

December 2021 USDA Newsletter

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Montana Newsletter - December 2021

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

In the December 2021 Issue:

- [Montana FSA Program Dates/Deadlines](#)
- [USDA Offers Online Tool for Drought-Stricken Ranchers to Estimate Compensation for Feed Transportation Costs](#)
- [USDA Issuing Approximately \\$270 Million in Pandemic Assistance to Poultry, Livestock Contract Producers](#)
- [USDA to Issue Final Pandemic Payments for Timber Harvesters and Haulers](#)
- [USDA Launches First Phase of Soil Carbon Monitoring Efforts through CRP](#)
- [USDA Updates Crop Insurance to Respond to Producer Needs, Support Conservation and Climate Mitigation Efforts](#)
- [USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records](#)
- [Montana Soil Outreach](#)
- [2022 Montana Soil Health Symposium: How to Have Your Soil and Keep Your Bottom Line Too](#)
- [Small-Scale, Local Producers Get Improved Insurance Coverage through New Micro Farm Policy](#)
- [NRCS in Montana Accepting Applications for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#)
- [Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants](#)
- [Chouteau & Hill County FSA Offices Hiring](#)
- [2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program Available in all Montana Counties](#)
- [Higher Loan Limit Now Available for USDA Guaranteed Farm Loans](#)
- [Inform FSA Promptly of All Changes in Farming Operation and Contact Information](#)
- [FSA's Ongoing Notice of Loss Requirements](#)
- [FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans](#)
- [Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers](#)
- [Emergency Loans Available in Montana](#)
- [Montana Farm and Ranch Stress Resource Clearinghouse](#)

Some USDA Service Centers in Montana are open to limited visitors by appointment only. Contact your Service Center to schedule an appointment. You can find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator. Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff also continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Producers can learn more about how to leverage these digital offerings by visiting <https://www.farmers.gov/mydocs>.

Montana FSA Program Dates/Deadlines



USDA in Montana reminds agricultural producers of important Farm Service Agency (FSA) program dates. Contact your local service center to apply and with any questions. Visit online at farmers.gov and fsa.usda.gov/mt. ([Click here for printable deadline poster.](#))

Dec. 6: Voted FSA County Committee Election Ballots due to FSA

Dec. 31: 2022 NAP Coverage Application Closing Date for Honey

Jan. 1: Newly elected COC Members/Alternates take Oath of Office

Jan. 3: 2022 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Honey covered under NAP (or 30 days after placement of colonies). *Please note that this is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2021 reports for these crops.*

Jan. 7: Deadline for the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program

Jan. 17: 2022 Acreage Reporting Deadline Established Stand Alfalfa Seed, Fall Alfalfa Seed and Cherries. *Please note that this is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2021 reports for these crops.*

Jan. 31: 2021 Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) Application for Payment Deadline for timely filed 2021 ELAP notices of losses

Jan. 31: Deadline for the 2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) Application and all supporting documentation

Jan. 31: Final availability date for Marketing Assistance Loans and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs) for prior year harvested peanuts, wool, mohair and LDP only for unshorn pelts

March 1: Deadline for the 2021 Livestock Indemnity Program Application for Payment and all supporting documentation for timely filed 2021 LIP notices of livestock losses.

March 1: CRP Spring Non-emergency Grazing season starts. Prior approval is required.

March 15: Last day of 2022 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Election and Enrollment Period

March 15: 2022 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 31: Final availability date for Loans and LDPs for prior year harvested Wheat, Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, and Sesame Seed

[Back to Top](#)

USDA Offers Online Tool for Drought-Stricken Ranchers to Estimate Compensation for Feed Transportation Costs

An online tool is now available to help ranchers document and estimate payments to cover feed transportation costs caused by drought, which are now covered by the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated the program this year to include feed transportation costs as well as lowered the threshold for when assistance for water hauling expenses is available. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will begin taking applications this fall.

