U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

South Dakota USDA Newsletter - March 2024

In This Issue:

Message from the FSA State Director

Greetings from the South Dakota State FSA Office!

It has often been said that USDA, "The People's Department," touches the lives of all Americans each day! Under the leadership of President Biden and Secretary Vilsack, USDA is transforming America's food system by focusing on more resilient local, regional food production and 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 all while using climate smart food and forestry practices. Making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America. Finally, by committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America.

Earlier this month I had the opportunity to see firsthand the role the Farm Service Agency has in touching the lives of Americans by accompanying the FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux on his stops in the Sioux Falls area. For those who don't know, Administrator Ducheneaux is a rancher from Dewey County.

We started with a visit to Boadwine Farms near Baltic. Lynn Boadwine and his son, Riley, operate a family-owned dairy farm that has a rich history which traces back to 1874. Lynn and Riley shared with Zach the challenges that dairy families face due to the low milk prices. They also discussed the Dairy Margin Coverage program. A program that touches all American's lives by supporting dairy families when milk prices are down, and feed costs are up. By supporting our dairy families, USDA is touching the lives of not only dairy farmers but also of millions of families by ensuring a safe and affordable supply of milk.

The next farm Zach visited was the McIntrye farm near Winfred. Scott and his son, Ryan grow corn, soybeans, cattle, and goats. Like thousands of other South Dakota farm families, the McIntrye work each and every day to provide food for a growing nation. Their lives have been touched by a number of USDA FSA programs including the Farm Storage Facility Loan program that allows them the opportunity to market their grains throughout the year, not just during harvest time.

Our last stop of the day wasn't visiting another farm family but visiting with people from all over the country at National Pheasant Fest Convention in Sioux Falls. USDA has undoubtedly touched the lives of thousands of hunters and South Dakota families through its work with conservation programs. At the convention Zach was joined by USDA Under Secretary Robert Bonnie to launch a new conservation initiative – Working Lands for Wildlife's Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project, as well as the signup dates for USDA's General Enrollment signup in the Conservation Reserve Program (General CRP), which opened March 4th. Both conservation opportunities give producers tools to conserve wildlife habitat while achieving other conservation benefits, including sequestering carbon and improving water quality and soil health.

The day spent with the FSA Administrator was just a small sampling of how USDA touches the lives of Americans each day just through the work of FSA, not counting the other ways USDA touches our lives each day in South Dakota ensuring that our food is safe; that children have proper nutrition; and that our soil, water, and forests are cared for.

Lastly, I want to give a special thanks to Kay Schmidt, the CED in in the Potter County office. Kay just celebrated her 40th year of service to farm and ranch families in Potter County!

As we are in the thick of calving and lambing season, please be safe; and remember if a weather disaster strikes, please let your local FSA office know the impact it has had on you and your livestock.

Sincerely,

Steve Dick
State Executive Director
USDA-Farm Service Agency

Message from the NRCS State Conservationist

Greetings,

I often remind readers of natural resource learning and networking opportunities throughout South Dakota. This message is no different. Please consider joining me at the South Dakota Grasslands Summit March 18 and 19 in Oacoma. Attendees will learn of the status and role of grasslands in South Dakota while also participating in the development of an action plan focused on grasslands and our rural communities that depend on them. The value of our grasslands was affirmed by the 2024 South Dakota Legislature with the House and Senate Concurrent Resolution 605 affirming the value of grassland ecosystems and the importance of farmers and ranchers as managers in conserving our grassland ecosystem. I encourage you to follow the link for a quick read of the resolution.

We have an opportunity to financially partner with entities who can support the capabilities and mission of NRCS. More than $4 million is available this year for our Conservation Collaboration Cooperative Agreements (CCCA) in South Dakota with an application deadline of April 29. I encourage municipalities, schools, tribal governments, and other entities can view priorities other details in the Notice of Funding Opportunity posted to Grants.gov. Email Colette Kessler, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, at colette.kessler@usda.gov with questions.

Thank you to all South Dakota farmers, ranchers, land managers, landowners and conservation partners who are moving the needle of conservation in our state.

Sincerely,

Tony Sunseri
State Conservationist
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Important Dates & Deadlines

March 29, 2024 - Deadline for submitting offers for General CRP signup

April 29, 2024 - Deadline for entities to apply for NRCS Conservation Collaboration Cooperative Agreement via www.grants.gov.

