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## June: Colorado USDA Newsletter

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Colorado USDA Newsletter - June 16, 2023

Farm Service Agency | Natural Resources Conservation Service | Risk Management Agency

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## **From Colorado FSA's State Executive Director, Kent Pepler**

I have spent most of the last three weeks with FSA Farm Loan staff members. What a great crew, just like the Farm Program staff they put farmers and rancher first.

Colorado FSA Farm Loan has a nice combination of experienced staff and new, younger folks. I am so impressed with how well the experienced folks embrace the younger employees. Colorado FSA is truly a family that looks out for one another. That makes us very special in this world, I think.

Being close to retirement age, I look at the younger employees with a great deal of envy. They have a lot going for them, a good steady job, ability to work up the chain of command based on hard work and not who they know. Colorado Farm Loan people are guaranteed to work in agriculture finance their whole career if they choose. Our folks don't have to worry about being transferred over to the credit card sales department, or being told you need to be certified as a financial advisor so you can sell life insurance or of course the all-time best, the bank has merged and we won't be doing many ag loans anymore.

No, FSA people will spend their careers helping family farmers and ranchers in the most important industry in the world. American agriculture. By the time their career comes to an end they will retire with a nice, well-earned government retirement and benefits.

Colorado FSA sounds like a pretty nice place, be it Farm Loans, Farm Programs or Administration, any makes a good living. No wonder I am a little bit envious of the youngsters...

Have a great harvest

KP

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## **Colorado Farm Service Agency is Hiring!**

The Farm Service Agency is accepting applications for the following positions. Interested individuals may apply using the below links to [USAJOBS](#)

### **PERMANENT POSITIONS:**

- **Upcoming Permanent Position Announcements**

*The following announcements will be coming soon.  
Be watching USAJobs for these announcements:*

- County Program Technician in Cheyenne County
- County Executive Director Trainee (Location negotiable)



**TEMPORARY POSITIONS (These are currently open positions)**

*To apply for one of the below listed temporary positions, please contact Claudia Drechsel at [claudia.drechsel@usda.gov](mailto:claudia.drechsel@usda.gov) or 720-544-2878 for more information.*

- Temporary County Program Technician in Lincoln County (Location negotiable)

If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested, please share this information with them. Contact Claudia Drechsel at [claudia.drechsel@usda.gov](mailto:claudia.drechsel@usda.gov) or 720-544-2878 if you have specific questions regarding the positions.

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## **USDA Accepts More Than 1 Million Acres in Offers Through Conservation Reserve Program General Signup**

**DENVER, Colo., June 12, 2023** – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting more than 1 million acres in this year's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup. This is one of several signups that USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is holding for the program. The results for CRP General signup reflect the continued importance of CRP as a tool to help producers invest in the long-term health, sustainability, and profitability of their land and resources. The signup resulted in 136,513 acres accepted in Colorado.

"This year's General CRP signup demonstrates the value and continued strength of this voluntary conservation program, which plays an important role in helping mitigate climate change and conserve our natural resources," said Kent Pepler State Executive Director in Colorado. "Today's announcement is one of many enrollment and partnership opportunities within CRP, including opportunities through our working lands Grassland CRP, Continuous CRP, and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). USDA will continue working to ensure producers and landowners have the information they need to take advantage of the options that work best for their operations."

Offers for new land in this General CRP signup totaled about 295,000 acres nationwide. Producers submitted re-enrollment offers for 891,000 expiring acres, reflecting the successes of participating in CRP longer term. The total number of CRP acres will continue to climb in the coming weeks once FSA accepts acres from the Grassland CRP signup, which closed May 26. Additionally, so far this year, FSA has received 761,000 offered acres for the Continuous CRP signup, for which FSA accepts applications year-round.

The number of accepted acres that are enrolled in General CRP will be confirmed later this year. Participating producers and landowners should also remember that submitting and accepting a CRP offer is the first step, and producers still need to develop a conservation plan before contracts become effective on October 1, 2023. Each year, during the window between offer acceptance and land enrollment, some producers ultimately decide not to enroll some accepted acres, without penalty.

### **General CRP Signup**

The General CRP Signup 60 ran from February 27 through April 7, 2023.

Through CRP, producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve soil health and water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat on agricultural land. In addition to the other well-documented benefits, lands enrolled in CRP are playing a key role in climate change mitigation efforts across the country.