The new [ELAP Feed Transportation Producer Tool](#) is a Microsoft Excel workbook that enables ranchers to input information specific to their operation to determine an estimated payment. Final payments may vary depending on eligibility.

To use the tool, ranchers will need:

- Number of truckloads for this year.
- Mileage per truckload this year.
- Share of feed cost this year (if splitting loads).
- Number of truckloads you normally haul.
- Normal mileage per truckload.
- Share of normal feed cost

The tool requires Microsoft Excel, and a [tutorial video](#) is available.

Updates to ELAP

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or loss conditions as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture. ELAP now covers feed transportation costs where grazing and hay resources have been depleted. This includes places where:

Drought intensity is D2 for eight consecutive weeks as indicated by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#); or Drought intensity is D3 or greater.

The tool calculates the estimated payment for feed transportation assistance, but it is not an application. Once FSA begins accepting applications later this fall for feed transportation assistance, ranchers should contact their FSA county office to apply. To simplify the application process, ranchers can print or email payment estimates generated by this tool for submission to FSA. The deadline to apply for ELAP, including feed transportation costs, for 2021 is Jan. 31, 2022.

ELAP already covers above normal costs for hauling water to livestock in areas where drought intensity is D3 or greater on the drought monitor. FSA is also updating ELAP to also cover water hauling in areas experiencing D2 for eight consecutive weeks, lowering the threshold for this assistance to be available. Program benefits are retroactive for 2021.

Payment Calculations

USDA will reimburse eligible ranchers 60% of feed transportation costs above what would have been incurred in a normal year. Producers qualifying as underserved (socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning or military veteran) will be reimbursed for 90% of the feed transportation cost above what would have been incurred in a normal year.

USDA uses a national cost formula to determine reimbursement costs that will not include the first 25 miles and distances exceeding 1,000 transportation miles. The calculation will also exclude the normal cost to transport hay or feed if the producer normally purchases some feed. For 2021, the initial cost formula of \$6.60 per mile will be used (before the percentage is applied).

Eligibility

To be eligible for ELAP assistance, livestock must be intended for grazing and producers must have incurred feed transportation costs on or after Jan. 1, 2021. Although producers will self-certify losses and expenses to FSA, producers are encouraged to maintain good records and retain receipts and related documentation in the event these documents are requested for review by the local FSA County Committee.

More Drought Recovery Information

USDA has taken additional steps to assist drought-impacted producers, including:

- [Extending deadlines for crop insurance premium and administrative fees, and deferring interest accrual.](#)
- [Streamlining and accelerating losses and issuance of indemnity payments for crop insurance.](#)
- [Investing \\$41.8 million through a four-state pilot of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Conservation Incentive Contracts focused on drought practices.](#)
- [Investing \\$15 million through a block grant to the Klamath Drought Response Agency to provide payments to producers to reduce irrigation demand.](#)

USDA offers a comprehensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs. On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine all program or loan options available for disaster recovery assistance. For details, producers should contact their [local USDA Service Center](#).

[Back to Top](#)

USDA Issuing Approximately \$270 Million in Pandemic Assistance to Poultry, Livestock Contract Producers

Continues to Build on Broader Pandemic Assistance for Producers Initiative

USDA has begun issuing approximately \$270 million in payments to contract producers of eligible livestock and poultry who applied for Pandemic Assistance. Earlier this year, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) identified gaps in assistance including in the initial proposal to assist contract growers. In August, USDA [released the improved program for contract producers to fill these gaps](#), providing support as part of USDA's broader [Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative](#).

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, provided funding for payments to contract producers of eligible livestock and poultry for revenue losses from Jan. 1, 2020, through Dec. 27, 2020. Contract producers of broilers, pullets, chicken eggs, turkeys, hogs and pigs, ducks, geese, pheasants and quail were eligible for assistance, along with eligible breeding stock and eggs of all eligible poultry types produced under contract. Signup ran from Aug. 24, 2021, through Oct. 12, 2021.

