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Montana FSA Program Dates/Deadlines

USDA in Montana reminds agricultural producers of important Farm Service Agency (FSA) program dates. Contact your local service center to apply and with any questions. Visit online at farmers.gov and fsa.usda.gov/mt.

March 15, 2023: ***Don't miss the March 15 deadline*** to elect coverage and enroll in Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2023 crop year.

March 15, 2023: Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage closing date for all spring crops **except** spring-seeded canola, rye, speltz, triticale, wheat, mixed forage, perennial and value-loss crops. *Please note that the acreage reporting date for your NAP covered crops is the earlier of the established FSA acreage reporting date for the crop or 15 calendar days before the onset of harvest or grazing of the specific crop acreage being reported.*

March 31, 2023: Crop year 2022 Final Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL)/Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP) Availability Date for Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, Seed Cotton, Sesame seed and Wheat.

April 7, 2023: Close of General CRP signup period

May 31, 2023: Crop year 2022 Final Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL)/Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP) Availability Date for Corn, Cotton (bales), Dry peas, Grain sorghum, Lentils, Mustard Seed, Long grain rice, Medium Grain Rice, Safflower, Small chickpeas, Large Chickpeas, Cotton, Soybeans and Sunflower seed.

June 2, 2023: ERP Phase 2 application period ends.

June 2, 2023: PARP application period ends.

July 17, 2023: 2023 acreage reporting deadline for spring seeded alfalfa seed, forage seeding, CRP, perennial forage not covered under NAP and all other crops not required to be reported by a previous reporting date.

Sept. 1, 2023: NAP application closing date for fall and spring seeded Canola and all Value Loss Crops.

Sept. 30, 2023: NAP application closing date for all perennial forage, fall and spring seeded garlic, rye, speltz, triticale, wheat, and mixed forage crops. *Please note that the acreage reporting date for your NAP covered crops is the earlier of the established FSA acreage reporting date for the crop or 15 calendar days before the onset of harvest or grazing of the specific crop acreage being reported.*

ELAP notice of loss must be filed within **30 days** of when loss is apparent for **livestock and farm-raised fish** losses.

ELAP notice of loss must be filed within **15 days** of when loss is apparent for **honeybee** losses.

***Note for ELAP Notice of Loss-** If you are still hauling feed/water/livestock in 2023 due to the 2022 drought, a new NOL is required for the 2023 calendar year - even if you already submitted a NOL in 2022.

LIP notice of loss must be filed within **30 days** of when the loss is apparent.

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From the Desk of the SED: Maureen Wicks

Montana FSA Celebrates National Agriculture Day and Women's History Month

As National Agriculture Day approaches, I'm reminded of how women play a crucial role in Montana's agriculture. One story comes to mind about a young woman back in 1910. Laura Etta Smalley was a schoolteacher near Edmonton, Alberta Canada.

Back then, there weren't many opportunities for single women to homestead in Canada. As a result, Etta headed south to Montana and filed a homestead near Inverness in Hill County Montana where she continued to teach.

In the summer of 1911, Etta broke ground and began prepping the soil for planting the following year. She seeded flax in 1912 and endured losses with the threshing process that resulted in Etta harvesting 11 bushels an acre.

Etta eventually married a neighboring homesteader, William Bangs, and had a family with him. They ultimately lived on Etta's homestead in a house that was bought and crafted to meet their needs and continued to work the Farm until 1954 when they retired and passed the tradition on to their son.

Today, the Bangs Farm is still in operation. They continue to work that land and carry on that proud tradition of agriculture that Montana is known for. It's amazing how the bravery of one young woman, impacted and shaped the lives of so many generations of agriculture producers.

I'm proud of this woman's history and I'm extremely pleased to share it with you as we celebrate this upcoming National Agriculture Day. Thank you for all you do, and continue to do, to support our agriculture's heritage here in Montana.

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USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023

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

Producers and landowners enrolled more than 5 million acres into CRP through signups in 2022, building on the acceptance of more than 3.1 million acres in the [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.

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USDA Encourages You to Consider NAP Risk Protection Coverage Before Crop Sales Deadlines

The Farm Service Agency encourages you to examine available USDA crop risk protection options, including federal crop insurance and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage, before the applicable crop sales deadline.

Federal crop insurance covers crop losses from natural adversities such as drought, hail and excessive moisture. NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available. You can determine if crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP by [visiting the RMA website](#).