FSA Is Accepting CRP Continuous Enrollment Offers

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Continuous Signup.

In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and to plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. The program’s long-term goal is to re-establish valuable land cover to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods. Instead they are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

For more information, including a list of acceptable practices, contact your local county USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Transitioning Expiring CRP Land to Beginning, Veteran or Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract holders are encouraged to transition their CRP acres to beginning, veteran or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers through the Transition Incentives Program (TIP). TIP provides annual rental payments to the landowner or operator for up to two additional years after the CRP contract expires.

CRP contract holders no longer need to be a retired or retiring owner or operator to transition their land. TIP participants must agree to sell, have a contract to sell, or agree to lease long term (at least five years) land enrolled in an expiring CRP contract to a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who is not a family member.

Beginning, veteran or social disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and CRP participants may enroll in TIP beginning two years before the expiration date of the CRP contract. The TIP application must be submitted prior to completing the lease or sale of the affected lands. New landowners or renters that return the land to production must use sustainable grazing or farming methods.

For more information, contact your local county USDA Service Center.

Disaster Assistance Available for Livestock Losses

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides assistance to you for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law.

For disease losses, FSA county committees can accept veterinarian certifications that livestock deaths were directly related to adverse weather and unpreventable through good animal husbandry and management.

For 2023 livestock losses, you must file a notice and provide the following supporting documentation to your local FSA office no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred.

- Proof of death documentation
- Copy of grower's contracts
- Proof of normal mortality documentation
- Livestock beginning inventory documentation

USDA has established normal mortality rates for each type and weight range of eligible livestock, i.e. Adult Beef Cow = 1.5% and Non-Adult Beef Cattle = 5%. These established percentages reflect losses that are considered expected or typical under "normal" conditions.

In addition to filing a notice of loss, you must also submit an application for payment by March 3, 2025.

For more information, contact the local county USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Dairy Producers Can Enroll for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage Beginning Feb. 28

Starting Feb. 28, dairy producers are able to enroll for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC), an important safety net program offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides producers with price support to help offset milk and feed price differences. This year's DMC signup begins Feb. 28, 2024, and ends April 29, 2024. For those who sign up for 2024 DMC coverage, payments may begin as soon as March 4, 2024, for any payments that triggered in January 2024.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has revised the regulations for DMC to allow eligible dairy operations to make a one-time adjustment to established production history. This adjustment will be accomplished by combining previously established supplemental production history with DMC production history for those dairy operations that participated in Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage during a prior coverage year. DMC has also been authorized through calendar year 2024. Congress passed a 2018 Farm Bill extension requiring these regulatory changes to the program.

DMC is a voluntary risk management program that offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed price (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer. In 2023, Dairy Margin Coverage payments triggered in 11 months including two months, June and July, where the margin fell below the catastrophic level of $4.00 per hundredweight, a first for Dairy Margin Coverage or its predecessor Margin Protection Program.

2024 DMC Coverage and Premium Fees FSA has revised DMC regulations to extend coverage for calendar year 2024, which is retroactive to Jan. 1, 2024, and to provide an adjustment to the production history for dairy operations with less than 5 million pounds of production. In previous years, smaller dairy operations could establish a supplemental production history and receive Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage. For 2024, dairy producers can establish one adjusted base production history through DMC for each participating dairy operation to better reflect the operation's current production.

For 2024 DMC enrollment, dairy operations that established supplemental production history through Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage for coverage years 2021 through 2023, will combine the supplemental production history with established production history for one adjusted base production history.

For dairy operations enrolled in 2023 DMC under a multi-year lock-in contract, lock-in eligibility will be extended until Dec. 31, 2024. In addition, dairy operations enrolled in multi-year lock-in contracts are eligible for the discounted DMC premium rate during the 2024 coverage year. To confirm 2024 DMC lock-in coverage or opt out in favor of an annual contract for 2024, dairy operations having lock-in contracts must enroll during the 2024 DMC enrollment period.

DMC offers different levels of coverage, even an option that is free to producers, minus a $100 administrative fee. The administrative fee is waived for dairy producers who are considered limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged or a military veteran. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the online dairy decision tool.

DMC Payments DMC payments are calculated using updated feed and premium hay costs, making the program more reflective of actual dairy producer expenses. These updated feed calculations use 100% premium alfalfa hay.

