

April 2021



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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-
- [Montana FSA Program Dates](#)
 - [USDA Announces Key Leadership in Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area](#)
 - [April 9 Application Deadline for the Quality Loss Adjustment](#)
 - [CFAP 2 Reopens April 5 Under Pandemic Assistance for Producers Initiative](#)
 - [2021 Wool Triggers Loan Deficiency Payments](#)
 - [More Information to Come on Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Debt Relief through the American Rescue Plan](#)
 - [Montana CRP Emergency Haying and Grazing Eligibility](#)
 - [USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming](#)
 - [USDA Offers New Forest Management Incentive for Conservation Reserve Program](#)
 - [USDA Extends General CRP Signup](#)
 - [USDA Encourages Completion of Cash Rents and Leases Survey](#)
 - [USDA Temporarily Suspends Debt Collections, Foreclosures and Other Activities on Farm Loans for Several Thousand Distressed Borrowers Due to Coronavirus](#)
 - [2021 Livestock Losses](#)
 - [Ongoing: FSA Notice of Loss Requirements](#)
 - [Document the Drought: USDA U.S. Drought Monitor Offers Producers a Voice to Report Drought Impacts](#)
 - [Weather the Storm: FEMA Mobile App Provides Weather Alerts and Safety Tips](#)
 - [Change to Policy on Filing a Notice of Loss for Grazed Forage Producers with NAP Coverage](#)
 - [FSA Direct Loans](#)
 - [FSA Guaranteed Loan Program](#)
 - [NRCS News: USDA Grants Available to Spur Innovation Technologies in Montana](#)
 - [Breaking New Ground](#)
 - [Inform FSA Promptly of All Changes in Farming Operation and Contact Information](#)
 - [Emergency Loans Available in Montana Disaster Areas](#)
 - [HealthCare.gov Insurance Enrollment Available through May 15](#)
 - [Montana Farm and Ranch Stress Resource Clearinghouse](#)

Montana FSA: April 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: [2021 Annual Notification to FSA Customers](#)

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

Montana FSA Program Dates

Customers can 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)

April 5: [Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2](#) (CFAP 2) Reopens. Signup period will remain open for at least 60 days.

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

April 15: [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (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.

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.*

USDA Announces Key Leadership in Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area

Gloria Montaña Greene new Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation

Zach Ducheneaux new Administrator of the Farm Service Agency

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the appointment of Gloria Montaña Greene as Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) and the appointment of Zach Ducheneaux as Administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA). They began their positions on Monday, Feb. 22. [Read more about the new leadership here.](#)

April 9 Application Deadline for the Quality Loss Adjustment

The U.S. Department of Agriculture extended 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.

CFAP 2 Reopens April 5 Under Pandemic Assistance for Producers Initiative

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA is establishing new programs and efforts to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions. The new initiative—**USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers**—will reach a broader set of producers than in previous COVID-19 aid programs. **Under the initiative**, USDA will reopen sign-up for CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning on **April 5, 2021**. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has committed at least \$2.5 million to improve outreach for CFAP 2 and will establish partnerships with organizations with strong connections to socially disadvantaged communities to ensure they are informed and aware of the application process.

In addition to the reopening of CFAP 2, additional payments will be processed automatically for CFAP 1, CFAP 2 applications, and CFAP Additional Assistance following the mandates enacted through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. The expedited payments and policy updates include:

- An increase in CFAP 1 payment rates for cattle. Cattle producers with approved CFAP 1 applications will **automatically** receive these payments beginning in April. Information on the additional payment rates for cattle can be found on farmers.gov/cfap. Eligible producers do not need to submit new applications, since payments are based on previously approved CFAP 1 applications. USDA estimates additional payments of more than \$1.1 billion to more than 410,000 producers, according to the mandated formula.
- Additional CFAP assistance of \$20 per acre for producers of eligible crops identified as CFAP 2 flat-rate or price-trigger crops beginning in April. This includes alfalfa, corn, cotton, hemp, peanuts, rice, sorghum, soybeans, sugar beets and wheat, among other crops. FSA will **automatically** issue payments to eligible price trigger and flat-rate crop producers based on the eligible acres included on their CFAP 2 applications. Eligible producers do not need to submit a new CFAP 2 application. For a list of all eligible row-

crops, visit [farmers.gov/cfap](https://www.farmers.gov/cfap). USDA estimates additional payments of more than \$4.5 billion to more than 560,000 producers, according to the mandated formula.