NAP offers higher levels of coverage, from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Producers of organics and crops marketed directly to consumers also may exercise the “buy-up” option to obtain NAP coverage of 100 percent of the average market price at the coverage levels of between 50 and 65 percent of expected production. Buy-up levels of NAP coverage are available if the producer can show at least one year of previously successfully growing the crop for which coverage is being requested. NAP basic coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production.

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

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

Deadlines for coverage vary by state and crop. Contact your [local USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov.

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

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USDA's Risk Management Agency Reminds Producers in Montana of the Final Date to Purchase Federal Crop Insurance

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) also reminds producers in Montana that the final date to purchase Federal crop insurance or make changes to Federal crop insurance for 2023 crop year spring-planted crops is March 15, 2023. Federal crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available online using the RMA [Agent Locator](#). Producers are encouraged to visit with their crop insurance agent soon to learn specific details for the 2023 crop year. Agents can help producers determine what policy works best for their operation and review existing

coverage to ensure the policy meets their needs.

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Disaster Assistance Available for Livestock Losses

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides assistance to you for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law.

For disease losses, FSA county committees can accept veterinarian certifications that livestock deaths were directly related to adverse weather and unpreventable through good animal husbandry and management.

For 2023 livestock losses, you must file a notice within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent. You then must provide the following supporting documentation to your local FSA office no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred.

- Proof of death documentation
- Copy of grower's contracts
- Proof of normal mortality documentation

USDA has established normal mortality rates for each type and weight range of eligible livestock, i.e. Adult Beef Cow = 1% and Non-Adult Beef Cattle (less than 250 pounds) = 4.1%. These established percentages reflect losses that are considered expected or typical under "normal" conditions.

In addition to filing a notice of loss, you must also submit an application for payment by March 1, 2024, for 2023 losses.

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

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Are you ready for the Census of Agriculture?

By Eric Sommer, USDA NASS State Statistician

Montana's farmers and rancher will have the opportunity to make a positive impact on their operations and communities by taking part in the Census of Agriculture. Conducted every five years by USDA NASS, the Census is the only uniform, comprehensive and impartial source for agricultural data for every county in our state.

The census also helps tell the whole story of Montana agriculture. The average age of Montana producers in 2017 was 58.2 years old. Total farm production expenses were \$3,328,498,000 Montana producers averaged \$123,059 of expenses. Net cash farm income was \$831,073,000 making the average net cash farm income per farm of \$30,726 in 2017. The last census counted 27,048 farms and ranches in Montana spanning more than 58.1 million acres. Those farms produced 137 million bushels of wheat and \$1.94 billion in livestock sales. This is your voice! Your Opportunity to tell your story! The story of Montana Agriculture!

We ask you to talk to fellow producers about this critical effort. Your answers to the census help grow your farm's future, shape farm programs, and boost services for you, your community and your industry.

Census of Agriculture questionnaires were mailed out in January and currently following up with producers. Producers are highly encouraged to complete their forms online. New and improved this year, the online census form is convenient and dynamic—you can access it on any electronic device.

The Census of Agriculture is Your Voice, Your Future, Your Opportunity. For more information about the census, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov or call 1-888-424-7828.

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

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

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

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USDA Announces Signup for Crop and Revenue Loss Assistance for Agricultural Producers

Signup began January 23 for additional emergency relief from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the [Emergency Relief Program](#) (ERP) Phase Two.

To be eligible for Phase Two, producers must have suffered a decrease in allowable gross revenue in 2020 or 2021 due to necessary expenses related to losses of eligible crops from a qualifying natural disaster event. Eligible crops include both traditional insurable commodities and specialty crops that are produced in the United States as part of a farming operation and are intended to be commercially marketed. This also includes losses of eligible on-farm stored commodities. ERP Phase 2 applicants will use the following tax years when selecting allowable gross revenue:

- Benchmark years: 2018 and/or 2019; estimated for new producers with no 2018 or 2019 revenue or adjusted if the benchmark years are not representative of the disaster year due to a change in operation size.
- Disaster years: 2020 and/or 2021. The allowable gross revenue for the specific disaster year will be based on the tax year applicable to that revenue (2020, 2021 or 2022).

The ERP tool assists producers in calculating allowable gross revenue, as well as adjusted revenue for the benchmark years 2018 and 2019, and allowable gross revenue for representative tax years 2020-2022 which represent disaster years 2020 and 2021. Once producers complete the allowable gross revenue entries, they are able to print forms FSA-521 and FSA-521A through this tool.

The ERP Phase 2 and PARP application period is open from January 23 through June 2, 2023.