More Information USDA also offers other risk management tools for dairy producers, including the Dairy Revenue Protection (DRP) plan that protects against a decline in milk revenue (yield and price) and the Livestock Gross Margin (LGM) plan, which provides protection against the loss of the market value of milk minus the feed costs. Both DRP and LGM livestock insurance policies are offered through the Risk Management Agency. Producers should contact their local crop insurance agent for more information.

For more information on DMC, visit the DMC webpage or contact your local USDA Service Center.

Annual Review of Payment Eligibility for New Crop Year

FSA and NRCS program applicants for benefits are required to submit a completed CCC-902 (Farming Operation Plan) and CCC-941 Average Gross Income (AGI) Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information for FSA to determine the applicant's payment eligibility and establish the maximum payment limitation applicable to the program applicant.

Participants are not required to annually submit new CCC-902s for payment eligibility and payment limitation purposes unless a change in the farming operation occurs that may affect the previous determination of record. A valid CCC-902 filed by the participant is considered to be a continuous certification used for all payment eligibility and payment limitation determinations applicable for the program benefits requested.

Participants are responsible for ensuring that all CCC-902 and CCC-941 and related forms on file in the county office are updated, current, and correct. Participants are required to timely notify the county office of any changes in the farming operation that may affect the previous determination of record by filing a new or updated CCC-902 as applicable.

Changes that may require a NEW determination include, but are not limited to, a change of:

- Shares of a contract, which may reflect:

  - A land lease from cash rent to share rent
  - A land lease from share rent to cash rent (subject to the cash rent tenant rule
  - A modification of a variable/fixed bushel-rent arrangement
- The size of the producer's farming operation by the addition or reduction of cropland that may affect the application of a cropland factor
- The structure of the farming operation, including any change to a member's share
- The contribution of farm inputs of capital, land, equipment, active personal labor, and/or active personal management
- Farming interests not previously disclosed on CCC-902 including the farming interests of a spouse or minor child
- Certifications of average AGI are required to be filed annually for participation in an annual USDA program. For multi-year conservation contracts and NRCS easements, a certification of AGI must be filed prior to approval of the contract or easement and is applicable for the duration of the contract period.

Participants are encouraged to file or review these forms within the deadlines established for each applicable program for which program benefits are being requested.

Payment Limitation

Program payments may be limited by direct attribution to individuals or entities. A legal entity is defined as an entity created under Federal or State law that owns land or an agricultural commodity, product or livestock. Through direct attribution, payment limitation is based on the total payments received by a person or legal entity, both and indirectly. Qualifying spouses are eligible for a separate payment limitation.

Payments and benefits under certain FSA programs are subject to some or all of the following:

- payment limitation by direct attribution (including common attribution)
- payment limitation amounts for the applicable programs
- substantive change requirements when a farming operation adds persons, resulting in an increase in persons to which payment limitation applies
- actively engaged in farming requirements
- cash-rent tenant rule
- foreign person rule
- average AGI limitations
- programs subject to AGI limitation

No program benefits subject to payment eligibility and limitation will be provided until all required forms for the specific situation are provided and necessary payment eligibility and payment limitation determinations are made. Payment eligibility and payment limitation determinations may be initiated by the County Committee or requested by the producer.

Statutory and Regulatory rules require persons and legal entities, provide the names and Tax Identification Numbers (TINs) for all persons and legal entities with an ownership interest in the farming operation to be eligible for payment.

Payment eligibility and payment limitation forms submitted by persons and legal entities are subject to spot check through FSA's end-of-year review process.

Persons or legal entities selected for end-of-year review must provide the County Committee with operating loan documents, income and expense ledgers, canceled checks for all expenditures, lease and purchase agreements, sales contracts, property tax statements, equipment listings, lease agreements, purchase contracts, documentation of who provided actual labor and management, employee time sheets or books, crop sales documents, warehouse ledgers, gin ledgers, corporate or entity papers, etc.

A finding that a person or legal entity is not actively engaged in farming results in the person or legal entity being ineligible for any payment or benefit subject to the actively engaged in farming rules.

Noncompliance with AGI provisions, either by exceeding the applicable limitation or failure to submit a certification and consent for disclosure statement, will result in payment ineligibility for all program benefits subject to AGI provisions. Program payments are reduced in an amount that is commensurate with the direct and indirect interest held by an ineligible person or legal entity in any legal entity, general partnership, or joint operation that receives benefits subject to the average AGI limitations.

