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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Colorado FSA Newsletter - March 2023

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

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Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) is Available

The Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) is conducted annually by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) in coordination with the Economic Research Service (ERS). This survey is the USDA's primary source of data on the financial well-being of America's farms. Every five years, ARMS coordinates with the Census of Agriculture (CoA) to give a more detailed scope of the economic conditions on agricultural operations throughout the United States. This year, NASS' field enumerators began contacting nearly 800 producers in Colorado on February 1, 2023 to collect this important information. After enduring a pandemic, drought, the increasing cost of feed, fertilizer, fuel, and other inputs, this information is needed to truly show what is occurring in rural America and to our farmers and ranchers.

While NASS and ERS conduct ARMS, many different agencies throughout the USDA and other government departments use the data to influence national policy. ARMS seeks to collect data on payments and acreage with regards to multiple government programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program, Farmable Wetlands Program, and Loan Deficiency Payments, which are all offered through FSA. Data collected through the ARMS survey can help influence future budget allocations for these programs. Information provided to NASS is kept confidential, as required by federal law. The agency only publishes data in aggregate form, ensuring that no individual respondent or operation can be identified.

Farmers and ranchers selected for this survey will be contacted through mid-april by a NASDA enumerator to schedule an in-person or telephone interview. Information about this survey can be found at USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service - Surveys - ARMS. To get additional information, please contact the USDA NASS Mountain Regional Field Office at 1-800-392-3202 or SM.AS.FOD.MTR@usda.gov.

National Agriculture Day 2023: Fifty Years Later, Farmers Are Growing a Climate for Tomorrow

Fifty years after the creation of National Agriculture Day, America's farmers, ranchers and private forestland owners find themselves on the front lines of climate change. They are uniquely positioned to deliver solutions by implementing climate-smart production practices that conserve natural resources, build healthier soils, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and sequester carbon.

National Agriculture Day is a day to recognize the producers who are the best stewards of our land. America's producers are not only providing food, forage, and fiber for today - they are also investing in climate solutions that will ensure a prosperous agricultural future for generations to come. They are growing a climate for tomorrow, for our state, our nation and our world.

Here in Colorado, there are 69,000 agricultural producers operating 38,900 farms on 31,821,000 acres of productive land. The average size of an agricultural operation in Colorado is 818 acres. Our major ag products are wheat, forage, corn, sorghum, proso millet, layers, cattle and calves, pullets, hogs and pigs, and sheep and lambs and the total market value is $7,491,702,000. These producers are important to Colorado's economy and our environment.

USDA is growing a climate for success for all people involved in farming, ranching and private forest land management. We are working to create an equitable and climate-smart food and agriculture economy built to support both rural and urban communities and empower Colorado producers –who feed the world; improve the health, nutrition, and quality of life of all Americans; and yield healthy lands, forests, and clean water. From crop insurance to farm loans, and from conservation to disaster assistance, USDA programs are helping producers conserve natural resources and keep families farming for future generations.

At the national level, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history. This is a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for this country and for the rural, suburban, and urban agricultural communities that USDA serves.

The IRA will help producers stay on the farm, prevent producers from becoming ineligible for future assistance. It provides $3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with at risk agricultural operations, $2.2 billion in financial assistance for farmers who have experienced discrimination in USDA's farm lending programs. The IRA will also promote climate-smart agriculture by increasing access to conservation assistance. It directs approximately $20 billion to support USDA's conservation programs that yield climate-related benefits while building resilience in agricultural operations.

USDA is committed to implementing the Inflation Reduction Act quickly and effectively to give farmers, ranchers, and private forestland owners the tools and resources they need to keep their operations productive and on climate change's front lines. But USDA can only succeed in its mission to help American agriculture thrive—and can only live up to President Lincoln's description of it as the "People's Department"—if it ensures that the Americans who need its services most receive them. Equity is not an add-on or extra; it is central to the Department's mission.

Equity is a component in all we do at USDA. We ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make are available to everyone and we take special steps to ensure that underserved and small and medium-sized producers can participate in our programs and prosper as a result of our work.