In 2021, FSA introduced improvements to the program, which included a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This incentive provides an annual 3, 5, or 10 percent incentive payment based on the predominant vegetation type for the practices enrolled – from grasses to trees to wetland restoration.

### **Other CRP Signups**

[Grassland CRP](#) is a *working lands program* that helps producers and landowners protect grassland from conversion while enabling haying and grazing activities to continue. Lands enrolled support haying and grazing operations and promotes plant and animal biodiversity. Lands are also protected from being converted to uses other than grassland. This year's signup for Grassland CRP ran from April 17 through May 26.

[Continuous CRP](#), in which producers and landowners can enroll 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. Continuous CRP includes the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement ([SAFE](#)) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program ([FWP](#)), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program ([CREP](#)). In CREP, which is available in certain geographies, partnerships with States, Tribes, and other entities are leveraged for participants to receive a variety of added incentives and flexibilities. Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) initiative. [CLEAR30](#), a signup opportunity under that initiative available nationwide, gives producers and landowners across the country the opportunity to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.

### **More Information**

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by [logging into their farmers.gov account](#). If you don't have an account, [sign up today](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under 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 [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).

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## Maintaining Good Credit History

Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans require applicants to have a satisfactory credit history. A credit report is requested for all FSA direct farm loan applicants. These reports are reviewed to verify outstanding debts, see if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash flow.

Information on your credit report is strictly confidential and is used only as an aid in conducting FSA business.

Our farm loan staff will discuss options with you if you have an unfavorable credit report and will provide a copy of your report. If you dispute the accuracy of the information on the credit report, it is up to you to contact the issuing credit report company to resolve any errors or inaccuracies.

There are multiple ways to remedy an unfavorable credit score:

- Make sure to pay bills on time
  - Setting up automatic payments or automated reminders can be an effective way to remember payment due dates.
- Pay down existing debt
- Keep your credit card balances low
- Avoid suddenly opening or closing existing credit accounts

FSA's farm loan staff will guide you through the process, which may require you to reapply for a loan after improving or correcting your credit report.

For more information visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov) or contact your [local FSA Office](#).

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## FSA Now Accepting Nominations for County Committee Members

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) has started accepting nominations for county committee members. Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for these members who make important decisions about how federal farm programs are administered locally. All nomination forms for the 2023 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA offices by August 1, 2023.

Agricultural producers who participate or cooperate in a USDA program, and reside in the LAA that is up for election this year, may be nominated or volunteer for candidacy for the county committee. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority producers, women and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote, and hold office.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 dedicated members of the agricultural community serving on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Producers serving on FSA county committees play a critical role in the day-to-day operations of the agency. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment and other agricultural issues.

LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction. This may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area.

### Urban and Suburban County Committees

The 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to form urban county committees as well as make other advancements related to urban agriculture, including the establishment of the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. FSA established county committees specifically focused on urban agriculture. The urban county committees will work to encourage and promote urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural production

practices. Additionally, the new county committees may address areas such as food access, community engagement, support of local activities to promote and encourage community compost and food waste reduction.

Urban committee members are nominated and elected to serve by local urban producers in the same jurisdiction. These members are a vital link in the effective administration of USDA programs and are responsible for carrying out programs in full accordance with the regulations, national and state policies, procedures, and instructions. Urban county committee members will provide outreach to ensure urban producers understand USDA programs and serve as the voice of other urban producers and assist in program implementation that support the needs of the growing urban community. Urban county committees must see that county office operations are supportive and that they receive timely and quality service by carrying out responsibilities effectively, efficiently, and impartially. Learn more at [farmers.gov/urban](https://farmers.gov/urban).

### **More Information**

Producers should contact their local FSA office today to register and find out how to get involved in their county's election. They should check with their [local USDA Service Center](#) to see if their LAA is up for election this year. To be considered, a producer must be registered and sign an FSA-669A nomination form or an FSA-669-A-3 for urban county committees. The form and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at [fsa.usda.gov/elections](https://fsa.usda.gov/elections).