For more information on payment calculations, payment limitations or how to determine allowable gross revenue, please reference the [ERP Phase 2 fact sheet](#).

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USDA Announces Signup for Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program

The Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) will assist eligible producers of agricultural commodities who experienced revenue decreases in calendar year 2020 compared to 2018 or 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PARP will help address gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

USDA's Farm Service Agency will accept PARP applications from January 23, 2023, through June 2, 2023.

Eligible and Ineligible Commodities

For PARP, eligible agricultural commodities include crops, aquaculture, livestock, livestock byproducts, or other animals or animal byproducts that are produced as part of a farming operation and are intended to be commercially marketed. This includes only commodities produced in the United States or those produced outside the United States by a producer located in the United States and marketed inside the United States.

The following commodities **are not eligible** for PARP:

- Wild free-roaming animals.
- Horses and other animals used or intended to be used for racing or wagering.
- Aquatic species that do not meet the definition of aquaculture.
- *Cannabis sativa L.* and any part of that plant that does not meet the definition of hemp.
- Timber.

Program Eligibility

PARP payments will be made on a whole-farm basis, not commodity-by-commodity. To be eligible for PARP, an agricultural producer must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and must have experienced a 15 percent decrease in allowable gross revenue in 2020, as compared to either:

- The 2018 or 2019 **calendar year**, *as elected by the producer*, if they received allowable gross revenue during the 2018 or 2019 **calendar years**, or

- The producer's expected 2020 calendar year allowable gross revenue, if the producer had no allowable gross revenue in 2018 or 2019.

PARP payments will be issued after the application period ends on June 2, 2023.

For more information on determining allowable gross revenue visit farmers.gov/coronavirus/pandemic-assistance/parp or review the [PARP fact sheet](#).

More Information

To apply for PARP, contact your [local USDA Service Center](#).

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Save Time – Make an Appointment with FSA

Producers are encouraged to call their local FSA office to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of their time and to make sure FSA staff is available to tend to their important business needs. Please call your local FSA office ahead to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that might be needed during your appointment. To find your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator.

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USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming

Are you a military veteran interested in farming? USDA offers resources to help you:

- **Fund Your Operation:** USDA's Farm Service Agency offers a variety of [funding opportunities](#) to help agricultural producers finance their businesses. Certain funds are targeted for veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Conserve Natural Resources:** USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers [conservation programs and expert one-on-one technical assistance](#) to strengthen agricultural operations now and into the future. Veterans may be eligible for a cost share of up to 90 percent and advance payments of up to 50 percent to cover certain conservation practices.
- **Manage Risks:** USDA is here to help you prepare for and recover from the unexpected. Veterans who are beginning farmers may be eligible for reduced premiums, application fee waivers, increased insurance coverage, and other incentives for multiple [USDA programs that support risk management](#).

USDA wants to ensure that veterans transitioning to agriculture have the resources needed to succeed. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to your [state Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator](#).

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USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;
- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

[Farmers.gov](#) now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

Managing USDA Business Online

Using farmers.gov, producers, entities and those acting on their behalf can also:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices, plans and contracts.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View farm loan and interest information (producers only).

Future plans include adding the ability to import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture planting boundaries.

To access your information, you'll will need a [USDA eAuth account](#) to login to farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit [farmers.gov](#) and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the [Sign In/Sign Up link](#) at the top right of the website. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

In addition to the self-service features available by logging into farmers.gov, the website also has ample information on USDA programs, including pandemic assistance, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance. Recently, USDA updated the navigation and organization of the site as well as added some new webpages, including "[Get Involved](#)," "[Common Forms](#)," and "[Translations](#)." [Learn more about these changes](#).

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NRCS Montana Sets Application Date of March 17 for Climate-Smart Agriculture Funding

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Montana is accepting applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). The funding for this current cycle comes through the Inflation Reduction Act and supports agricultural and forest landowners participating in voluntary conservation programs implementing climate-smart practices. To be considered for funding in the current cycle, producers and landowners should apply by March 17, 2023.

“NRCS in Montana focuses our conservation investments to make the most impact on our working lands. The Inflation Reduction Act funding is a once-in-a-generation investment in climate-smart practices that will accelerate that goal while providing opportunities for improved ecologic and economic sustainability for our ag producers and rural communities,” said Tom Watson, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana. “Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners of all sizes, small to large, including historically underserved producers play a critical role in addressing climate change challenges.”