In total, the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), of which assistance for contract producers is part, provided more than [\\$18.8 billion to producers](#) whose operations were impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. CFAP 2 had a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers since the program reopened in April 2021. This highlights USDA's commitment to increase outreach, education and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, including by investing [\\$4.7 million to assist in targeted outreach](#) for FSA programs.

[Back to Top](#)

USDA to Issue Final Pandemic Payments for Timber Harvesters and Haulers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will begin issuing final pandemic assistance payments to timber harvesters and timber hauling businesses through the [Pandemic Assistance for Timber Harvesters and Haulers \(PATHH\) program](#) starting next week. In total, \$200 million will be provided to loggers and log trucking businesses who experienced a gross revenue loss of at least 10% during the period of Jan. 1 through Dec. 1, 2020, compared to the period of Jan. 1 through Dec. 1, 2019. This support is part of USDA's broader [Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative](#).

Eligible PATHH applicants must have derived at least 50 percent of total gross revenue from timber harvesting and/or timber hauling. Specifically, eligible activities included cutting timber, transporting timber and/or the processing of wood on-site on the forest land, such as chipping, grinding, converting to biochar or cutting to smaller lengths.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, authorized up to \$200 million for PATHH. FSA issued initial payments up to \$2,000 as applications were approved. Now that signup has ended and FSA has evaluated remaining funds, FSA has started to issue second payments to those applicants whose calculated payment amount was over \$2,000.

Based on the number of actual PATHH applications filed, FSA will be required to lower the payment limitation for PATHH from \$125,000 to \$75,000 and apply a payment factor of 70.5% across all calculated payments to ensure program outlays do not exceed the available funding. These provisions were previously outlined in the [Notice of Funding Availability](#) in the event the revenue loss reported exceeded available funding.

[Back to Top](#)

USDA Builds Pandemic Support for Certified Organic and Transitioning Operations

Signup began November 8

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide pandemic assistance to cover certification and education expenses to agricultural producers who are certified organic or transitioning to organic. USDA will make \$20 million available through the new [Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program \(OTECP\)](#) as part of USDA's broader [Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative](#), which provides new, broader and more equitable opportunities for farmers, ranchers and producers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, certified organic and transitional operations faced challenges due to loss of markets, and increased costs and labor shortages, in addition to costs related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification, which producers and handlers of conventionally grown commodities do not incur. Transitional operations also faced the financial challenge of implementing practices required to obtain organic certification without being able to obtain the premium prices normally received for certified organic commodities.

Eligible Expenses

OTECP funding is provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). Certified operations and transitional operations may apply for OTECP for eligible expenses paid during the 2020, 2021 and 2022 fiscal years. For each year, OTECP covers 25% of a certified operation's eligible certification expenses, up to \$250 per certification category (crop, livestock, wild crop, handling and State Organic Program fee). This includes application fees, inspection fees, USDA organic certification costs, state organic program fees and more.

Crop and livestock operations transitioning to organic production may be eligible for 75% of a transitional operation's eligible expenses, up to \$750, for each year. This includes fees charged by a certifying agent or consultant for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan.

For both certified operations and transitional operations, OTECP covers 75% of the registration fees, up to \$200, per year, for educational events that include content related to organic production and handling in order to assist operations in increasing their knowledge of production and marketing practices that can improve their operations, increase resilience and expand available marketing opportunities. Additionally, both certified and transitional operations may be eligible for 75% of the expense of soil testing required under the National Organic Program (NOP) to document micronutrient deficiency, not to exceed \$100 per year.

Applying for Assistance

Signup for 2020 and 2021 OTECP will be Nov. 8, 2021, through Jan. 7, 2022. Producers apply through their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office and can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364. Visit farmers.gov/otecp to learn more.

Additional Organic Support

OTECP builds upon USDA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) which provides cost share assistance of 50%, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope, to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the NOP. This year's application period for OCCSP ended Nov. 1, 2021.