- USDA will finalize routine decisions and minor formula adjustments on applications and begin processing payments for certain applications filed as part of the CFAP Additional Assistance program in the following categories:
 - Applications filed for pullets and turfgrass sod;
 - A formula correction for row-crop producer applications to allow producers with a non-Actual Production History (APH) insurance policy to use 100% of the 2019 Agriculture Risk Coverage-County Option (ARC-CO) benchmark yield in the calculation;
 - Sales commodity applications revised to include insurance indemnities, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program payments, and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus payments, as required by statute; and
 - Additional payments for swine producers and contract growers under CFAP Additional Assistance remain on hold and are likely to require modifications to the regulation as part of the broader evaluation and future assistance; however, FSA will continue to accept applications from interested producers.

Until software is in place to process additional payments and adapt to these changes in policy, please be patient for automatic payments to be processed. FSA staff will work to process payments as quickly as possible once the automatic calculation process is complete.

The information in this article is only one portion of the programs involved in the new initiative. USDA is dedicating at least \$6 billion toward new programs through this initiative. The Department will also develop rules for new programs that will put a greater emphasis on outreach to small and socially disadvantaged producers, specialty crop and organic producers, timber harvesters, as well as provide support for the food supply chain and producers of renewable fuel, among others. To see all the programs and assistance available through the **USDA Pandemic Assistance to Producers** initiative, visit www.farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance. The site will be updated with the latest information and announcements under the initiative. For more information on all programs available through USDA, please visit www.farmers.gov and www.usda.gov.

2021 Wool Triggers Loan Deficiency Payments

Wool producers may be eligible for Loan Deficiency Payments (LDP) through the Farm Service Agency. LDPs are direct payments made in lieu of a marketing assistance loan when the Commodity Credit Corporation determined value, based on the current local price, is below the applicable loan rate. For wool, the local prices and loan rates are set at a national level. The payment is the difference between the price and loan rate times the eligible quantity. Wool LDP rates are updated on a weekly basis and can be found online [here](#). Use the Weekly Commodity Rates icon to open the dropdown which includes the “Wool and Mohair LDP Rates” spreadsheet.

Unsold wool shorn during the 2021 calendar year may be eligible for a 2021 LDP. For a commodity to be eligible for an LDP, the producer must have beneficial interest in the commodity, defined as having title, possession, and control of the commodity, and responsible for loss of or damage to the commodity. All related application forms must be completed at the local FSA office prior to loss of beneficial interest. Additional eligibility requirements must be met before an LDP payment can be paid. This includes a 2021 FSA-578 acreage report for all crop acres, a CCC-941 Adjusted Gross Income Certification, a CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan, an AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Certification, and a direct deposit form or waiver.

In order to request an LDP for wool, producers must complete a CCC-633 EZ Loan Deficiency Payment Agreement and Request form. Page 1 is the agreement which signifies an intent to request an LDP and must be completed before a producer loses beneficial interest of the eligible commodity. Page 4 is the wool request for LDP benefits and must be submitted after page 1 is completed. Once signed and approved, page 4 cannot be cancelled and payments cannot be deferred. Payments are processed after page 4 has been submitted and approved.

For more information on LDPs, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/price-support/Index> or visit [your local FSA office](#)

More Information to Come on Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Debt Relief through the American Rescue Plan

USDA is now reviewing and working to gather feedback to implement the Act.

USDA recognizes that socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have faced systemic discrimination with cumulative effects that have, among other consequences, led to a substantial loss in the number of socially disadvantaged producers, reduced the amount of farmland they control, and contributed to a cycle of debt that was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address these systemic barriers, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 provides historic debt relief to socially disadvantaged producers including Black/African American, American Indian or Alaskan native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian American or Pacific Islander. Gender is not a criteria in and of itself.

USDA is now reviewing and working to gather feedback to implement the Act, and more guidance will be forthcoming for socially disadvantaged borrowers with direct or guaranteed farm loans as well as Farm Storage Facility Loans.

