

## In This Issue:

- [Montana Program Dates](#)
- [Inform FSA Promptly of All Changes in Farming Operation and Contact Information](#)
- [Disaster Assistance for 2021 Livestock Forage Losses in 14 Montana counties](#)
- [USDA Emergency Haying and Grazing Eligibility](#)
- [July 15th Deadline for FSA Maps - 2021 Acreage Reporting/Crop Certification](#)
- [FSA Opens CFAP 2 Signup for Additional Enrollment; Updates Additional CFAP Provisions](#)
- [USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program](#)
- [Marketing Assistance Loans](#)
- [More Information to Come on Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Debt Relief through the American Rescue Plan](#)
- [Using FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans for Construction](#)
- [Document the Drought: USDA U.S. Drought Monitor Offers Producers a Voice to Report Drought Impacts](#)
- [Guaranteed Conservation Loans](#)
- [Emergency Loans Available in Montana](#)
- [NRCS Sets Funding Application Cutoff for May 21 for Prairie Pothole Wetlands and Honey Bee Pollinators](#)
- [NRCS: USDA Awards New Partnership Projects in Montana to Help Mitigate Climate Change and Protect Natural Resources while Supporting America's Producers](#)
- [NRCS: USDA Seeks Proposals for Innovative Approaches to Conservation on Agricultural Lands](#)
- [Montana Farm and Ranch Stress Resource Clearinghouse](#)

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## Montana Program Dates

**Ongoing:** Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup (Deadline TBA)

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

**April 5:** Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP2) Signup Reopened. Signup period will remain open for at least 60 days. (Deadline TBA)

**May 15 to July 15:** CRP Primary Nesting Season Non-emergency Grazing (prior approval required, with 50% reduction in the carrying capacity)



**May 31:** Final availability date for Loans and Loan Deficiency Payments (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

**June 21:** Proposals due for NRCS [Conservation Innovation Grant \(CIG\) Program's](#) On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials

**July 15, 2021:** 2020 ARC-IC Production Certification Deadline

**July 15:** 2021 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Annually Seeded Spring Crops, Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program, 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.*

**July 16:** CRP Summer Non-emergency Haying and Grazing Begins (prior approval required)

### FSA's Ongoing Notice of Loss Requirements

It's important for agricultural producers to report losses immediately as all disaster programs are dependent on the timely reporting of the loss. A notice of loss can be filed with USDA Farm Service Agency via phone, email, fax or 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 loss is first apparent. Producers should document the adverse weather conditions and date(s) of weather events.
- **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.

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## 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.

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## Disaster Assistance for 2021 Livestock Forage Losses in 14 Montana counties

Livestock producers in 14 Montana counties are eligible to apply for 2021 [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) (LFP) benefits on small grain, native pasture, improved pasture, annual ryegrass, and forage sorghum.

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

County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire.

The following Montana counties have triggered the 2021 LFP drought criteria: **Carter, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, McCone, Phillips, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Valley and Wibaux.** Producers must complete a CCC-853 and the required supporting documentation no later than January 31, 2022, for 2021 losses.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact the local USDA Service Center and/or visit [fsa.usda.gov/mt](https://fsa.usda.gov/mt).

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## USDA 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, 29 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 have 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](https://fsa.usda.gov/crp) or contact your FSA county office. To locate your FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator). For more disaster recovery assistance programs, visit [farmers.gov/recover](https://farmers.gov/recover).

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## July 15th Deadline for FSA Maps - 2021 Acreage Reporting/Crop Certification

USDA Farm Service Agency offices in Montana are currently open to appointments only; but can still work with producers on timely filing crop acreage reports. FSA staff can provide assistance over the phone, by email, scheduled office visits and through virtual meetings via a software program called Microsoft Teams.

The deadline for acreage certification is **July 15, 2021**, and applies to crops such as **spring alfalfa seed, Conservation Reserve Program, perennial forage (not covered by NAP), annually spring seeded crops, and any other crop not reported by a previous deadline.**

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers, including livestock producers, must file an accurate crop acreage report by the deadline. FSA staff is available to assist producers in completing acreage reports and providing maps.

Certification plans may vary by office, so customers can assist FSA by:

- Paying close attention to email or mail from their county FSA office that outlines the process put in place for 2021 spring certification in their office and following the requested steps; and
- Keeping good records of what is planted, where and when it is planted, and ensuring that information is accurately reported on the maps and provided to FSA as soon as possible following the completion of planting.

**Producers are encouraged to work with their county office to arrange for getting map packets and completing the certification process using available options.** Upon receipt of completed maps, FSA will make software updates and contact the producer to obtain signatures on the FSA-578 to complete the certification process by the July 15 deadline. Crops not certified by this date may be subject to late-filed fees.

