

June 2015



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Minnesota FSA Newsletter: June 2015

Minnesota Farm Service Agency **A Minnesota Message...**

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Saint Paul, MN 55101

www.fsa.usda.gov/mn

State Committee:
David Haugo- Chair
Kent Kanten- Member
Richard Peterson- Member
Roger Vogt- Member
Scott Winslow- Member

Executive Officer/ Acting State Executive Director:
Glenn Schafer

Welcome to June! On May 28, we said congratulations and goodbye to FSA State Executive Director Debra Crusoe, who retired at the end of the month. Deb did a great job for the farmers and ranchers of Minnesota over her 31-year career with USDA. She will be missed, but we wish her well in retirement.

I am the executive officer for FSA in Minnesota. I will be serving as acting State Executive Director until a new person is appointed to the position. Typically, this process takes several weeks. A press release will be issued when the new director is on board.

With the growing season well underway, it is interesting how growing conditions can change dramatically in a short period of time. Earlier this spring, most of the state was experiencing some level of drought conditions; now, nearly the whole state has recovered from drought conditions and would benefit from less precipitation in the coming weeks. For more information on

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prevailing drought conditions across the nation, go to the U.S. Drought Monitor Web site at <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>. The U.S. Drought Monitor is produced in partnership between the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Please contact your [local FSA Office](#) for questions specific to your operation or county.

Now that crops are planted, it is time for farmers to visit their local FSA office to report their crop acreage. Soon FSA will be announcing the annual signup for the Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage (ARC/PLC) program for the 2014 and 2015 crop years. We look forward to assisting you with acreage reporting and signup.

I hope June helps your crops mature well to a bountiful harvest!

Glenn Schafer
Acting State Executive Director

Secretary Vilsack Announces Additional 800,000 Acres Dedicated to Conservation Reserve Program for Wildlife Habitat and Wetlands

Secretary Hails Program's 30th Anniversary, Announces General Signup Period

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that an additional 800,000 acres of highly environmentally sensitive land may be enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under certain wetland and wildlife initiatives that provide multiple benefits on the same land.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will accept new offers to participate in CRP under a general signup to be held Dec. 1, 2015, through Feb. 26, 2016. Eligible existing program participants with contracts expiring Sept. 30, 2015, will be granted an option for one-year extensions. Farmers and ranchers interested in removing sensitive land from agricultural production and planting grasses or trees to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and restore wildlife habitat are encouraged to enroll.

For 30 years, the Conservation Reserve Program has helped farmers and ranchers prevent more than 8 billion tons of soil from eroding, reduce nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to cropland by 95 and 85 percent respectively, and even sequester 43 million tons of greenhouse gases annually, equal to taking 8 million cars off the road.

The voluntary Conservation Reserve Program allows USDA to contract with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is conserved. Participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

CRP protects water quality and restores significant habitat for ducks, pheasants, turkey, quail, deer and other important wildlife which spurs economic development like hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation and tourism across rural America. Today's announcement allows an additional 800,000 acres for duck nesting habitat and other wetland and wildlife habitat initiatives to be enrolled in the program.

Farmers and ranchers should consider the various CRP continuous sign-up initiatives that may help target specific resource concerns. Financial assistance is offered for many practices including conservation buffers and pollinator habitat plantings, and initiatives such as the highly erodible lands, bottomland hardwood tree and longleaf pine.

Farmers and ranchers may visit their FSA county office for additional information. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized the enrollment of grasslands in CRP and information on grasslands enrollment will be available after the regulation is published later this summer.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, please visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Agricultural Producers in Minnesota Still Have Time to Apply for Direct Farm Ownership Loan Program

Low-Interest Loans Can Help Producers Start or Expand Farms

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Minnesota Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced that farmers and ranchers still have time to apply for low interest loans available through the FSA direct farm ownership program. Applications must be approved by Sept. 30, 2015, to take advantage of the funding available.

Eligible farmers and ranchers can borrow up to \$300,000 to buy farmland, construct or repair buildings, pay closing costs, or promote soil and water conservation. The interest rate can be as low as 1.5 percent with up to 40 years to repay.

New farmers and ranchers, military veterans, and underserved farmers and ranchers also are encouraged to apply. Each year Congress targets 80 percent of available loan funds to beginning and targeted underserved farmers and ranchers. Targeted underserved groups include American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians, or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics and women.

For more information about farm loan, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans, or contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agriculture production. Loans are available for operating type loans and/or to purchase or improve farms or ranches.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of socially disadvantaged groups.

A socially disadvantaged applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities. For purposes of this program, socially disadvantaged groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

USDA Announces Restart of Biomass Crop Assistance Program for Renewable Energy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that incentives will resume this summer for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners interested in growing and harvesting biomass for renewable energy. The support comes through the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), which was reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. BCAP provides financial assistance to establish and maintain new crops of energy biomass, or who harvest and deliver forest or agricultural residues to a qualifying energy facility.

Financial assistance is available through BCAP for costs associated with harvesting and transporting agriculture or forest residues to facilities that convert biomass crops into energy. Eligible crops may include corn residue, diseased or insect infested wood materials, or orchard waste. The energy facility must first be approved by USDA to accept the biomass crop. Facilities can apply for, or renew, their BCAP qualification status beginning today. \$11.5 million of federal funds will be allocated to support the delivery of biomass materials through December 2015. Last year, more than 200,000 tons of dead or diseased trees from National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands were removed and used to produce renewable energy, while reducing the risk of forest fire. Nineteen energy facilities in 10 states participated in the program.

Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners can also receive financial assistance to grow biomass crops that will be converted into energy in selected BCAP project areas. New BCAP project area proposals will be solicited beginning this summer and accepted through fall 2015, with new project area announcements and enrollments taking place in early spring 2016. The extended proposal submission period allows project sponsors time to complete any needed environmental assessments and allows producers enough lead time to make informed decisions on whether or not to pursue the BCAP project area enrollment opportunity. This fiscal year USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will allocate up to \$8 million for producer enrollment to expand and enhance existing BCAP project areas. Additionally, in accordance with the 2014 Farm Bill, underserved farmers are eligible for a higher establishment cost share. BCAP projects have supported over 50,000 acres across 74 counties in 11 different project areas.

For more information, visit www.usda.gov.

Farm Service Agency County Committee Nomination Period Begins June 15

The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced that the nomination period for local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees begins on Monday, June 15, 2015.

It is important for county committees to reflect America's diversity, all eligible farmers and ranchers, including beginning farmers are encouraged to get involved in this year's elections. FSA has seen an increase in the number of nominations for qualified candidates, especially among women and minorities – a trend the Agency would like to see continue.

To be eligible to serve on a FSA county committee, a person must participate or cooperate in an agency administered program, be eligible to vote in a county committee election and reside in the local administrative area where they are nominated.

Farmers and ranchers may nominate themselves or others. Organizations representing minorities and women also may nominate candidates. To become a candidate, an eligible individual must sign an FSA-669A nomination form. The form and other information about FSA county committee

elections are available at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections. Nomination forms for the 2015 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by close of business on Aug. 3, 2015.

FSA will mail election ballots to eligible voters beginning Nov. 9, 2015. Ballots will be due back to the local county office either via mail or in person by Dec. 7, 2015. Newly elected committee members and alternates will take office on Jan. 1, 2016.

While FSA county committees do not approve or deny farm ownership or operating loans, they make decisions on disaster and conservation programs, emergency programs, commodity price support loan programs and other agricultural issues. Members serve three-year terms. Nationwide, there are about 7,800 farmers and ranchers serving on FSA county committees. Committees consist of three to 11 members that are elected by eligible producers.

Producers Must Report Prevented Planting and Failed Acres

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers to report prevented planting and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility.

Producers must report crop acreage they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were prevented from planting. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form FSA-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and Risk Management Agency (RMA). Please contact your local office regarding final planting dates for crops in your area.

If a producer is unable to report the prevented planting acreage within the 15 calendar days following the final planting date, a late-filed report can be submitted. Late-filed reports will only be accepted if FSA conducts a farm visit to assess the eligible disaster condition that prevented the crop from being planted. A measurement service fee will be charged.

Additionally, producers with failed acres should also use form FSA-576, Notice of Loss, to report failed acres.

For losses on crops covered by the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and crop insurance, producers must file a Notice of Loss within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent. Producers must timely file a Notice of Loss for failed acres on all crops including grasses.

Please contact your local county office to schedule an appointment to file a Notice of Loss. To find your local FSA office visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

ARC and PLC Acreage Maintenance

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

A list of noxious weeds can be found on the following website:
<http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxiousDriver>.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to disease, adverse weather or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible livestock losses include grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, additional cost of transporting water because of an eligible drought and additional cost associated with gathering livestock to treat for cattle tick fever.

Eligible honeybee losses include loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, cost of additional feed purchased above normal quantities due to an eligible adverse weather condition, colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.

Eligible farm-raised fish losses include death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

Producers who suffer eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015 must file:

- A notice of loss the earlier of 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent or by November 1, 2015
- An application for payment by November 1, 2015

The Farm Bill caps ELAP disaster funding at \$20 million per federal fiscal year.

The following ELAP Fact Sheets (by topic) are available online:

- ELAP for Farm-Raised Fish Fact Sheet
- ELAP for Livestock Fact Sheet
- ELAP for Honeybees Fact Sheet

To view these and other FSA program fact sheets, visit the FSA fact sheet web page at www.fsa.usda.gov/factsheets.

Tree Assistance Program (TAP) Sign-Up

Orchardists and nursery tree growers who experience losses from natural disasters during calendar year 2015 must submit a TAP application either 90 calendar days after the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent. TAP was authorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 as a permanent disaster program. TAP provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Eligible tree types include trees, bushes or vines that produce an annual crop for commercial purposes. Nursery trees include ornamental, fruit, nut and Christmas trees that are produced for commercial sale. Trees used for pulp or timber are ineligible.

To qualify for TAP, orchardists must suffer a qualifying tree, bush or vine loss in excess of 15 percent mortality from an eligible natural disaster. The eligible trees, bushes or vines must have been owned when the natural disaster occurred; however, eligible growers are not required to own the land on which the eligible trees, bushes and vines were planted.

If the TAP application is approved, the eligible trees, bushes and vines must be replaced within 12 months from the date the application is approved. The cumulative total quantity of acres planted to trees, bushes or vines, for which a producer can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 500 acres annually.

2015 Acreage Reporting Dates

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

- November 15, 2014: Fall seeded small grains, Forage Production - fall seeding (insured/no insurance), Forage for grazing including pasture, and Forage Production - prior year seeding (insured/no insurance).
- January 2, 2015: honey
- January 15, 2015: apples
- May 31, 2015: nursery crops
- July 15, 2015: all other crops

The following exceptions apply to the above acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.
- If a perennial forage crop is reported with the intended use of "cover only," "green manure," "left standing," or "seed," then the acreage must be reported by July 15th.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact your local county office.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).