

Wisconsin Farm Service Agency - March 2023

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Dates to Remember

March 15, 2023: Deadline for producers to sign up for the <u>Agriculture Risk Coverage</u> (ARC) and <u>Price Loss Coverage</u> (PLC) <u>Programs.</u>

March 15, 2023: Non-insured Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) deadline for spring seeded annual crops.

March 17, 2023: Deadline for farmers and landowners to <u>sign-up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).</u>

March 31, 2023: USDA's prospective <u>customer survey</u> deadline.

April 7, 2023: Deadline to for producers to sign up for the <u>General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).</u>

USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup starting **February 27 through April 7, 2023**. CRP is a cornerstone voluntary conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris administration's effort to address climate change and help agricultural communities invest in the long-term well-being of their land and natural resources.

Producers and landowners enrolled more than 5 million acres into CRP through signups in 2022, building on the acceptance of more than 3.1 million acres in the <u>largest Grassland CRP signup in history</u>. There are currently 23 million acres enrolled in CRP, with 1.9 million set to expire this year. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is aiming to reach the 27-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2023.

General CRP

General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

Continuous CRP

Under Continuous CRP, producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR30), the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watershed, has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices. Under this administration, FSA also moved SAFE practices back to the Continuous CRP signup, giving producers and landowners more opportunities to participate in the initiative. Through the FWP, producers and landowners can enroll land in CRP as part of their efforts to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, to improve both vegetation and water flow.

This administration has also made significant improvements to CREP, which leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific State, regional or nationally significant conservation concerns. Specifically, USDA made significant improvements to CREP to

reduce barriers and make the program more accessible to a broad range of producers and new types of partners.

These updates included flexibility for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, along with an investment in additional staff to work directly with partners. Through CREP, for the first time ever, three Tribal Nations are now partnering with USDA to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Grassland CRP

FSA will announce the dates for Grassland CRP signup in the coming weeks. Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands.

Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

How to Sign Up

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local <u>USDA Service</u> <u>Center</u> to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

More Information

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

Agricultural Producers Have Until March 15 to Enroll in USDA's Key Commodity Safety Net Programs

Agricultural producers who have not yet enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2023 crop year have until March 15, 2023, to elect and enroll a contract. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers these two safety net programs to provide vital income support to farmers experiencing substantial declines in crop prices or revenues.

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County or PLC, which are both commodity-by-commodity, or ARC-Individual, which covers the entire farm. Although election changes for 2023 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Additionally, if a producer has a multi-year contract on their farm and makes an election change for 2023, they will need to sign a new contract.

If producers do not submit an election by the March 15, 2023, deadline, the election remains the same as the 2022 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the commodity.

In Wisconsin producers have completed 69,399 contracts to date, representing 81.9% of the more than 84,000 expected contracts.

Producers who do not complete enrollment by the deadline will not be enrolled in ARC or PLC for the 2023 year and will not receive a payment if triggered.

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

Decision Tools

In partnership with USDA, two web-based decision tools are available to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations:

- Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator, a tool available through the University of Illinois allows producers to estimate payments for farms and counties for ARC-CO and PLC.
- ARC and PLC Decision Tool, a tool available through Texas A&M University that allows producers to estimate payments and yield updates and expected payments for 2023.

Crop Insurance Considerations and Decision Deadline

ARC and PLC are part of a broader safety net provided by USDA, which also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans. Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider. However, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

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

Producers should contact their crop insurance agent to make certain that the election and enrollment made at FSA follows their intention to participate in STAX or SCO coverage. Producers have until March 15, 2023, to make the appropriate changes or cancel their ARC or PLC contract.

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the <u>ARC and PLC webpage</u> or contact their local USDA Service Center.

Current FSA Loan Interest Rates

Current loan rates as of March 1, 2023.

Farm Loan Interest Rates:

Farm Operating - Direct	4.750%
Farm Operating - Microloan	4.750%
Farm Ownership - Direct	4.875%
Farm Ownership - Microloan	4.875%
Farm Ownership - Direct, Joint Financing	2.875%
Farm Ownership - Down Payment	1.500%
Emergency - Amount of Actual Loss	3.750%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL):

3-year FSFL	4.000%
5-year FSFL	3.750%
7-year FSFL	3.750%
10-year FSFL	3.625%
12-year FSFL	3.625%

Please visit the Farm Loan Program webpage for more information.

Wisconsin NRCS Announces March 17, 2023, Deadline Extension for Conservation Stewardship Program

The Wisconsin U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is extending the previously announced Conservation Stewardship

Program (CSP) sign-up date. The new application deadline for CSP sign-ups is March 17, 2023. This extension is due to the recent announcement of additional funding made available through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Through CSP, Wisconsin NRCS helps farmers, and forest landowners earn payments for expanding conservation activities while maintaining agricultural production on their land. CSP also encourages adoption of new technologies and management techniques. Specifically, this additional IRA allocation will be used to target applications willing to adopt <u>Climate Smart Conservation Activities</u>. While applications are accepted throughout the year, interested producers should submit applications to their local NRCS office by the extended deadline to ensure their applications are considered for 2023 funding.

More Information

CSP is offered in Wisconsin through continuous signups. The program provides many benefits including increased crop yields, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements and increased resilience to weather extremes. CSP is for working lands including cropland, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of a tribe.

