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February: Colorado USDA Newsletter

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Colorado USDA Newsletter - February 13, 2024

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

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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 through [USAJOBS](#):

Currently Open:

- **County Program Technician:**
 - [Multiple Locations available](#), Open 01/31-02/14/2024
 - Baca
 - Logan
 - Moffat
 - Montezuma
 - Pueblo
 - Weld

Opening Soon:

The following announcements will be opening soon. Be on the lookout through [USAJOBS](#) to apply when these open:

- ****Pathways Internship- Multiple Locations**
 - Pueblo
 - Fort Collins
 - Lamar
 - Greeley
 - Lakewood/Golden
 - Alamosa

****The Pathways Internship Program** provides year-round paid work experiences for current degree-seeking high-school, undergraduate, and graduate students. Interns may work during the summer, fall, spring or year-round and are eligible for non-competitive conversion upon program completion. Learn more about our [Pathways Programs and other career opportunities](#).

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.

Colorado USDA Webinar Series for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

USDA is an "Every Day, Every Way" department that touches the lives of every American, every day by supporting the agriculture sector, strengthening rural communities, promoting healthy eating, and helping to protect our natural resources. At the forefront of our mission is the support we provide to farmers to help them start—and continue—farming. If you have been wondering where to start at USDA, this is the place for you.



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), Rural Development (RD), and other partner organizations have come together to create a webinar series for all. The Webinar series will take place virtually every third Wednesday of the Month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

[Register for the webinar series here!](#)

Our Agenda for the year is as follows (subject to change):

- February 21, USDA Overview each agency.
- March 20, Working with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Loans
- April 17, How to get Started with FSA and Why it's important
- May 15, RD financial assistance programs REAP Program and Value-Added Producer Grants
- June 19, Working with the Risk Management Agency (RMA) Crop & Livestock Insurance
- July 17, Technical and financial assistance to producers and forest landowners to address natural resource concerns (NRCS)
- August 21, Soil Health and how use Web Soil Survey
- September 18, Urban Ag
- October 16, What CSU has to offer!
- November 18, Colorado Department of Agriculture New Farmer & Rancher Resources

For more information for beginning farmers visit: [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers | Farmers.gov](#)

USDA Now Accepting Farm Loan Payments Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that most farm loan borrowers will soon be able to make payments to their direct loans online through the Pay My Loan feature on [farmers.gov](#) in early February. Pay My Loan is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, especially for

producers who may have limited time during the planting or harvest seasons to visit a local FSA office; modernize and improve customer service; provide additional customer self-service tools; and expand credit access to assist more producers.

On average, local USDA Service Centers process more than 225,000 farm loan payments each year. Pay My Loan gives most borrowers an online repayment option and relieves them from needing to call, mail, or visit a Service Center to pay their loan installment. Farm loan payments can now be made at the borrower's convenience, on their schedule and outside of FSA office hours.

Pay My Loan also provides time savings for FSA's farm loan employees by minimizing manual payment processing activities. This new service for producers means that farm loan employees will have more time to focus on reviewing and processing new loans or servicing requests.

The Pay My Loan feature can be accessed at farmers.gov/loans. To use the payment feature, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). This initial release only allows individuals with loans to make online payments. For now, borrowers with jointly payable checks will need to continue to make loan payments through their local office.

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate the Farm Loan Program customer-facing business process. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a direct loan application annually, FSA has made various improvements including:

- The [Online Loan Application](#), an interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet, and build a farm operating plan.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the direct loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.
- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), which reduced loan applications by more than half, from 29 pages to 13 pages.

Insurance Linkage Requirements for Payments Received Through the Emergency Relief Program

Producers who received an Emergency Relief Program (ERP) payment need to meet ERP insurance linkage requirements by purchasing crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage at the 60/100 level or higher for the next two available crop years, which will be determined from the date you received an ERP payment and may vary depending on the timing and availability of coverage. The insurance coverage requirement applies to the physical location of the county where the crop was located and for which an ERP payment was issued.

Contact your crop insurance agent or local FSA county office as soon as possible to ask about coverage options. Producers who do not obtain the applicable coverage by the sales/application closing date will be required to refund the ERP benefits received on the applicable crop, plus interest. To determine which crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP, visit the [RMA website](#).

For more information, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA AMS Partners with Colorado to Award Over \$3 Million to Strengthen Food Supply Chain Infrastructure

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announced it has a cooperative agreement with Colorado under the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI). Through this agreement, USDA and Colorado are working together to offer over \$3 million in competitive grant funding for projects designed to build resilience across the middle of the supply chain. Colorado is accepting applications for this Infrastructure Grant funding through **March 7, 2024**.