USDA is working across its agencies to support urban producers in their efforts to not only grow fresh, healthy produce, but also help create jobs, beautify their neighborhoods, and increase access to fresh, healthy food in areas where grocery stores are scarce.

On National Agriculture Day and every day, USDA is committed to ensuring our programs and investments reach all producers, including underserved producers who haven't always had the opportunity to benefit from the many resources USDA has to offer. We are committed to ensuring producers have the tools and resources they need to be part of the climate solution. Please join us in thanking our nation's producers and wishing them a happy National Agriculture Day!

Kent Peppler is the State Executive Director for USDA's Farm Service Agency; Clint Evans is the State Conservationist for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service; Collin Olsen is the RMA Regional Office Director, serving Colorado. Learn more about *USDA programs at farmers.gov.*

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 County Program Technician:**
    - Phillips County, Open 03/16/23-03/30/23
    - Sedgwick County, Open 03/16/23-03/30/23
- **Temporary County Program Technician:**
    - Washington County, Open 03/02/23-03/23/23 - this vacancy is temporary with the possibility of becoming permanent
- **Upcoming Announcements**
  The following announcements will be coming soon. Be watching USAJobs for these announcements:
    - Farm Loan Officer Trainee vacancy in Logan County
    - Farm Loan Officer Trainee vacancy in Montezuma County
    - Temporary Program Technician vacancy in Adams County

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 or 720-544-2878 if you have specific questions regarding the positions.

Is the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program Right for You?

Farmers and ranchers rely on crop insurance to protect themselves from disasters and unforeseen events, but not all crops are insurable through the USDA's Risk Management Agency. The Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides producers another option to obtain coverage against disaster for these crops. NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops impacted by natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevents crop planting.

Commercially produced crops and agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available are generally eligible for NAP. Eligible crops include those grown specifically for food, fiber, livestock consumption, biofuel or biobased products, or value loss crops such as aquaculture, Christmas trees, ornamental nursery, and others. Contact your local FSA office to see which crops are eligible in your state and county.

Eligible causes of loss include drought, freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, earthquake and flood. These events must occur during the NAP policy coverage period, before or during harvest, and the disaster must directly affect the eligible crop. For guidance on causes of loss not listed, contact your local FSA county office.

Interested producers apply for NAP coverage using FSA form CCC-471, "Application for Coverage," and pay the applicable service fee at the FSA office where their farm records are maintained. These must be filed by the application closing date, which varies by crop. Contact your local FSA office to verify application closing dates and ensure coverage for eligible NAP crops.

At the time of application, each producer acknowledges they have received the NAP Basic Provisions, which describes NAP requirements for coverage. NAP participants must report crop acreage shortly after planting and provide verifiable or reliable crop production records when required by FSA.

Producers are required to pay service fees which vary depending on the number of crops and number of counties your operation is located in. The NAP service fee is the lesser of $325 per crop or $825 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of

$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Premiums also apply when producers elect higher levels of coverage with a maximum premium of $15,750 per person or legal entity.

A producer’s certification on Form CCC-860 *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification* may serve as an application for basic NAP coverage for all eligible crops beginning with crop year 2022. These producers will have all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage waived, in addition to a 50 percent premium reduction if higher levels of coverage are elected.

For more detailed information on NAP, download the NAP Fact Sheet. To get started with NAP, we recommend you contact your local USDA service center.

USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signup 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.

“The Conservation Reserve Program is one of the largest private lands conservation programs in the United States, offering a range of conservation options to farmers, ranchers and landowners,” Vilsack said. “CRP has and continues to be a great fit for farmers with less productive or marginal cropland, helping them re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and support wildlife habitat. Under this administration, we have made several updates to the program to increase producer interest and enrollment, strengthen the climate benefits of the program and help ensure underserved producers can find a pathway to entry into CRP.”

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 largest Grassland CRP signup in history. 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 USDA Service Center 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.

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.