For additional information about CSP, landowners should contact their local NRCS office at the <u>USDA Service Center</u> for their county. For more information, visit <u>our website</u>.

USDA Reminds Farmers, Ranchers and Forest Managers of Approaching Deadline for Prospective Customer Survey

Are you a farmer, rancher or forest manager? Please share your vital feedback with USDA by taking a nationwide survey at farmers.gov/survey! The survey is completely anonymous, will take about 10 minutes to complete, is available in multiple languages, and will be open until March 31, 2023. The survey focuses on gathering feedback about the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Risk Management Agency.

All farmers, ranchers and forest managers are encouraged to take the survey. USDA would especially like to hear from prospective customers: those who don't know about USDA or have yet to work with USDA, and those who were unable to participate in the past. The survey will help USDA enhance support, improve programs and services, increase access, and advance equity for new and existing customers.

USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a simplified direct loan application to provide improved customer experience for producers applying for loans from

the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The simplified direct loan application enables producers to complete a more streamlined application, reduced from 29 to 13 pages. Producers will also have the option to complete an electronic fillable form or prepare a traditional, paper application for submission to their local FSA farm loan office. The paper and electronic versions of the form were available starting March 1, 2023.

Approximately 26,000 producers submit a direct loan application to the FSA annually, but there is a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. Coupled with the Loan Assistance Tool released in October 2022, the simplified application will provide all loan applicants access to information regarding the application process and assist them with gathering the correct documents before they begin the process. This new application will help farmers and ranchers submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete, rejected, or withdrawn applications.

In October 2022, USDA launched the Loan Assistance Tool, an online step-by-step guide that provides materials to help an applicant prepare their farm loan application in one tool. Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser. A version compatible with mobile devices is expected to be available by the summer. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

The simplified direct loan application and Loan Assistance Tool are the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:

- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity
 of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA took action in October 2022 to provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.

Soon, all direct loan borrowers will receive a letter from USDA describing the circumstances under which additional payments will be made to distressed borrowers and how they can work with their FSA local office to discuss these options. Producers can explore all available options on all FSA loan options at fsa.usda.gov or by contacting their local USDA Service Center.

Wisconsin NRCS Accepting Proposals for 2023 Conservation Innovation Grants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Wisconsin, announced the availability of \$500,000 in Wisconsin Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) funding to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. All non-Federal entities and individuals are invited to apply, with the sole exception of Federal agencies. Project proposal applications are due May 5, 2023.

CIG project proposals must involve Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) eligible producers and should demonstrate the use of innovative technologies or approaches to address a natural resource concern. These resource concerns must fit into one of the following categories: Conservation Planning, Manure Management Systems or Climate Smart Management Systems.

Projects may be between one and three years in duration. The maximum award amount for a single award in 2023 is \$500,000 and the minimum award amount is \$50,000.

Wisconsin CIG grant application materials are available on Grants.gov at: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=346629

Complete application packets must be received by 10:59 p.m., Central Time on May 5, 2023, through www.grants.gov. For technical issues with Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

The funding available through this <u>NFO</u> is Federal financial assistance. Grants 101 Training is highly recommended for those seeking knowledge about Federal financial assistance. The training is free and available to the public via https://www.cfo.gov/grants-training/.

Applicants may direct their questions regarding the process to NRCS Resource Conservationist Ryan Gerlich at 608-662-4422, ext 227, or by email ryan.gerlich@usda.gov.

Producers Urged to Consider NAP Risk Protection Coverage Before Crop Sales Deadlines

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages you to review available USDA crop risk protection options, including federal crop insurance and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage, before the crop deadline. The local sales closing date for crop insurance is March 15, 2023 for barley, cabbage, corn, cucumbers, dry beans, forage seeding, grain sorghum, green peas, hemp, mint, oats, popcorn, potatoes, processing beans, soybeans, sweet corn, and whole farm revenue protection. Wisconsin Sales Closing deadlines for NAP for all spring seeded crops is also March, 15, 2023.

If you received a payment under the Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) or the Quality Loss Adjustment Program (QLA) for crop production and/or quality losses occurring in 2018, 2019, or 2020 crop years, you are required to meet linkage requirements by obtaining federal crop insurance or Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage at the 60/100 level, or higher, for both the 2022 and 2023 crop years.

When applying for WHIP+ or QLA, form FSA-895 (Crop Insurance and/or NAP Coverage Agreement) was submitted acknowledging the requirement to obtain federal crop insurance, if available, or NAP coverage if federal crop insurance is not available. The coverage requirement is applicable to the physical location county of the crop that received WHIP+ and/or QLA benefits.

You can determine if crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP by <u>visiting the</u> RMA website.

NAP offers two levels of coverage. Basic coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production. Higher levels of coverage may be purchased, from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Organic and direct market producers may be eligible for additional price incentives with their NAP coverage.

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

Beginning, underserved, veterans and limited resource farmers are now eligible for free catastrophic level coverage.

Federal crop insurance coverage is sold and delivered solely through private insurance agents. Agent lists are available at all USDA Service Centers or at <u>USDA's online Agent</u> Locator. You can use the <u>USDA Cost Estimator</u> to predict insurance premium costs.

For more information on NAP, service fees, sales deadlines, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Qualified veteran farmers or ranchers are eligible for a service fee waiver and premium reduction, if the NAP applicant meets certain eligibility criteria.

Wisconsin Farm Service Agency

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