If any changes occur that could affect an actively engaged in farming, cash-rent tenant, foreign person, or average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) determination, producers must timely notify the County FSA Office by filing revised farm operating plans and/or supporting documentation, as applicable. Failure to timely notify the County Office may adversely affect payment eligibility.

USDA to Provide More Than $3 Billion to Commodity and Specialty Crop Producers Impacted by 2022 Natural Disasters

The U. S Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide more than $3 billion to commodity and specialty crop producers impacted by natural disaster events in 2022. Eligible impacted producers can apply for financial assistance through the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) 2022. The program will help offset the financial impacts of crop yield and value losses from qualifying disasters occurring in 2022.

Background

On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the *Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328)* that provides about $3.7 billion in financial assistance for agricultural producers impacted by eligible natural disasters that occurred in calendar year 2022.

ERP 2022 covers losses to crops, trees, bushes and vines due to qualifying, calendar year 2022 natural disaster events including wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture, qualifying drought and related conditions.

ERP 2022 program benefits will be delivered to eligible producers through a two-track process. FSA intends to make both tracks available to producers at the same time. This two-track approach enables USDA to:

- Streamline the application process.
- Reduce the paperwork burden on producers.
- Proactively include provisions for underserved producers who have not been well served by past emergency relief efforts.
- Encourage producer participation in existing risk management programs to mitigate the impacts of future severe weather events.

It’s important to note that disaster-impacted producers may be eligible for ERP 2022 assistance under one or both tracks. To avoid duplicative benefits, if a producer applies for both tracks, the Track 2 payment calculation will take into account any payments received through Track 1.

ERP 2022 Application Process – Track 1

ERP 2022 Track 1 leverages existing federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments for eligible crop producers who received indemnities through these risk management programs.

Although FSA is sending pre-filled ERP 2022 Track 1 application forms to producers who have crop insurance and NAP data already on file with USDA, producers indemnified for losses resulting from 2022 natural disasters do not have to wait to receive the application before requesting ERP 2022 assistance. Effective Oct. 31, 2023, producers can apply for ERP 2022 benefits whether they have received the pre-filled application or not. Receipt of a pre-filled application is not confirmation that a producer is eligible to receive an ERP 2022 Track 1 payment.

USDA estimates that ERP Track 1 benefits will reach more than 206,000 producers who received indemnities for losses covered by federal crop insurance and more than 4,500 producers who obtained NAP coverage for the 2022 crop year.

ERP 2022 Application Process – Track 2

Track 2 is a revenue-based certification program designed to assist eligible producers who suffered an eligible decrease in revenue resulting from 2022 calendar year disaster events when compared with revenue in a benchmark year using revenue information that is readily available from most tax records.

In cases where revenue does not reasonably reflect a normal year's revenue, Track 2 provides an alternative method for establishing revenue. Likewise, Track 2 affords producers of crops that are used within an operation and do not generate revenue from the sale of the crop a method for establishing revenue for the purpose of applying for ERP 2022 benefits. Producers are not required to submit tax records to FSA unless requested by the County Committee if required for an FSA compliance spot check.

Although not required when applying for ERP 2022 Track 2, applicants might find the following documents useful to the process:

- Schedule F (Form 1040)
- *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

Track 2 targets gaps in emergency relief assistance for eligible producers whose eligible losses were not covered by crop insurance or NAP including revenue losses too small (shallow loss) to be covered by crop insurance.

Producers interested in applying for ERP 2022 Track 2, should contact their local FSA county office. Additional reference resources can be found on FSA's emergency relief website.

Additional Required Forms

For both ERP 2022 tracks, all producers must have certain required forms on file with FSA within 60 days of the ERP 2022 deadline. FSA started accepting applications on Oct. 31, 2023. The application deadline has not yet been determined and will be announced at a later date. If not already on file, producers can update, complete and submit required forms to FSA at any time.

Required forms:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet.*
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable).
- Form FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the $125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs* (if applicable).
- Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, if applicable, for the 2022 program year.

- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*) for the ERP producer and applicable affiliates.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have these required forms on file. However, those who are uncertain or want to confirm the status of their forms can contact their local FSA county office.

Future Insurance Coverage Requirements

All producers who receive ERP 2022 payments must purchase crop insurance, or NAP coverage where crop insurance is not available, in the next two available crop years as determined by the Secretary. Purchased coverage must be at the 60/100 coverage level or higher for insured crops or at the catastrophic coverage level or higher for NAP crops.