Rolling Out Revenue Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs (ERP and PARP)

Beginning January 23, 2023, agricultural producers can begin to apply for two new important programs for revenue losses, from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. Both programs equitably fill gaps in earlier assistance.

First, you may be eligible for assistance through the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase Two if you experienced revenue losses from eligible natural disasters in 2020 and 2021. ERP Phase Two is for producers who didn't receive assistance from ERP Phase One.

You may also be eligible for the Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) if you experienced revenue losses in calendar year 2020. PARP is addressing gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

Applications for both new programs are due June 2, 2023, and you can apply for both programs during your same appointment with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Historically, FSA programs have been designed to make direct payments to producers based on a single disaster event or for a single commodity loss. For many of you, this may be the first revenue-based program that you've applied for with FSA.

Why revenue-based programs?
ERP Phase Two and PARP take a much more holistic approach to disaster assistance, ensuring that producers not just make it through a single growing season but have the financial stability to invest in the long-term well-being of their operations and employees.

In general, ERP Phase Two payments are based on the difference in allowable gross revenue between a benchmark year, representing a typical year of revenue for the producer and the disaster year – designed to target the remaining needs of producers impacted by qualifying natural disasters and avoid duplicative payments. ERP Phase Two revenue loss is based on tax years.

For PARP, an agricultural producer must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a decrease in revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to a typical year. PARP revenue loss is based on calendar years.

How to Apply
FSA employees have been and continue to be restricted in giving any casual advice for any program. In addition, employees will not be allowed to provide assistance in

completing the ERP and PARP applications. Producers must complete the ERP and PARP applications on their own or with the assistance of their accountant or tax professional. FSA will provide upon request a copy of the 1099-G to assist producers with prior years payments from FSA.

In preparation for enrollment, producers should gather supporting documentation including:

- Schedule F (Form 1040); and
- *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 for ERP and for calendar years 2018, 2019 and 2020 for PARP.

Producers should also have, or be prepared to have, the following forms on file for both ERP and PARP program participation:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet* (as applicable to the program participant);
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity;
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable); and
- Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification.*
- FSA-941 *Average Gross Income Statement*
- Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, as certain existing permanent and ad-hoc disaster programs provide increased benefits or reduced fees and premiums.

ERP Application Forms needed before deadline of June 2, 2023:

- FSA-521 ERP Phase 2 Application
- FSA-521-A ERP Phase 2 Allowable Gross Income Worksheet
- FSA-522 Crop Insurance/NAP Coverage Agreement
- Supporting documentation within 30 days if requested by COC

PARP Application Forms needed before deadline of June 2, 2023:

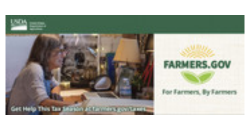
- FSA-1122
- FSA-1122-A
- Supporting Documentation within 30 days if requested by COC

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have some of these required forms on file. However, those who are uncertain or want to confirm should contact FSA at their local USDA Service Center.

Other Resources
FACTSHEETS available: FSA ERP Phase2 Factsheet, FSA PARP Factsheet, FSA PARP and ERP 2 comparison Factsheet

Please visit your local USDA Service Center for more information on ERP Phase Two, PARP and our full portfolio of conservation, prices support, safety-net, credit and disaster assistance programs.

It's tax season! Let farmers.gov help



Filing taxes can be challenging, especially if you are new to USDA programs or running a farm business, or if you are trying to forecast your farm's tax bill.

To support farmers and ranchers, USDA is partnering with tax experts from across the country to connect producers to information and resources related to taxes and USDA program payments, including those from the Inflation Reduction Act for distressed borrowers. RSVP for webinars or use the new tax estimator tool. Learn More

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USDA Announces Availability of Inflation Reduction Act Funding for Climate-Smart Agriculture

USDA is making funding available for agricultural producers and forest landowners nationwide to participate in voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided an additional $19.5 billion over five years for climate smart agriculture through several of the conservation programs that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) implements. NRCS is making available $850 million in fiscal year 2023 for its oversubscribed conservation programs: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

The IRA funding includes an additional $8.45 billion for EQIP, $4.95 billion for RCPP, $3.25 billion for CSP, and $1.4 billion for ACEP. The increased funding levels begin in fiscal year 2023 and rapidly build over four years. These additional investments are estimated to help hundreds of thousands of farmers and ranchers apply conservation to millions of acres of land. Additionally, the IRA provides $300 million to quantify carbon sequestration and greenhouse gases (GHG) through the collection and use of field-based data to assess conservation outcomes. Information gained through this effort will be used to improve practices and technical assistance to customers. Further guidance on this important work will be provided as the implementation of this portion of the IRA continues.