In May 2023, [USDA announced](#) the availability of up to \$420 million through RFSI to strengthen local and regional food systems. Through this program, AMS has entered into cooperative agreements with state agencies, commissions, or departments responsible for agriculture, commercial food processing, seafood, or food system and distribution activities or commerce activities in states or U.S. territories. RFSI is authorized by the

American Rescue Plan. Updates for each state's Request for Applications for the RFSI program are available on the [AMS website](#).

"This partnership between USDA and Colorado is allowing critical funding to reach areas of the supply chain that need it most," said USDA Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Jenny Lester Moffitt. "The projects funded through this program will create new opportunities for the region's small and midsize producers to thrive, expand access to nutritious food options, and increase supply chain resiliency."

Using RFSI funding, the Colorado Department of Agriculture will fund projects that increase aggregation and storage options, particularly with cold and dry storage; processing facilities for individual quick freezing, freeze drying, drying, puree, and canning to create accessibility to institutional markets and expansion into consumer markets. The state's priorities are informed by stakeholder engagement and outreach to underserved producers to better understand their needs.

"The collaboration between federal, state, and local partners is integral to the success of implementing resilient food infrastructure systems. CDA's Markets division staff has worked diligently to create a meaningful state plan that will boost our regional food system. We are grateful for our partnership with USDA and look forward to launching the Resilient Food System Infrastructure grant to support Coloradans in every part of the state in expanding local processing capacity and adding value to their homegrown products," said Colorado Agriculture Commissioner Kate Greenberg.

Those interested in receiving a subaward should apply directly through the [Colorado Department of Agriculture](#) by March 7, 2024. AMS encourages applications that serve smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and underserved communities.

Through the program and in addition to the Infrastructure Grant funding, the Colorado Department of Agriculture will support supply chain coordination and technical assistance to farmers and food businesses operating in processing, aggregation and distribution—all critical activities to support access to more and better markets for farmers.

For more information, visit the AMS [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure webpage](#).

NRCS in Colorado Announces New Extended 2024 ACEP Application Signup Cut-Off Date

Colorado's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announces a NEW 2024 application cut-off dates for eligible Colorado entities to participate in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE).

There is one signup offered for complete and eligible applications to compete for available funding. **Application packages** for funding general, grasslands of special significance (GSS), GSS Gunnison sage grouse, GSS greater sage grouse, and general urban agriculture projects **are NOW due on Friday, February 16, 2024, by 4:00 PM Mountain Standard Time (MST)**.

[Read More](#)

For more information about ACEP-ALE, please contact Laura Trimboli at (970) 403-6379 or laura.trimboli@usda.gov or Cody Robertson at (970)880-4938 or cody.robertson@usda.gov. You can also visit your local NRCS field office located in your nearest [USDA Service Center](#).

Rural Business Development Grant Available: USDA Seeks Applications to Advance Economic Development and Create Jobs for People in Rural America

USDA Rural Development is accepting applications to advance economic development and create jobs for people in rural America through the [Rural Business Development Grant](#) program. The program supports business opportunities or business enterprise projects in rural communities. Organizations eligible to receive funding include rural towns, communities, state agencies, authorities, nonprofits, federally recognized Tribes, public colleges and non-profit cooperatives.

This program provides grants for rural projects that finance and facilitate development of small and emerging rural businesses, help fund distance learning networks, and help fund employment related adult education programs. To assist with business development, RBDGs may fund a broad array of activities.

RBDG is a competitive grant designed to support targeted technical assistance, training, and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenues. Programmatic activities are separated into enterprise or opportunity type grant activities.

Applications must be submitted to the nearest USDA Rural Development state office where the project is located by 4:30 p.m. ET on Feb. 28, 2024. Please reach out to RBCS Team contacts below with questions regarding application completion and submission.

For questions on projects in Colorado contact Bill Chester, william.chester@usda.gov or Robert McElroy, robert.mcelroy@usda.gov.

Farmers Can Now Enroll for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs the 2024 Crop Year

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\)](#) and [Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting Dec. 18, 2023. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

2024 Elections and Enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

2022 Crop Year Payments

This fall, FSA issued payments totaling more than \$267 million to agricultural producers who enrolled in the 2022 ARC-CO option and the ARC-IC option for covered commodities that triggered a payment. Payments through the PLC option did not trigger for the 2022 crop year.

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. These payments help mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. Payments for crops that may trigger for the 2023 crop year will be issued in the fall of 2024.

Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that 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 can purchase 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.

Web-Based Decision Tools

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

Maintaining ARC/PLC Acreage

If you're enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, you must protect all cropland and noncropland acres on the farm from wind and water erosion and noxious weeds. By signing ARC county or individual contracts and PLC contracts, you agree to effectively control noxious weeds on the farm according to sound agricultural practices. If you fail to take necessary actions to correct a maintenance problem on your farm that is enrolled in ARC or PLC, the County Committee may elect to terminate your contract for the program year.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

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 USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

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