More Information

ERP 2022 eligibility details and payment calculation factor tables are available on the emergency relief website, in the ERP Track 1 and ERP Track 2 fact sheets and through your local FSA county office.

Marketing Assistance Loans and Loan Deficiency Payments for Wool, Mohair and Unshorn Pelts

Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs) provide financing and marketing assistance for producers of many commodities, including graded and non-graded wool, mohair, and unshorn pelts. MALs and LDPs are available during shearing and provide interim financing to help you meet cash flow needs without having to sell commodities when market prices are low, enabling you to delay selling until more favorable marketing conditions emerge. LDPs are payments made to producers who, although eligible to obtain an MAL, agree to forgo the loan in return for a payment on the eligible commodity.

FSA is now accepting requests for 2024 MALs and LDPs for all eligible wool, mohair and unshorn pelts. These requests should be made on or before the final availability date of Jan. 31, 2025. USDA recently announced 2024 wool and mohair marketing assistance loan rates.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a wool or mohair MAL or LDP, producers must produce and shear eligible mohair and wool in the U.S. during the applicable crop year and must:

- comply with conservation and wetland protection requirements;
- report all cropland acreage on applicable farms where the eligible commodity is produced;
- have and retain beneficial interest in the commodity until the MAL is repaid or the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) takes title to the commodity, and;
- meet Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitations.

Unshorn pelts are eligible for LDPs only. In addition to the criteria above, producers of unshorn pelts must have sold the unshorn lamb for immediate slaughter or slaughter the lambs for personal use.

LDPs and marketing loan gains are not subject to payment limitation, including actively engaged in farming and cash rent tenant provisions.

In addition to producer eligibility, the loan commodity must have been produced and shorn from live animals by an eligible producer, be in storable condition, and meet specific CCC minimum grade and quality standards. Producers are responsible for any loss in quantity or quality of the wool or mohair pledged as loan collateral.

To retain beneficial interest, the producer must have control and title of the wool, mohair, or unshorn pelt. If beneficial interest in the commodity is lost, the commodity loses eligibility for an MAL or LDP and remains ineligible even if the producer later regains beneficial interest. The producer must be able to make all decisions affecting the commodity including movement, sale, and the request for an MAL or LDP.

Producers may repay an MAL any time during the loan period at the lesser of the loan rate plus accrued interest and other charges or an alternative loan repayment rate, the national posted price, which is announced weekly. Visit the Farm Service Agency (FSA) website for posted loan and LDP rates.

How to Apply

Producers can apply for an MAL by contacting their local FSA county office. To be considered for a LDP, **producers must first have the form CCC-633 EZ, Page 1, on file with FSA** prior to losing beneficial interest in the wool, mohair or unshorn pelt. **It is best to visit the county office and submit the CCC-633 Page 1 right before you shear**. This is completed one time per crop year and indicates your intention to receive LDP benefits.

To apply and learn more information, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early

The Farm Loan team in your local county is already working on operating loans for spring 2024 and asks potential borrowers to submit their requests early so they can be timely processed. The farm loan team can help determine which loan programs are best for applicants.

FSA offers a wide range of low-interest loans that can meet the financial needs of any farm operation for just about any purpose. The traditional **farm operating and farm ownership loans** can help large and small farm operations take advantage of early purchasing discounts for spring inputs as well expenses throughout the year.

Microloans are a simplified loan program that will provide up to $50,000 for both Farm Ownership and Operating Microloans to eligible applicants. These loans, targeted for smaller and non-traditional operations, can be used for operating expenses, starting a new operation, purchasing equipment, and other needs associated with a farming operation. Loans to beginning farmers and members of underserved groups are a priority.

Other types of loans available include:

Marketing Assistance Loans allow producers to use eligible commodities as loan collateral and obtain a 9-month loan while the crop is in storage. These loans provide cash flow to the producer and allow them to market the crop when prices may be more advantageous.

Farm Storage Facility Loans can be used to build permanent structures used to store eligible commodities, for storage and handling trucks, or portable or permanent handling equipment. A variety of structures are eligible under this loan, including bunker silos, grain bins, hay storage structures, and refrigerated structures for vegetables and fruit. A producer may borrow up to $500,000 per loan**.**

Emerging Findings on the Effects of Cover Crops on Grassland Birds

As the use of cover crops to improve soil health and reduce water quality concerns on working cropland has increased in recent years, questions have emerged regarding the value of cover crops to wildlife. For example, do cover crops provide needed habitat for grassland birds, a group that has experienced widespread population decline in recent decades? What is the value of cover crop fields to grassland birds during the winter, spring migration, and breeding periods compared to cropland fields without cover crops or areas of perennial cover?