These funds will provide direct climate mitigation benefits and will expand access to financial and technical assistance for producers to advance conservation on their farm, ranch or forest land through practices like cover cropping, conservation tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more. To ensure we can quantify the benefits of these IRA investments, NRCS is working to support Department-wide work on Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MMRV). The IRA provided targeted funding to support this effort. In administering the Inflation Reduction Act climate investments, USDA will also support other environmental co-benefits, including – among other things – water conservation, wildlife habitat improvements, and reducing runoff.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs year-round, but producers interested in **EQIP** or **CSP** should apply by their state's ranking dates to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Funding is provided through a competitive process and will include an opportunity to address the unmet demand from producers who have previously sought funding for climate-smart conservation activities.

For **ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)** or **Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)**, applications for the current IRA funding cycle must be submitted by **March 17, 2023**, for the first funding round. This year, NRCS will prioritize ACEP-ALE for grasslands in areas of highest risk for conversion to non-grassland uses to prevent the release of soil carbon stores. Meanwhile, NRCS will prioritize ACEP-WRE for eligible lands that contain soils high in organic carbon.

NRCS plans to roll out the next **RCPP** funding opportunity in early spring, which will include IRA funds from fiscal year 2023.

Other opportunities for agreements and partnerships at the state level will be announced for fiscal year 2023 in the coming months. The IRA provides funding to support those strategic partnerships with local, regional and national organizations. This will include outreach to underserved producers to ensure IRA climate funding is reaching those who have been previously unable to access conservation assistance.

USDA Supports Climate-Smart Ag, Equity and Domestic Food Production through Crop Insurance

USDA has made great strides to better reach underserved agricultural producers and to support climate-smart agriculture through crop insurance. In the past two years, USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) has created new insurance options while improving others and invested in a comprehensive risk management education effort.

Equity in Crop Insurance

RMA took steps to ensure that underserved, specialty crop, organic, small-scale, and urban producers had access to crop insurance options and information during the past two years. This includes launching the new Micro Farm option in 2021 to better serve direct market and small-scale producers. Micro Farm provides a risk management safety net for all eligible commodities on a farm under one insurance policy, but on a smaller scale. In 2022, RMA listened to producers and expanded the program's eligibility to reach more producers.

Meanwhile, RMA made several improvements to Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), an important policy to specialty crop and organic producers, including:

- Increasing expansion limits for organic and aquaculture producers.

- Increasing insurable revenue up to $17 million in revenue (formerly $8.5 million).

As part of USDA's broader Organic Transition Initiative, RMA provided a premium benefit to organic and transitioning producers through the Transitional and Organic Grower Assistance (TOGA) Program. TOGA reduces producers' overall crop insurance premium bills and helps them continue to use organic agricultural systems.

In order to better engage with producers about these and other risk management tools, RMA has increased its support of risk management education and outreach. In 2021 and 2022, RMA invested about $6.5 million in partnerships with 27 organizations to provide risk management education as well as to train and equip the next generation of crop insurance agents, adjusters, and outreach educators about crop insurance options.

RMA created a roadshow series to promote Micro Farm and WFRP insurance options. The roadshow series reached over 3,000 producers who attended the events either virtually or in-person since its creation in late fall 2022.