Additionally, USDA's Risk Management Agency announced improvements to the Whole-Farm Revenue Program including increasing expansion limits for organic producers to the higher of \$500,000 or 35%. Previously, small and medium size organic operations were held to the same 35% limit to expansion as conventional practice producers. Also, producers can now report acreage as certified organic, or as acreage

in transition to organic, when the producer has requested an organic certification by the acreage reporting date.

To learn more about USDA's assistance for organic producers, visit usda.gov/organic.

As USDA looks for long-term solutions to build back a better food system, the Department is committed to delivery of financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers and businesses who have been impacted by COVID-19 market disruptions. Since USDA rolled out the Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative in March, the Department has provided support to America's farmers and ranchers including:

- \$18 billion in [Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2](#) payments, including a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers since the program reopened in April 2021.
- Over \$35 million in assistance for those who had to depopulate livestock and poultry due to insufficient processing access ([Pandemic Livestock Indemnity Program](#)).
- Over \$7 million to date for the logging and log hauling industry ([Pandemic Assistance for Timber Harvesters and Haulers](#)). Final payments are being calculated to be disbursed soon.
- \$1 billion to [purchase healthy food for food insecure Americans and build food bank capacity](#).
- \$350 million in [additional dairy assistance related to market volatility](#).
- [\\$500 million deployed through existing USDA programs](#).

For more details, please visit www.farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance.

[Back to Top](#)

USDA Launches First Phase of Soil Carbon Monitoring Efforts through CRP

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing \$10 million in a new initiative to sample, measure, and monitor soil carbon on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to better quantify the climate outcomes of the program. CRP is an important tool in the Nation's fight to reduce the worst impacts of climate change facing our farmers, ranchers, and foresters. This initiative will begin implementation in fall 2021 with three partners. Today's announcement is part of a broader, long-term soil carbon monitoring effort across agricultural lands that supports USDA's commitment to deliver climate solutions to agricultural producers and rural America through voluntary, incentive-based solutions.

These models include the Daily Century Model, or DayCent, which simulates the movement of carbon and nitrogen through agricultural systems and informs the [National Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#). Data will also be used to strengthen the [COMET-Farm](#) and [COMET-Planner](#) tools, which enable producers to evaluate potential carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions based on specific management scenarios.

USDA partners will conduct soil carbon sampling on three categories of CRP practice types: perennial grass, trees, and wetlands.

Perennial grasses: In consultation with USDA, Michigan State University will sample and measure soil carbon and bulk density of CRP grasslands (including native grass plantings, rangelands, and pollinator habitat plantings) at an estimated 600 sites across the U.S. with a focus in the central states during this five-year project. This information will be used to model and compare the climate benefits of CRP. Partners include the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Deveron, an agriculture technology company, and Woods End Laboratories.

Trees: Mississippi State University will partner with Alabama A&M University to collect above and below ground data at 162 sites across seven states documenting CRP-related benefits to soil and atmospheric carbon levels. Information will help further calibrate the DayCent model. This five-year project will focus within the Mississippi Delta and Southeast states.

Wetlands: Ducks Unlimited and its partners will collect data on carbon stocks in wetland soils as well as vegetation carbon levels at 250 wetland sites across a 15-state area in the central U.S. Data will support the DayCent and additional modeling. Partners for this five-year project include: Migratory Bird Joint Venture, Intertribal Research and Resource Center at United Tribes Technical College, Clemson University, Kenyon College, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Missouri, and the University of Texas at Austin.

CRP Monitoring, Assessment, and Evaluation Projects

These three Climate Change Mitigation Assessment Initiative projects are funded through FSA's program to work with partners to identify [Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation \(MAE\)](#) projects to quantify CRP environmental benefits to water quality and quantity, wildlife, and rural economies.

Applications for projects were welcome from all organizations, including public, private, nonprofit institutions, and educational institutions including historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions or organizations.