The following exceptions apply to the July 15 acreage reporting date:

- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting deadline, the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after the purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation to support the newly acquired land must be provided to the county office.
- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the **earlier of** July 15, 2021 or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop.

**Reporting Prevent Plant Acres:** Producers also must report crop acreage that they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were unable to plant. Prevent planted acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA's Risk Management Agency. If you have acreage that was prevented from being planted, please notify your county office and they can assist you in completing this form.

**Reporting Organic Crops:** Producers who selected the "organic" option on their NAP application must report the applicable crop as organic and provide a copy of their current organic plan and recent written certification in effect from a certifying agency. Please note that if you have applied for organic certification and do not receive it before the acreage reporting deadline, you may provide the necessary information to FSA immediately upon receipt.

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## FSA Opens CFAP 2 Signup for Additional Enrollment; Updates Additional CFAP Provisions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced that signup has reopened for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2) as part of the Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative. The initial CFAP 2 signup ended on Dec. 11, 2020, but USDA has reopened sign-up for CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning April 5, 2021, for producers to apply or make modifications to existing CFAP 2 applications.

CFAP 2 provides direct financial relief to producers due to market disruptions and associated costs because of COVID-19. CFAP 2 payments will be made for three categories of commodities – Price Trigger Commodities, Flat-rate Crops and Sales Commodities. Visit [farmers.gov/cfap/commodities](https://farmers.gov/cfap/commodities) for a full list of eligible commodities for each category.

**Price Trigger Commodities** Price trigger commodities are major commodities that meet a minimum 5-percent price decline over a specified period of time. Eligible price trigger crops include barley, corn, sorghum, soybeans, sunflowers, upland cotton, and all classes of wheat. Payments will be based on 2020 planted acres of the crop, excluding prevented planting and experimental acres.

For broilers and eggs, payments will be based on 75 percent of the producers' 2019 production.

Dairy (cow's milk) payments will be based on actual milk production from April 1 to Aug. 31, 2020. The milk production for Sept. 1, 2020, to Dec. 31, 2020, will be estimated by FSA.

Eligible beef cattle, hogs and pigs, and lambs and sheep payments will be based on the maximum owned inventory of eligible livestock, excluding breeding stock, on a date selected by the producer, between April 16, 2020, and Aug. 31, 2020.

**Flat-rate Crops** Crops that either do not meet the 5-percent price decline trigger or do not have data available to calculate a price change will have payments calculated based on eligible 2020 acres multiplied by \$15 per acre. These crops include alfalfa, extra long staple (ELS) cotton, oats, peanuts, rice, hemp, millet, mustard, safflower, sesame, triticale, rapeseed, and several others.

**Sales Commodities** Sales commodities include specialty crops; aquaculture; nursery crops and floriculture; other commodities not included in the price trigger and flat-rate categories, turfgrass sod; pullets; goat milk; mink (including pelts); mohair; wool; and other livestock (excluding breeding stock), not included under the price trigger category that were grown for food, fiber, fur, or feathers. Payment calculations will use a sales-based approach, where producers are paid based on five payment gradations associated with their 2019 sales, and crop insurance indemnities, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) payments for crop year 2019.

### Applying for CFAP 2

Visit [farmers.gov/cfap](https://farmers.gov/cfap) for details on all eligible commodities, producer eligibility, payment limitations and structure and additional program resources.

Producers have multiple options to apply for CFAP 2, including through an online application portal and by working directly with the FSA office. Customers seeking one-on-one support with the CFAP 2 application process can call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.

### **Additional CFAP Payments for Beef and Row-Crop Producers**

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, authorizes an increase in CFAP 1 payment rates for cattle. Cattle producers with approved CFAP 1 applications will automatically receive these payments and do not need to submit a new application since payments are based on previously approved CFAP 1 applications. Producers may be asked for additional information depending on how they filed the original application. Information on the additional payment rates for cattle can be found on [farmers.gov/cfap](https://farmers.gov/cfap).

This act also authorized additional CFAP assistance of \$20 per acre for producers of eligible CFAP 2 flat-rate or price trigger commodities. FSA will automatically issue payments to eligible producers based on the eligible acres included on their CFAP 2 applications. Eligible producers do not need to submit a new CFAP 2 application.

**Additional CFAP Actions** FSA has also begun payment processing 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; and
- Sales commodity applications revised to include insurance indemnities, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program payments, and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus payments.

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.

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## **USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program**

*USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program in Effort to Boost Enrollment and Address Climate Change*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including \$330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and \$25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement today at the White House National Climate Task Force meeting to demonstrate USDA's commitment to putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

The Biden-Harris Administration is working to leverage USDA conservation programs for climate mitigation, including continuing to invest in innovation partnership programs like RCPP and On-Farm Trials as well as strengthening programs like CRP to enhance their impacts.

### **Conservation Reserve Program**

USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.