Climate-Smart Agriculture

RMA has taken steps to support producers who are using climate-smart practices, including planting cover crops and split-applying nitrogen. RMA introduced the Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP), which supports climate smart agricultural practices and helps farmers maintain their cover crop systems, despite the financial challenges posed by the pandemic. RMA provided more than $110 million in premium support for producers who planted cover crops on over 22 million net acres through PCCP during the 2021 and 2022 seasons. RMA also updated policy in 2021 to allow producers with crop insurance to hay, graze or chop cover crops at any time and still receive 100% of the prevented planting payment.

In 2022, RMA introduced its Post Application Coverage Endorsement (PACE) in certain states for non-irrigated corn, providing coverage for producers who use this practice that saves them money and is considered better for natural resources, and expanded the program in September.

Supporting Domestic Production

To increase domestic food production amid potential global food shortages and supply chain disruptions, RMA expanded double crop insurance opportunities in nearly 1,500 counties where double cropping is viable.

Improvements to Crop Insurance

RMA continues to work with producers and agricultural groups to improve crop insurance. Some examples include:

- RMA updated three key crop insurance options for livestock producersto reach more producers, offer greater flexibility for protecting their operations, and ultimately, better meet the needs of the country's swine, dairy and cattle producers.
- RMA created greater flexibilities for crop insurance reporting, making it easier for specialty crop producers and others who sell through direct marketing channels to obtain insurance, report their annual production and file a claim.
- RMA has expanded Small Grains Crop Provisions to offer revenue protection for oats and ryefor crop year 2023—a direct result of RMA listening to and prioritizing the requests and feedback from producers.

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.

Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be successful. FSA staff will provide guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower's graduation to commercial credit. While it is FSA's commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower's responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses
- The development of problem situations
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

If a farm loan borrower can't make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

USDA Rural Development Makes $31 Million in Grants Available to Help Farmers and Ranchers Add More Value to Their Products to Access New and Better Markets

USDA Rural Development is making $31 million in grants available under the Value-Added Producer Grants program. The grants help agricultural producers generate new products, create marketing opportunities and increase their incomes through value-added activities.

Eligible applicants include independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmer or rancher cooperatives, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures.

Funding priority will be given to beginning farmers or ranchers who are military veterans or socially disadvantaged individuals; small and mid-sized family farms or ranches; and farmer or rancher cooperatives. Priority also will be given to projects that propose a mid-tier value chain by developing a supply network that moves agricultural products from production through consumption in a local or regional market.

The funding may be used for planning activities or working capital expenses related to producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product. Planning activities may include conducting feasibility studies and developing business plans. Working capital expenses may include costs associated with processing, marketing, advertising, inventory and salaries.

The maximum award for a planning grant is $75,000. The maximum award for a working capital grant is $250,000.

USDA is offering priority points to projects that advance key priorities under the Biden-Harris Administration to help rural communities and people address climate change and environmental justice, advance racial justice, place-based equity, and opportunity, and create more and better market opportunities.

Electronic applications will be accepted via Grants.gov until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on May 11, 2023. Paper applications in Colorado must be sent to the Colorado State Office, Denver Federal Center, Building 56, Room 2300, Denver, CO 80225-0426. Paper applications must be postmarked and mailed or sent overnight by May 16, 2023. Applications also may be delivered in person or emailed to an RD field office by close of business May 16, 2023.

Additional information is available on page 16396 of the March 17 Federal Register. For questions in Colorado contact Jessica Akers, Jessica.akers@usda.gov, Bill Chester, william.chester@usda.gov, or Robert McElroy, robert.mcelroy@usda.gov .

USDA Service Center
Colorado State Office

Denver Federal Center, Bld 56
Denver, CO 80225

Phone: 720.544.2876
Fax: 844.860.8238

Farm Service Agency

State Executive Director
Kent Peppler
720.544.2876
Kent.Peppler@usda.gov

Communications Coordinator
Elizabeth Thomas
720.544.2879
Elizabeth.Thomas1@usda.gov

Natural Resource Conservation Service

State Conservationist
Clint Evans
720.544.2810
Clint.Evans@usda.gov

Public Affairs Specialist
Petra Popiel
720.544.2808
Petra.Popiel@usda.gov

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