For more details on the all the awarded MAE projects, visit the [FSA Monitoring Assessment & Evaluation webpage](#).

About the Conservation Reserve Program

CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs, with an established track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, reducing nitrogen runoff and providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

In exchange for a yearly rental payment, agricultural producers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. In general, land is enrolled in CRP for 10 to 15 years, with the option of re-enrollment. [FSA offers multiple CRP signups](#), including the general signup and continuous signup, as well as Grassland CRP and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water. In 2021, producers and landowners enrolled more than 5.3 million acres in CRP signups, surpassing USDA's 4-million-acre goal.

Earlier this year, [USDA announced updates to CRP](#) including higher payment rates, new incentives for environmental practices, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. This included 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. Download the ["What's New" fact sheet](#) to learn more about CRP updates.

[Back to Top](#)

USDA Updates Crop Insurance to Respond to Producer Needs, Support Conservation and Climate Mitigation Efforts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making updates to crop insurance to respond to the needs of agricultural producers, including organic producers, as well as to support conservation of natural resources on agricultural land.

Specifically, USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is making permanent a new provision that allows producers to hay, graze or chop cover crops and still receive a full prevented planting payment. To accommodate the different farming practices across the country, RMA is also increasing flexibility related to the prevented planting "1 in 4" requirement, as well as aligning crop insurance definitions with USDA's National Organic Program.

"We are responsive to the needs of producers, and we are updating several key policies to encourage the use of cover crops and other conservation practices," RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger said. "We want to provide producers tools to help mitigate and adapt to climate change as well as ensure crop insurance works well for a wide variety of producers, including organic producers."

Haying, Grazing, and Chopping of Cover Crops

In July, RMA announced producers can [hay, graze, or chop cover crops for silage, haylage, or baleage at any time](#) and still receive 100% of the prevented planting payment. Previously, cover crops could only be hayed, grazed or chopped after Nov. 1. Otherwise, the prevented planting payment was reduced by 65% if producers took those actions on the cover crop.

RMA added this flexibility starting with the 2021 crop year as part of a broader effort to encourage producers to use cover crops, an important conservation and good farming practice. Cover crops are especially important on fields prevented from being planted because they cover ground that would otherwise be left bare, which helps reduce soil erosion, boost soil health and increase soil carbon sequestration.

This change builds on the advanced research and identified benefits cover crops have supporting healthy soils and cropland sustainability efforts. Studies also show that cover crops provide increased corn and soybean yields. While results vary by region and soil type, cover crops are proven to reduce erosion, improve water quality and increase the health and productivity of the soil while building resilience to climate change. Additionally, RMA provided a premium benefit to producers who planted cover crops through the [Pandemic Cover Crop Program](#) to help producers maintain cover crop systems amid the financially challenging pandemic.

"1 in 4" Requirement Flexibilities

For the 2020 crop year, RMA implemented a policy stating that for land to be eligible for prevented planting coverage, the acreage must meet the "1 in 4" requirement, which means the land must be planted, insured and harvested in at least one of the four most recent crop years. Now, RMA is adding flexibilities to recognize different farming practices and crops grown, as well as the availability of risk management options.

New flexibilities allowed in order to meet the "1 in 4" requirement include:

- The annual regrowth for an insured perennial crop, such as alfalfa, red clover, or mint, to be considered planted.
- Allow a crop covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) to meet the insurability requirement.
- If crop insurance or NAP coverage was not available, allow the producer to prove the acreage was planted and harvested using good farming practices in at least two consecutive years out of the four previous years to meet the insurability requirement.

Aligning Organic Terms

RMA is revising four organic definitions to be consistent with USDA's National Organic Program. Consistency across USDA programs is important to eliminate the potential for confusion between the various programs that USDA is committed to providing to the producers.