As information becomes available, it will be provided directly to socially disadvantaged borrowers and stakeholder groups representing socially disadvantaged producers, posted on farmers.gov and FSA websites and social media channels, and shared through email newsletters and the media.

Producers who have worked with USDA's Farm Service Agency previously may have their ethnicity and race on file. A borrower, including those with guaranteed loans, can contact their local USDA Service Center to verify, update or submit a new ethnicity and race designation using the AD-2047.

Find your nearest service center at farmers.gov/service-locator.

To learn more about USDA's work to implement the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, visit www.usda.gov/arp.

Montana CRP 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, 21 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 hay 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 Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming

Are you a military veteran interested in farming? USDA offers resources to help you:

- **Fund Your Operation:** USDA's Farm Service Agency offers a variety of [funding opportunities](#) to help agricultural producers finance their businesses. Certain funds are targeted for veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Conserve Natural Resources:** USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers [conservation programs and expert one-on-one technical assistance](#) to strengthen agricultural operations now and into the future. Veterans may be eligible for a cost share of up to 90 percent and advance payments of up to 50 percent to cover certain conservation practices.
- **Manage Risks:** USDA is here to help you prepare for and recover from the unexpected. Veterans who are beginning farmers may be eligible for reduced premiums, application fee waivers, increased insurance coverage, and other incentives for multiple [USDA programs that support risk management](#).

USDA wants to ensure that veterans transitioning to agriculture have the resources needed to succeed. 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. If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to your [state Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator](#).

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 a 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.

USDA Encourages Completion of Cash Rents and Leases Survey

You may have received a *Cash Rents and Leases* survey from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). This survey provides the basis for estimates of the current year's cash rents paid for irrigated cropland, non-irrigated cropland, and permanent pasture. Please complete your Cash Rents and Leases survey by **June 21**. This survey can be completed and returned by mail, over the phone, or at agcounts.usda.gov.

Information from this survey is used in the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as an alternative soil rental rate prior to finalizing new rates each year. Survey responses from as many localities as possible help calculate more accurate rental rates. Completion of the survey ensures cash rental rates accurately

represent your locality. Survey results will also give you a useful tool in negotiating your rental agreements, and financial planning for your agricultural operation.

In accordance with federal law, survey responses are kept confidential. Survey results will be available in aggregate form only to ensure that no individual producer or operation can be identified. NASS will publish the survey results on August 27 at [quickstats.nass.usda.gov/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/quickstats.nass.usda.gov/).

If you have any questions about this survey, please call 888-424-7828, or visit: [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide to NASS Surveys/Cash Rents by County/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide%20to%20NASS%20Surveys/Cash%20Rents%20by%20County/index.php).

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.

2021 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.

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

The U.S. Drought Monitor includes 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 (with the option to keep information confidential)

The reporting tool can be accessed at: droughtreporter.unl.edu/submitreport/

More information, including state specific drought impact maps, can be found at droughtmonitor.unl.edu/Home.aspx

Weather the Storm: FEMA Mobile App Provides Weather Alerts and Safety Tips

USDA offers programs to help producers recover from disasters; FEMA can help you prepare ahead of time.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a free mobile app that explains what to do before, during and after emergencies. The app is available for download for Apple, Android and Blackberry mobile devices.

Download the app to:

- Receive alerts from the National Weather Service for up to five locations
- Get safety reminders, read tips to survive natural disasters and customize your emergency checklist
- Locate open shelters and where to talk to FEMA in person (or on the phone)
- Upload and share your disaster photos to help first responders.

For more information about the FEMA app, visit fema.gov/mobile-app. To download the FEMA app from the Apple Store visit itunes.apple.com/us/app/fema/id474807486?mt=8. To download the FEMA app on Google Play for Android visit: play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gov.fema.mobile.android&hl=en

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.

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.

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](#)

HealthCare.gov Insurance Enrollment Available through May 15

HealthCare.gov has opened a Special Enrollment Period from now through May 15 for people seeking health insurance. You may be eligible for financial assistance or have access to plans of \$50 or less. [Learn more at HealthCare.gov.](#)

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).