Inflation Reduction Act funding 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, forest stand improvement, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more. Conservation funding is available for the following programs and initiatives:

Targeted Implementation Plans: NRCS in Montana targets its EQIP investments in very specific areas to achieve clearly defined natural resource goals as identified by local partners. The Montana Focused Conservation approach harnesses the power of multiple producers in one area undertaking similar conservation projects to achieve a regional or landscape-scale result. There are nearly 100 local projects currently available in fiscal year 2023. For more information about projects in your area, visit nrcs.usda.gov/montana and click on [What's Available in My County](#).

EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. In Montana, historically underserved participants, including limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

The CSP is for working lands. For farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, CSP can help find new ways to meet resource and operation goals. All of the land in a producer's agricultural operation must be enrolled to be eligible for CSP. This year, the Conservation Planning Workbook will be a required part of the CSP application package. Request a printed copy of the workbook from your local USDA service center.

ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) provide financial assistance to eligible entities, including land trusts and state and local units of government, for purchasing easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. In the case of working farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. Landowners interested in an ACEP-ALE easement must enter into an agreement with an eligible entity to be considered for enrollment into the program. Find a list of entities eligible to hold ACEP-ALE easements in Montana and

additional information at nrcs.usda.gov/montana by clicking on the [ACEP](#) option under State Programs and Initiatives.

NRCS accepts conservation program applications year-round; however, applications for the current funding consideration must be submitted by March 17, 2023. Applications made after the cutoff will be considered in the next funding cycle. Additional information is available on the Montana NRCS website at nrcs.usda.gov/montana. For contact information of your local USDA Service Center, visit nrcs.usda.gov/contact.

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Requesting Site Access for Grazing Land Field Study

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is conducting a grazing land field study as part of the National Resources Inventory (NRI). The NRI is an annual nationwide survey of the status of natural resource conditions on non-federal lands. This nationally consistent statistical data supports agricultural and environmental policy development and program implementation.

The focus of the on-site grazing land study is on key issues in range and pasture science such as weed management, soil health, fire hazard, and woody encroachment. The information collected is a valuable tool to prioritize Montana agricultural conservation efforts and demonstrate landowner conservation successes. The information will aid in developing local conservation programs that could benefit both you and the Conservation District in your area.

Each year, sample sites are randomly distributed on non-federal rural range or pastureland across the Nation in every county. In Montana, over sixty percent of the non-federal rural land is rangeland or pastureland. Thanks to past landowner support, over 2,000 Montana sites have been sampled, since 2003. This year 154 sites have been selected in Montana.

NRCS will start mailing permission request letters in early to mid-March. You will receive a letter if one or more of the randomly selected sites is located on your land. The data will be collected during the vegetation growing season, generally May-September but the exact date of the site visit depends on scheduling and weather conditions. These activities do not disturb the landscape and are similar to activities used in NRCS grazing land conservation planning. The data collection will generally take less than one day. Data collection will begin in mid-May and end in early October. Landowner participation in the field survey is always welcomed.

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2023 Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants

Know a Montana rancher, farmer or forestland owner who goes above and beyond in the stewardship and management of natural resources? Nominate them for the 2023 Montana Leopold Conservation Award®.

Nominations may be submitted on behalf of a landowner, or landowners may nominate themselves. The application can be found at www.sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA [sandcountyfoundation.us13.list-manage.com].

The [application \[sandcountyfoundation.us13.list-manage.com\]](https://sandcountyfoundation.us13.list-manage.com) deadline is **March 15, 2023**. Applications can be emailed to sbarta@mt.gov or postmarked by March 15, 2023, and mailed to:

Leopold Conservation Award
c/o Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation
P.O. Box 414
Clyde Park, MT 59018

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USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

Apply by March 27, 2023

USDA is making available up to \$7.5 million for grants through its Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP). The competitive grants will support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production projects through two categories, Planning Projects and Implementation Projects. [Learn more.](#)

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USDA Announces Renewed Partnership with Tribal Colleges

For nearly 30 years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and tribal land-grant colleges and universities have partnered to prepare the next generation of agriculture professionals in Indian Country. USDA is honored to renew its memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), which represents the 36 federally recognized tribal colleges and universities designated as land-grants.

“Tribal colleges and universities play an essential role with our tribal nations, and for USDA.” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “USDA is working with our tribal college partners to strengthen these institutions and educate tomorrow’s Indigenous leaders.”