Election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters beginning Nov. 6, 2023

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## **USDA Offers Assistance to Help Organic Dairy Producers Cover Increased Costs**

USDA announced assistance for dairy producers with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP). ODMAP is established to help mitigate market volatility, higher input and transportation costs, and unstable feed supply and prices that have created unique hardships in the organic dairy industry. Specifically, under the ODMAP, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is making \$104 million available to organic dairy operations to assist with projected marketing costs in 2023, calculated using their marketing costs in 2022. FSA began accepting applications for ODMAP on May 24, 2023. Eligible producers include certified organic dairy operations that produce milk from cows, goats and sheep.

### **How ODMAP Works**

FSA is providing financial assistance for a producer's projected marketing costs in 2023 based on their 2022 costs. ODMAP provides a one-time cost-share payment based on marketing costs on pounds of organic milk marketed in the 2022 calendar year. ODMAP provides financial assistance that will immediately support certified organic dairy operations during 2023 keeping organic dairy operations sustainable until markets return to more normal conditions.

## How to Apply

FSA is accepting applications from May 24 to July 26, 2023. To apply, producers should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#). To complete the ODMAP application, producers must certify to pounds of 2022 milk production, show documentation of their organic certification, and submit a completed application form.

Organic dairy operations are required to provide their USDA certification of organic status confirming operation as an organic dairy in 2023 and 2022 along with the certification of 2022 milk production in hundredweight.

ODMAP complements other assistance available to dairy producers, including Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) and Supplemental DMC, with more than \$300 million in benefits paid for the 2023 program year to date. Learn more on the [FSA Dairy Programs webpage](#).

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## USDA Offers Livestock Disaster Program Flexibilities; Responds to Needs Expressed by Producers Hard-Hit by Drought and Winter Storms

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has provided additional flexibilities and further enhanced disaster recovery assistance provided by the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#), [Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#) and [Livestock Forage Disaster Program \(LFP\)](#) in response to needs expressed by livestock producers in the Western U.S. who have experienced significant feed, forage, animal and infrastructure loss from preexisting, long-term drought conditions further compounded by unprecedented snowfall and winter storms. These livestock disaster program policy enhancements include an extended June 2, 2023, deadline to submit notices of loss and applications for payment for 2022 losses. The deadline extension and program flexibilities are available to eligible producers nationwide who incurred losses from a qualifying natural disaster event.

LIP and ELAP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died because of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed, and forage. LFP provides benefits for grazing losses due to a qualifying drought or wildfire. For fire, losses must occur on federally managed lands. ELAP provides benefits for grazing losses not covered under LFP.

### New Program Applications for 2022

FSA is accepting 2022 LIP notices of loss and applications for payment through June 2, 2023, for all covered livestock that may have been eligible in 2022.

Producers who did not sign up for ELAP assistance for hauling livestock, forage and feedstuff hauling or other losses covered under ELAP in 2022 can also apply through June 2, 2023.

FSA will accept LFP applications for only newly eligible covered livestock through June 2, 2023.

All required supporting documentation must be received and on file in the county office by the established deadline.

### **Revising 2022 Applications**

Producers who have a 2022 ELAP, LIP or LFP application on file with FSA as of the program deadline or were placed on an approved register, may revise their application with the newly updated eligible livestock no later than June 2, 2023.

### **Filing a Notice of Loss for ELAP due to 2022 and 2023 Drought**

To support program access for counties that do not currently have a 365-day grazing season, FSA is waiving the 30-day timeframe for producers to submit a notice of loss for the 2023 ELAP program year due to qualifying drought in calendar years 2022 or 2023. Producers can now submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent, as far back as Jan. 1, 2023, for 2022 eligible losses and 2023 eligible losses that occur before June 2, 2023.

For counties that have a 365-day grazing season, producers must have a qualifying drought in the 2023 calendar year to be eligible for 2023 livestock, water and feed hauling in 2023.

### **More Information**

Livestock producers must provide evidence that livestock death was due to an eligible adverse weather event or loss condition. In addition, livestock producers should bring supporting evidence, including documentation of the number and kind of livestock that died, photographs or video records to document the loss, purchase records, veterinarian records, production records and other similar documents. Owners who sold injured livestock for a reduced price because the livestock were injured due to an adverse weather event, must provide verifiable evidence of the reduced sale of the livestock.

Producers can apply for ELAP, LFP and LIP benefits at their local FSA county office. For more information or to submit a notice of loss or an application for payment, please contact your [local FSA office](#) or visit [farmers.gov/recover](https://farmers.gov/recover).

