Loans, with Microloans for each:

- Farm Ownership: Helps producers purchase or enlarge a farm or ranch, construct a new or improve an existing farm or ranch building, pay closing costs and pay for soil and water conservation and protection.
- Farm Operating: Helps producers purchase livestock and equipment and pay for minor real estate repairs and annual operating expenses.
- Farm Storage Facility Loans are made directly to producers for the construction of cold or dry storage and includes handling equipment and mobile storage such as refrigerated trucks.
- Microloans: Direct Farm Ownership, Operating Loans and Farm Storage Facility Loans have a shortened application process and reduced paperwork designed to meet the needs of smaller, non-traditional and niche-type operations.

Contact FSA

FSA encourages producers to contact their county office to discuss these programs and temporary changes to farm loan deadlines and the loan servicing options available. For Service Center contact information, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus. For servicing information, access farmers.gov.

IRS Reporting For Tax Year 2020

Producers receiving program payments during calendar year 2020 will receive form IRS-1099-G detailing payments received from the Commodity Credit Corporation. The annual report of program payments on IRS-1099-G is a service intended to help our customers report taxable income. It is not intended to replace producer's responsibilities to report income to IRS. The mailing of form IRS-1099-G occurred around January 31, 2021.

CCC will not issue form IRS 1099-G when CCC program payments total less than \$600 for the calendar year. In addition, producers who receive program payments from multiple counties will receive only one IRS Form 1099-G showing all payments from all counties.

FSA staff will not attempt to interpret IRS regulations or advise producers about which payments to report on their income tax returns. However, county office staff can review payments for accuracy.

Although refund information is not shown on the IRS 1099-G, a customer's financial data including refund information, program payment amounts, and prior year CCC-1099 information is conveniently available via the internet through the FSA "Financial Inquiries" database (FSA-FI). Instructions for obtaining a FSA-FI user ID and password are available on the FSA web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov/fmi

Livestock Losses

Montana livestock producers are reminded to keep updated livestock inventory records. These records are necessary in the event of a natural disaster.

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. Producers should document the adverse weather conditions and date(s) of weather events.

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 3rd party)
- Copy of growers contracts
- Proof of normal mortality documentation

2021 Livestock Losses: In addition to filing a timely notice of loss, producers must submit an application for payment and all supporting documentation by **March 1, 2022**, which is 60 days after the end of the calendar year.

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

Ongoing: FSA Notice of Loss Requirements

It's important for agricultural producers to report losses right away as [disaster programs](#) are dependent on the timely reporting of the loss to FSA. A notice of loss can be filed with USDA Farm Service Agency via phone, email, fax or, a scheduled 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, to file a **honeybee** notice of loss instead of 30 days,. 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 livestock 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.

Change to Policy on Filing a Notice of Loss for Grazed Forage Producers with NAP Coverage

For the 2021 and subsequent crop years, NAP forage producers with the intended use of grazing who elect to use independent assessments or other approved alternative loss percentage methods to establish their loss are no longer required to file a CCC-576 Notice of Loss with FSA. However, a CCC-576 Application for Payment form must be submitted to FSA no later than 60 calendar days after the coverage period ends.

Producers that elect to have the grazing loss determined using similar mechanically harvested units still must timely file a CCC-576 Notice of Loss within 15 days of the disaster event or damage to the crop first becomes apparent or within 15 days of harvest.

FSA Direct Loans

FSA offers direct farm ownership and direct farm operating Loans to producers who want to establish, maintain or strengthen their farm or ranch. FSA loan officers process, approve and service direct loans.

Direct farm operating loans can be used to purchase livestock and feed, farm equipment, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance and other costs including family living expenses. Operating loans can also be used to finance minor improvements or repairs to buildings and to refinance some farm-related debts, excluding real estate.

Direct farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, enlarge an existing farm, construct and repair buildings, and to make farm improvements.

The maximum loan amount for direct farm ownership loans is \$600,000 and the maximum loan amount for direct operating loans is \$400,000 and a down payment is not required. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.

Please contact your local FSA office for more information or to apply for a direct farm ownership or operating loan.

FSA Guaranteed Loan Program

FSA guaranteed loans allow lenders to provide agricultural credit to farmers who do not meet the lender's normal underwriting criteria. Farmers and ranchers apply for a guaranteed loan through a lender, and the lender arranges for the guarantee. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of principal and interest on a loan. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.

Guaranteed farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, construct or repair buildings, develop farmland to promote soil and water conservation or to refinance debt.

Guaranteed operating loans can be used to purchase livestock, farm equipment, feed, seed, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance and other operating expenses.