CRP's long-term goal is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, improve soil health and carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a number of signups, including the general signup and continuous signup, which are both open now, as well as a CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

### **New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive**

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing a new **Climate-Smart Practice Incentive** for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

### **Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives**

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

- **Adjusting soil rental rates.** This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.
- **Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%.** This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.
- **Increasing payments for water quality practices.** Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.
- **Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate.** This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

### **Enhanced Natural Resource Benefits**

To boost impacts for natural resources, FSA is:

- **Moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup.** Unlike the general signup, producers can sign up year-round for the continuous signup and be eligible for additional incentives.
- **Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones.** This aims to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups.**

### **Expanding Prairie Pothole Soil Health and Watershed Programs**

CRP has two pilot programs — the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) and the Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers 30-year contracts (CLEAR30).

- For SHIPP, which is a short-term option (3, 4, or 5-year contracts) for farmers to plant cover on less productive agricultural lands, FSA will hold a 2021 signup in the Prairie Pothole states.
- The CLEAR30 pilot, a long-term option through CRP, will be expanded from the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay pilot regions to nationwide.

### **Increasing Technical Assistance Capacity and Impact Measurement**

USDA technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is critical to enable producers to plan and implement conservation practices that are appropriate for their needs. To ensure increased enrollment and support for producers, USDA is increasing NRCS technical assistance capacity for CRP by \$140 million.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA will invest \$10 million in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

To learn more about updates to CRP, download our “What’s New with CRP” [fact sheet](#).

### **Partnership Programs Contribute to Priorities**

In addition to changes to CRP, Secretary Vilsack also announced significant investments for climate-smart policies. First, NRCS is investing \$330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to address climate change and other natural resources challenges. NRCS will announce more details on the RCPP project selections on April 26.

Second, NRCS is investing \$25 million in proposals for On-Farm Trials, which are part of the Conservation Innovation Grants program. NRCS is seeking proposals through June 21. Project priorities include climate-smart agricultural solutions and soil health practices.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including state, local, and tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

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## **Marketing Assistance Loans**

USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation makes available nonrecourse marketing assistance loans on certain crop year 2020 commodities. These loans can be requested via mail, fax, or in person by properly completing the loan application (CCC-666). Producers requesting a commodity must also have form CCC-633EZ on file for crop year 2020. Loan applications are available at all county FSA offices and online at: <http://forms.sc.egov.usda.gov/eForms/>

A commodity loan application must be filed at the county office that maintains the farm records for the farm that produced the commodity for the loan. The 2020 crop commodity loan rates are available at any county FSA office, or online at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov> and clicking on the “Price Support” link.

Lien searches are required for all applicants and spouses in order to identify prior lien holders. County Offices update CCC-10's by verifying an individual's name according to their driver's license. Lien waivers are required from all lien holders before the commodity loan can be disbursed.

To be eligible for loan the commodity must meet the applicable commodity definition in the Official United States Standards and specific commodity eligibility requirements for a nonrecourse loan. Test weight and moisture levels can impact the eligibility for nonrecourse loans. If there are known quality problems producers should contact their local county FSA office to discuss available loan options.

Farm-stored loans are available in approved storage structures that provide safe storage for the commodity through the maturity date of the loan.

Warehouse-stored loans are also available at CCC-approved storage warehouses or State licensed warehouses which have been assigned a CCC warehouse code. Proof of storage paid through the loan maturity date and proof of payment of in-charges must be provided with the warehouse receipt for the warehouse stored loan. CCC will not adjust the loan rate using premiums and discounts at the time of loan making.

Loans mature on demand, but no later than the last day of the ninth calendar month after the month in which the loan was disbursed. If at maturity of the loan the warehouse receipt is forfeited or the farm-stored commodity is delivered to CCC, the settlement value will be determined based on the CCC's schedule of premiums and discounts based on the grade and quality factors shown on the warehouse receipt. Discounts applied to determine settlement value are included for, but not limited to vomitoxin, falling numbers, damaged kernels, grade, and test weight.

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## **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 call or visit 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](https://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](https://www.usda.gov/arp).**

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# Using FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans for Construction

The USDA Farm Service Agency's [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) are a resource to help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

Depending on the applicant's needs, there are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#) option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Amongst other purposes, Direct Farm Ownership Loans can be used to construct, purchase or improve farm dwellings, service buildings or other facilities and improvements essential to an operation.

To do this, applicants must provide FSA with an estimate of the total cost of all planned development that completely describe the work, prior to loan approval and must show proof of sufficient funds to pay for the total cost of all planned development at or before loan closing. In some instances, applicants may be asked to provide certified plans, specifications or contract documents. The applicant cannot incur any debts for materials or labor or make any expenditures for development purposes prior to loan closing with the expectation of being reimbursed from FSA funds.