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## **Update Your Records**

FSA is cleaning up our producer record database and needs your help. Please report any changes of address, zip code, phone number, email address or an incorrect name or business name on file to our office. You should also report changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase. You should also report any changes to your operation in which you reorganize to form a Trust, LLC or other legal entity.

FSA and NRCS program participants are required to promptly report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and to update their *Farm Operating*

Plan on form CCC-902.

To update your records, please contact your [local FSA office](#).

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## USDA Unveils Efforts to Streamline NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The USDA is streamlining its Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to ultimately better help agricultural producers and private landowners conserve wetlands, productive farmlands and at-risk grasslands. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is rolling out several improvements to this important program, which has more than 5 million acres of land enrolled, in response to feedback from producers, landowners and conservation partners.

Specifically, NRCS is updating its processes around appraisals, land surveys, as well as certifying eligible entities who help NRCS and producers enroll land into easements. These changes are for ACEP [Agricultural Land Easements](#) (ALE) as well as [Wetland Reserve Easements](#) (WRE).

Key program changes include:

- **Appraisals for ALE:** The threshold for national review of ALE appraisals is now \$3 million, raised from \$1 million. NRCS raised the threshold to align program requirements with increased land values, enabling the agency to better target staff resources and speed up implementation. Appraisals help ensure cost-effective and appropriate use of federal funds that are contributed to a conservation partner for their purchase of the ALE from the farmer or rancher.
- **Land Surveys for WRE:** NRCS plans to encourage procurement of land surveys earlier in the acquisition timeline, such as when an application has been tentatively selected for a WRE. These surveys help with locating land boundaries, which is needed to purchase and manage the easement. NRCS is also increasing its use of partnerships to assist with acquiring the land surveys and has simplified the review process for producer-acquired land surveys. This will speed up the time it takes producers and landowners to enroll.
- **Certification of Entities for ALE:** For ALE, NRCS works with eligible entities, such as American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations, to conserve prime farmland and at-risk grasslands. NRCS is working to expand the number of entities by launching a certification initiative to proactively notify potentially eligible entities that they qualify for administrative flexibilities. Certified entities have greater independence and less oversight in their purchase of easements funded under ALE. Information for entities on how to get certified is available on the [ALE webpage](#).

These improvements are the first step in an ongoing effort to streamline ACEP as well as other NRCS conservation programs to ensure that they are easier and more convenient to utilize, and it will strengthen implementation of the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA), which included \$1.4 billion in additional funding for ACEP over five years. ACEP is administered

by NRCS and aids landowners and eligible entities with conserving, restoring, and protecting wetlands, productive agricultural lands, and grasslands at risk to conversion to non-grassland uses. Healthy wetlands, grasslands and farmlands sequester carbon and provide many other natural resource benefits. NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs – including ACEP – year-round. Producers interested in easements should contact their [local Service Center](#) or view their [state application ranking dates](#).

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## **USDA Announces Modifications to the RMA Annual Forage and Rainfall Index Program**

The Annual Forage Insurance Program began in 2014. Producers have enrolled for coverage on more than 6.2 million acres. USDA is modifying the Annual Forage Insurance Program to make it more sustainable and to allow producers more flexibility. This includes allowing producers to choose the areas which they insure, rather than being required to insure all eligible acres. The changes will take effect for the 2024 crop year.

The Annual Forage insurance program is a rainfall index area-based plan that provides coverage to acreage planted each year and used as feed and fodder by livestock. The rainfall index does not directly measure an individual producer's annual forage production or loss. Rather, it measures the normal precipitation deviation that occurs in and around the insured area, which is correlated with forage production. The Annual Forage insurance program include all counties in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Texas.

The modifications to the Annual Forage pilot program include:

- Allowing producers to insure the acres they choose – no longer requiring all eligible acres to be insured.
- Modifying the program design from four growing seasons to 12 growing seasons.
- Moving the Acreage Reporting Date to the fifth day of the month after the month of planting, which creates 12 acreage reporting dates.
- Adding planting dates to designate the planting month and corresponding acreage reporting date.
- Allowing producers in Kansas and Nebraska to have coverage in growing season 10 through 12 and a corresponding growing season at the start of the next crop year, which is consistent with other states where the insurance is offered.
- Updating the Rainfall Index Basic Provisions to incorporate existing guidance on the record requirements in double cropping situations when one of the crops follow a different plan of insurance.

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