This change builds on other RMA efforts to expand and improve current options for organic producers. In Sept. 2021, RMA announced several [updates to Whole-Farm Revenue Protection \(WFRP\)](#), including increasing farm operation growth limits for organic producers to the higher of \$500,000 or 35% over the five-year average allowable income, and to allowing a producer to report acreage as certified organic, or as acreage in transition to organic, when the producer has requested an organic certification by the acreage reporting date. In addition, RMA announced it will be offering the new Micro Farm policy through WFRP that specifically targets coverage for small, diversified farmers, including organic growers.

Other Changes

RMA made other changes to Common Crop Insurance Policy Basic Provisions, Area Risk Protection Insurance Regulations, Coarse Grains Crop Insurance Provisions, and other insurance provisions, which published today:

- RMA is providing an option for producers to delay measurement of farm-stored production for 180-days through the Special Provisions, similar to flexibilities already available to grain crop producers.
- RMA added earlage and snaplage as an acceptable method of harvest for coarse grains. During the 2020 Derecho, many producers salvaged their damaged corn crop by harvesting as earlage or snaplage instead of grain or silage.

"By recognizing earlage and snaplage, we are providing confidence to producers that their crop is covered when a disaster changes their planned harvest method or if they choose to harvest in a manner other than reported on their acreage report," Bunger said.

More Information

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](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov.

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.

[Back to Top](#)

USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;
- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

[Farmers.gov](#) now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

Managing USDA Business Online

Using farmers.gov, producers, entities and those acting on their behalf can also:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices, plans and contracts.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View farm loan and interest information (producers only).

Future plans include adding the ability to import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture planting boundaries.

To access your information, you'll will need a [USDA eAuth account](#) to login to farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit [farmers.gov](#) and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the [Sign In/Sign Up link](#) at the top right of the website. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

In addition to the self-service features available by logging into farmers.gov, the website also has ample information on USDA programs, including pandemic assistance, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance. Recently, USDA updated the navigation and organization of the site as well as added some new webpages, including "[Get Involved](#)," "[Common Forms](#)," and "[Translations](#)." [Learn more about these changes](#).

[Back to top](#)

Montana Soil Outreach

From September 2021 through July 2022, the Montana Association of Conservation Districts, Montana Watershed Coordination Council and partners are reaching out across the state to ask: What more might be done to better support farmers and ranchers in managing soils in Montana?

The purpose is to increase the pace and scale at which land stewards implement voluntary practices and systems to maintain and improve soil health, and thereby the long term economic and ecological vitality of

agriculture in Montana. In August of 2022 a report will be shared on what was learned along with any recommendations that seem to emerge. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

[Learn how to participate.](#)

[Back to Top](#)

2022 Montana Soil Health Symposium: How to Have Your Soil and Keep Your Bottom Line Too

The Montana Association of Conservation Districts is hosting the second annual Soil Health Symposium Feb. 9-10, 2022. This two-day event is centered around peer-to-peer conversations and experience-based presentations from many aspects of agriculture. We dive into the biological components of soil, managing productive land, tools and techniques that can enhance the nutrient value of your crop, and how to keep a healthy bottom line, too! You'll hear from Montana producers and national technical experts like keynote speakers Dr. Allen Williams and Dan Kittredge. A pre-conference workshop on Feb. 8 features Jolene Brown leading an interactive session on the nitty gritty work of running a successful family agricultural business and ensuring that measures are in place for transitioning the business to the next generation.

Early bird registration is open now, including special pricing for students and interns enrolled in agricultural programs. Registration is limited and on a first come-first serve basis. Get more information and see the full agenda at www.mtsoilhealth.org.

[Back to Top](#)

Small-Scale, Local Producers Get Improved Insurance Coverage through New Micro Farm Policy

Agricultural producers with small-scale farms who sell locally can now get simplified insurance coverage through a new policy designed for their needs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed the new Micro Farm policy, which simplifies recordkeeping and covers post-production costs like washing and value-added products.