Construction and development work may be performed either by the contract method or the borrower method. Under the contract method, construction and development contractors perform work according to a written contract with the applicant or borrower. An applicant for a direct loan to finance a construction project must obtain a surety bond that guarantees both payment and performance in the amount of the construction contract from a construction contractor.

A surety bond is required when a contract exceeds \$100,000, an authorized agency official determines that a surety bond appears advisable to protect the borrower against default of the contractor or a contract provides for partial payments in excess of the amount of 60 percent of the value of the work in place.

Under the borrower method, the applicant or borrower will perform the construction and development work. The borrower method may only be used when the authorized agency official determines, based on information from the applicant, that the applicant possesses or arranges to obtain the necessary skill and managerial ability to complete the work satisfactorily and that such work will not interfere with the applicant's farming operation or work schedule.

Potential applicants should visit with FSA early in the initial project planning process to ensure environmental compliance.

For more eligibility requirements and information about [FSA Loan programs](#), contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov). To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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

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

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

The report allows producers to:

- Provide a written description of drought impacts on livelihood, activities, etc.;

- Select categories to show losses and gains as a result of the drought;
- Report on the duration of drought event;
- Select *Affected Places* – geographic areas ranging from an entire state to a small area within a state;
- Submit images that document the drought and its impact;
- Provide contact information (includes an option to keep information confidential).

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

More information, including state specific drought impact maps, can be found at <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

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## Guaranteed Conservation Loans

Guaranteed Conservation Loans are available for applicants to install a conservation practice. These funds may be used for any conservation activities included in a conservation plan or Forest Stewardship Management plan. A copy of the conservation plan is required to complete the application. These loans are not limited to just family farmers. In some cases, applicants can operate non-eligible enterprises. Loan funds are issued by a participating commercial lender and guaranteed up to 80 percent by FSA or up to 90 percent for beginning and historically underserved producers.

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## Emergency Loans Available in Montana

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 Loan Factsheet](#) (pdf)
- [FSA Farm Loan Program](#) (Web)

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## NRCS Sets Funding Application Cutoff for May 21 for Prairie Pothole Wetlands and Honey Bee Pollinators

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Montana has set a May 21, 2021, application cutoff for agricultural operators to be considered for the next conservation program funding cycle. The cutoff date applies to the Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program and the Honey Bee Pollinator Initiative, both funded through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP).

The Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program is focused on unmanipulated wetlands of two acres or less within working cropland as identified on the National Wetland Inventory. NRCS will work with applicants to determine which wetlands are eligible based on the National Wetlands Inventory. Once the wetlands are deemed eligible, producers will then decide which of the three available levels of management is appropriate for their operation.

- Management Level 1: Implement conservation cover and permanent vegetation on wetlands that are wholly or partially in cropland.

- Management Level 2: Cease cropping, maintain wetland hydrology that provides adequate forage and cover in areas where normal cropland production restricts that growth.
- Management Level 3: Crops and annual vegetation will not be harvested during the primary nesting season.

Honey Bee Pollinators: Combats future honey bee declines by implementing conservation practices that provide forage for honey bees while enhancing habitat for other pollinators and wildlife. This initiative targets agricultural locations within 3.5 miles of a documented apiary.

To apply, and for more information on EQIP, please contact your [local NRCS Field Office](#).

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## **NRCS: USDA Awards New Partnership Projects in Montana to Help Mitigate Climate Change and Protect Natural Resources while Supporting America's Producers**

The USDA announced it is investing \$330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships to address climate change, improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability, including two projects in Montana. Projects are awarded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

### **The two RCPP projects chosen from Montana in 2021 include:**

The Big Game Habitat Improvement Project will address threats to big game migration corridors and winter ranges through outreach, technical assistance, and producer contracts. The robust group of thirteen partners will work with producers to improve grazing operations, restore grassland habitats, and retain intact rangelands. Additional benefits include improved grazing management, improved plant productivity and health, making grasslands more resilient to drought, and restoring marginal cropland to perennial grasses.

The Flint Creek Valley Conservation Project will help sustain the agricultural economy and rural heritage of the Flint Creek Valley, one of the last naturally intact valleys in western Montana. Project partners aim to conserve a critical wildlife migration corridor between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and strengthen the valley's agricultural economy by providing conservation easement services and support to the area's producers. [\(Read more\)](#)

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## **NRCS: USDA Seeks Proposals for Innovative Approaches to Conservation on Agricultural Lands**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is seeking proposals through June 21 for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials (On-Farm Trials). On-Farm Trials, part of the agency's Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program, feature collaboration between NRCS and partners to implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact. Incentive payments are provided to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches.

This program harnesses the expertise, resources and capacity of partner organizations nationwide to help NRCS boost natural resource conservation on private lands and support climate smart agriculture. [\(Read more\)](#)

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## **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/](https://msuextension.org/wellness/stress-management/mt_farm_stress_clearing_house/)



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