“We are looking forward to the momentum that will grow from this Memorandum of Agreement with USDA,” said David Yarlott, Chair of the AIHEC Board of Directors and President, Little Big Horn College. “Seventy-five percent of Indian Country is either forested or agriculture lands, and nowhere else in America do extension and other land-grant programs hold greater potential for benefit. Today’s agreement is a springboard for action and new partnerships with USDA in the years ahead. We are ready to get to work.”

Through [the new agreement](#) (PDF, 343 KB), USDA and AIHEC will work together to make USDA programs and services more accessible to tribal colleges and universities. The agreement also recognizes the importance of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) in agriculture and federal land management and builds on USDA’s work to support Indigenous knowledge research with tribal colleges and associations.

Tribal colleges offer the distinctive land-grant mix of research, education and extension, while framing that education in the context of Native American history, Indigenous knowledge and traditions, and tribal self-

determination. Today there are [36 federally recognized tribal colleges and universities](#) designated as land-grants.

Tribal Scholars Program – Apply by April 10

In addition, USDA is pleased to announce the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 scholarship application cycle for the USDA Tribal Scholars Program, with first-ever e-applications. The next generation of tribal agriculture professionals starts with the USDA Tribal Scholars program. The program provides full tuition, fees, books, a housing stipend, and workforce training to students pursuing degrees in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines. The Tribal Scholars Program is a unique fast-track career path. When the student has completed the scholarship requirements, USDA may convert the student to a permanent employee without further competition. Eligible applicants include graduating high school seniors, full-time students currently enrolled at a 1994 land grant tribal college or university, or recent graduates of one of these schools. The application deadline is April 10, 2023. Apply [online](#) and email 1994@usda.gov for further information.

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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 producers](#) to 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 rye](#) for 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](#).

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USDA Invests \$2 Million to Provide Risk Management Training to Farmers, Ranchers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today up to \$2 million is available for cooperative agreements for risk management education and training programs that support farmers and ranchers, including underserved producers, small-scale farmers, organic operations and climate-smart farm practices.

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) makes this funding available to provide the needed resources for organizations – such as universities, county cooperative extension offices, and nonprofit organizations – to develop education tools that help producers learn how to effectively manage long-term risks and challenges.

“Agriculture is an inherently risky line of work, so we are partnering with organizations to provide valuable training, particularly in underserved communities, so that they learn how to effectively manage risks with their businesses,” said RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger. “We’re committed to broadening the reach of crop insurance and these risk management education partnerships are a testament to our efforts to reach more communities.”

A broad range of risk management training activities are eligible for funding consideration, including training on crop insurance options, record keeping, financial management, non-insurance-based risk management tools and natural disaster preparedness among others. Partners can also train farmers at all levels on risk management options that help secure local food systems.

Proposals are due April 24, 2023. The notice of funding has additional details [View Opportunity | GRANTS.GOV](#). Interested organizations must apply through the Results Verification System at <http://rvs.umn.edu>.

In the past two years, RMA has invested roughly \$6.5 million into risk management education and outreach partnerships.

Examples of previous RME education partnership projects include:

- Invested \$200,000 to assist the Rural South Institute deliver financial and risk management education to minority producers underserved by crop insurance in 18 persistent poverty counties in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.
- Invested \$107,000 with the University of Arizona to improve risk management skills of small to medium-scale Native American livestock producers in Arizona and New Mexico.

More Information

RMA oversees the Federal crop insurance program and promotes a strong farm safety net to sustain and ensure the success of American agriculture. Federal crop insurance helps farmers and ranchers manage risks, such as catastrophic weather conditions and market fluctuations.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In 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 www.usda.gov

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USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new online tool to help farmers and ranchers better navigate the farm loan application process. This uniform application process will help to ensure all farm loan applicants receive equal support and have a consistent customer experience with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) regardless of their individual circumstances.

USDA experiences a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, particularly among underserved customers, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. The Loan Assistance Tool is available 24/7 and gives customers an online step-by-step guide that supplements the support they receive when working in person with a USDA employee, providing materials that may help an applicant prepare their loan application in one tool.

Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button. From here they can follow the prompts to complete the Eligibility Self-Assessment and start the farm loan journey. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

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

- A streamlined and simplified direct loan application, reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

Background

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

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USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a simplified direct loan application to provide improved customer experience for producers applying for loans from the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The simplified direct loan application enables producers to complete a more streamlined application, reduced from 29 to 13 pages. Producers will also have the option to complete an electronic fillable form or prepare a

traditional, paper application for submission to their local FSA farm loan office. The paper and electronic versions of the form will be available starting March 1, 2023.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Contact information for your local office, visit: www.farmers.gov.

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