“USDA is focused on supporting local and regional food systems, and Micro Farm is one more example of how we’re helping agricultural producers with farms of all shapes and sizes to manage their unique operations and risk,” said Marcia Bungler, Administrator for USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA). “The Risk Management Agency values collaboration and feedback from our customers, and Micro Farm is one way we’re responding to producers’ needs.”

Micro Farm is offered through Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) and is geared to local producers. Details include:

- **Eligibility:** Micro Farm is available to producers who have a farm operation that earns an average allowable revenue of \$100,000 or less, or for carryover insureds, an average allowable revenue of \$125,000 or less. The increase in allowable revenue for a carry-over insured will allow for some farm growth in subsequent years before they become ineligible for the program. RMA’s research showed that 85% of producers who sell locally reported they made less than \$75,000 in gross sales.

- **Coverage Levels:** All coverage levels will be available to producers using Micro Farm. This will enable producers to purchase the 80% and 85% coverage levels without providing additional paperwork.
- **Underwriting and Recordkeeping Requirements:** Micro Farm minimizes underwriting and recordkeeping requirements, and producers will not have to report expenses and individual commodities.
- **Post-production Revenue:** Producers can include post-production activities as revenue, such as washing and packaging commodities or value-added products like jam.

Micro Farm is available for the 2022 crop year. Sales closing dates are Jan. 31, 2022, Feb. 28, 2022, or March 15, 2022, depending on the producer's county.

Producers with crops insured under another crop insurance policy or a vertically integrated operation will not be eligible.

This new policy derived from research directed by the 2018 Farm Bill, and it includes feedback from producers who grow for their local communities. [See the full report.](#)

Specialty and Organic Crops

The Micro Farm policy builds on other RMA efforts to better serve specialty and organic crop growers. This includes WFRP, which provides coverage for producers with larger operations that may not be eligible for Micro Farm. RMA recently made [improvements to WFRP](#) as part of a broader set of [new policies and expanded policies](#) to assist specialty crop and organic producers.

More Information

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](#). If you have difficulty finding an agent, contact your [RMA Regional Office](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at [rma.usda.gov](#).

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](#).

[Back to Top](#)

NRCS in Montana Accepting Applications for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Montana is accepting applications for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) enrollment option. While NRCS accepts easement applications year-round, applications for the current funding cycle must be submitted by January 28, 2022.

[Learn more.](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants

Know a Montana rancher, farmer or forestland owner who goes above and beyond in the stewardship and management of natural resources? Nominate them by March 15 for the 2022 Montana Leopold Conservation Award®. Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to land, water, and wildlife habitat management on private, working land.

Sand County Foundation and national sponsor American Farmland Trust present the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 23 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation.

In [Montana](#), the \$10,000 award is presented with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Rangeland Resources Committee. Nominations may be submitted on behalf of a landowner, or landowners may nominate themselves. The application can be found at www.sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA.

[Back to Top](#)

Chouteau & Hill County FSA Offices Hiring

Chouteau County – Dec. 10 Deadline

Hill County – Dec. 3 Deadline

The Chouteau and Hill County Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices in Fort Benton and Havre, Montana, are hiring a full time, permanent Program Technician (PT).

Duties include general office activities supporting FSA programs administered at the field level. Successful applicants must be reliable, have a professional attitude and enjoy working with the public.

If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested, please share this information with them.

Here are the direct links to the positions with information on how to apply:

Chouteau County FSA Office

Program Technician, Fort Benton, MT

Dec. 10th Application Deadline

<https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/623105800>

Hill County FSA Office

Program Technician, Havre, MT

Dec. 3rd Application Deadline

<https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/623102300>

Applications must be completed through USAJOBS no later than close of business of the vacancy deadline. *USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.*

[Back to Top](#)

2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program Available in all Montana Counties

January 31 Application Deadline

Livestock producers in all **56 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.