On **April 25 at 2:00 p.m. eastern**, Dr. Adam Janke of Iowa State University and Dr. David Buehler of the University of Tennessee will provide answers to these questions and more during our free, one-hour Conservation Outcomes Webinar. This webinar will share findings from recent studies examining bird use of cover crops in Iowa and Tennessee conducted in partnership with USDA's Conservation Effects Assessment Project. Findings may be used to support on-the-ground cropland management decisions informed by a better understanding of the potential roll of cover crops in grassland bird conservation efforts.

Registration is not required. Access instructions are available on the Conservation Outcomes Webinar Series webpage along with a calendar of upcoming webinars through 2024.

2023 a Big Year for Climate-Smart Agriculture, President Biden’s Investing in America Agenda

In 2023, USDA enrolled more farmers and more acres in voluntary conservation programs than at any point in history. This is in large part because of the Inflation Reduction Act, part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s Investing in America agenda, which provided a historic $19.5 billion for NRCS conservation programs for five years to help implement climate-smart practices. In fact, NRCS enrolled nearly 5,300 additional producers in our conservation programs across all 50 states.

At NRCS, we have been working diligently to increase our capacity, streamline our programs, build new and existing partnerships, and better reach underserved producers. We’re proud of our work in 2023, and our efforts complement the hard work done by the Biden-Harris Administration over the past three years to better support America’s agricultural producers.

In fiscal year 2023, NRCS showed “we got this” by investing over $2.8 billion in financial assistance for conservation and supporting more than 45,000 contracts, more than any year in our 89-year history. We recently released updated state-by-state data showing where those investments went – from the Inflation Reduction Act and the Farm Bill. Alongside our conservation partners, the agency successfully obligated 99.8% of all available Inflation Reduction Act funds to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners across America. Even with the additional Inflation Reduction Act funding, NRCS had significant unmet producer demand for conservation funding.

Learn more about NRCS successes by visiting farmers.gov/blog/2023-big-year-climate-smart-agriculture-president-bidens-investing-in-america-agenda.

Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Resources to Support Grazing Land Conservation with Carrie-Ann Houdeshell

Carrie-Ann Houdeshell is a Grazing Land Co-Lead for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), an effort led by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to evaluate and inform voluntary conservation across the nation’s working lands. In this Ask the Expert, Carrie-Ann answers questions about recent findings on three key grazing land conservation practices, new resources to assist data-driven conservation decision making across the nation’s non-federal grazing land and federal rangeland, and NRCS programs and services to support ranchers and other land managers in pursuing voluntary conservation.

Let’s start with the basics: When we talk about “grazing land,” what is included?

Grazing land is a collective term that includes rangeland, pastureland, grazed forests, native and naturalized pasture, hayland, and grazed cropland. All 50 states have grazing land, and the national grazing land footprint is incredible – approximately 40 percent of all land across the United States. That includes more than 580 million acres of private land and more than 390 million acres of land managed by federal agencies.

Ranchers and other land managers use grazing land to feed and raise livestock, providing food and fiber for the United States and beyond. Through their stewardship, grazing land also delivers a suite of ecosystem services – like water conservation, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration – that benefit us all.

Read more about grazing lands.

USDA Expands Insurance Option for Nursery Growers to All States

USDA is expanding crop insurance tailored for nursery producers to all counties in all states. Nursery Value Select (NVS) is a pilot program that enables nursery producers to select the dollar amount of coverage that best fits their risk management needs. Its expansion is part of USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) efforts to provide insurance options for a broader group of producers, including specialty crop producers.

NVS provides similar but improved coverage to the longstanding Nursery Field Grown and Container (FG&C) program. NVS also covers field grown and containerized nursery plants and offers coverage levels between catastrophic and 75 percent.

Prior to this expansion, NVS was only available in select counties in these states: Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington. Beginning with the 2025 crop year, NVS will now be available in all counties in all states. The sales closing date for the 2025 crop year is May 1, 2024, or September 1, 2024, as provided in the actuarial documents.

NVS was first available in the 2021 crop year, and producers insured more than $460 million in liabilities in crop year 2023.

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 or by contacting your RMA Regional Office.

USDA in South Dakota

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Farm Service Agency

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