FSA can guarantee farm ownership and operating loans up to \$1,750,000. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.

Please contact your lender or local FSA farm loan office for more information on guaranteed loans.

RMA News: USDA Implements Improvements to Livestock Risk Protection Insurance Program

USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) announced that further changes to its [Livestock Risk Protection](#) (LRP) insurance plan are effective on January 20 for crop year 2021 and succeeding crop years.

The improvements to LRP include:

- Increasing livestock head limits for feeder and fed cattle to 6,000 head per endorsement/12,000 head annually and swine to 40,000 head per endorsement/150,000 head annually.
- Modifying the requirement to own insured livestock until the last 60 days of the endorsement.
- Increasing the endorsement lengths for swine up to 52 weeks.
- Creating new feeder cattle and swine types to allow for unborn livestock to be insured.

For more information, please see the [livestock insurance plans page](#) on the RMA website.

RMA is authorizing additional flexibilities due to coronavirus. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

NRCS News: USDA Grants Available to Spur Innovation Technologies in Montana

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for grants until **April 23, 2021**, to fund Montana projects that could stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. [Conservation Innovation Grants \(CIG\)](#) generally fund pilot projects, field demonstrations and on-farm conservation research.

Tom Watson, NRCS state conservationist for Montana, said \$225,000 is available for the state-component CIG this year. He said applicants can request up to \$75,000 for projects lasting one to three years.

Watson said projects should address one or more of the three resource concerns identified for this program: soil health, water quality and quantity, and range health. All projects need to result in technology or methods that can be used to augment agency technical guidance; be designed with an understanding of NRCS practice standards, pertinent assessment tools, and planning criteria. Information about CIG and the application process is available online at grants.gov.

Applications must be submitted electronically through grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. EDT on April 23, 2021. In addition, a PDF of the complete application must be emailed to jerry.shows@usda.gov.

For more information, contact Jerry Shows at jerry.shows@usda.gov or 406-587-6967.

USDA Offers Secure Options for Signing and Sharing Documents Online

Farmers and ranchers working with USDA's Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service can sign and share documents online in just a few clicks. By using Box or OneSpan, producers can digitally complete business transactions without leaving their homes or agricultural operations. Both services are free, secure, and available for multiple FSA and NRCS programs.

Box is a secure, cloud-based site where FSA or NRCS documents can be managed and shared. Producers who choose to use Box can create a username and password to access their secure Box account, where documents can be downloaded, printed, manually signed, scanned, uploaded, and shared digitally with Service Center staff. This service is available to any FSA or NRCS customer with access to a mobile device or computer with printer connectivity.

OneSpan is a secure eSignature solution for FSA and NRCS customers. Like Box, no software downloads or eAuthentication is required for OneSpan. Instead, producers interested in eSignature through OneSpan can confirm their identity through two-factor authentication using a verification code sent to their mobile device or a personalized question and answer. Once identity is confirmed, documents can be reviewed and e-signed through OneSpan via the producer's personal email address. Signed documents immediately become available to the appropriate Service Center staff.

Box and OneSpan are both optional services for customers interested in improved efficiency in signing and sharing documents with USDA, and they do not replace existing systems using eAuthentication for digital signature. Instead, these tools provide additional digital options for producers to use when conducting business with FSA or NRCS.

USDA Service Center staff are available to help producers get started with Box and OneSpan through a few simple steps. Please visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find your local office and let Service Center staff know you're interested in signing and sharing documents through these new features. In most cases, one quick phone call will be all that is needed to initiate the process.

Visit farmers.gov/mydocs to learn more about Box and OneSpan, steps for getting started, and additional resources for conducting business with USDA online.

To learn more about program flexibilities and Service Center status during the coronavirus pandemic, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Breaking New Ground

Agricultural producers are reminded to consult with FSA and NRCS before breaking out new ground for production purposes. Breaking new ground and seeding an agriculture commodity without prior authorization may jeopardize your eligibility to receive USDA benefits. This is especially true for land that must meet Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions.

Producers with HEL determined soils are required to apply tillage, crop residue and rotational requirements as specified in their conservation plan or an approved conservation system.

Producers should notify FSA prior to conducting land leveling, filling, dredging, land clearing such as clearing trees to create new cropland, or drainage type projects to ensure the proposed activities meet compliance criteria. These areas will be reviewed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to ensure such work will not risk your eligibility for benefits.

Landowners, operators, and other tenants requesting benefits are required to complete form AD-1026 - Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification and identify the proposed activities to allow FSA to determine whether a referral to NRCS for further review is necessary.

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.

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](#)

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/

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).