All 56 Montana counties have triggered the 2021 LFP drought criteria: **Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Broadwater, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Chouteau, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Flathead, Gallatin, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Granite, Hill, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lake, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, McCone, Meagher, Mineral, Missoula, Musselshell, Park, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Powell, Prairie, Ravalli, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sanders, Sheridan, Silver Bow, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Toole, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux and Yellowstone.** 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 www.farmers.gov and/or fsa.usda.gov/mt.

[Back to Top](#)

Higher Loan Limit Now Available for USDA Guaranteed Farm Loans

USDA Extends Disaster Set-Aside for Direct Loans Until 2022

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a higher loan limit will be available for borrowers seeking a guaranteed farm loan starting Oct. 1, 2021, from \$1.776 million to \$1.825 million.

FSA farm loans offer access to funding for a wide range of producer needs, from securing land to financing the purchase of equipment. Guaranteed loans are financed and serviced by commercial lenders. FSA provides up to a 95% guarantee against possible financial loss of principal and interest. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.

In fiscal year 2021, FSA saw continued strong demand for guaranteed loans. FSA obligated more than \$3.4 billion in guaranteed farm ownership and operating loans. This includes nearly \$1.2 billion for beginning farmers. The number of guaranteed borrowers has grown by 10% to more than 38,750 farmers and ranchers over the last decade. FSA expects the increasing demand for farm loans to continue into fiscal year 2022.

Disaster Set-Aside Extension

USDA has additional support available to producers given the recent outbreaks of the COVID-19 Delta variant and has extended the availability of COVID-19 Disaster Set-Aside (DSA) for installments due through Jan. 31, 2022. In addition, FSA will permit a second DSA for COVID-19 and a second DSA for natural disasters for

those who had an initial COVID-19 DSA. Requests for a COVID-19 DSA or a second DSA must be received no later than May 1, 2022.

Last year, FSA broadened the use of the DSA. Normally used in the wake of natural disasters, the DSA can now allow farmers with USDA farm loans who are affected by COVID-19 and determined to be eligible, to have their next payment set aside. The set-aside payment's due date is moved to the final maturity date of the loan or extended up to twelve months in the case of an annual operating loan. Any principal set-aside will continue to accrue interest until it is repaid. This will improve the borrower's cashflow in the current production cycle.

More Information

Producers can explore available options on all FSA loan options at fsa.usda.gov or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some [USDA Service Centers](#) are open to limited visitors. Contact your Service Center to set up an in-person or phone appointment. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

[Back to top](#)

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.

[Back to top](#)

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.
- **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.
- **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.

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.

[Back to Top](#)

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

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.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a Joint Financing loan is \$600,000 and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

To be eligible, the operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about FSA Loan programs, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

[Back to Top](#)

Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has several loan programs to help you start or continue an agriculture production. Farm ownership and operating loans are available.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of targeted underserved applicants.

A targeted underserved applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities.

For purposes of this program, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

[Back to Top](#)

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.

- [2021 Montana Disaster Designations \(by Type\) - \(by county\)](#)
- [Emergency Loan Factsheet \(pdf\)](#)
- [FSA Farm Loan Program \(Web\)](#)

[Back to Top](#)

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/>



Montana

USDA Farm Service Agency
PO Box 670
Bozeman, MT 59771

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

State Executive Director (Acting):
LES J RISPENS

State Committee:
RYAN LANKFORD

FSA Policy Reminders: [2021 Annual Notification to FSA Customers](#)

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
10 East Babcock Street, Room 443
Bozeman, MT 59715-4704
Phone: 406-587-6811
Fax: 855-510-7028
Web: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/home>

State Conservationist:
TOM WATSON

USDA Risk Management Agency
Billings Regional Office
3490 Gabel Road, Suite 100
Billings, MT 59102-7302
Phone: 406-657-6447
Fax: 406-657-6573
Email: rsomt@rma.usda.gov
Web: <https://www.rma.usda.gov/>

Regional Director:
ERIC BASHORE

Contact information for your local office, visit: www.farmers.gov.