



## In This Issue:

- [Montana FSA Program Dates/Deadlines](#)
- [From the Desk of the SED: Maureen Wicks](#)
- [USDA Reminds Customers of Expanded Eligibility for Livestock Disaster Programs](#)
- [USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023](#)
- [Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters 2023](#)
- [Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting](#)
- [Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance](#)
- [Getting Acreage Reporting Right](#)
- [USDA Announces Signup for Crop and Revenue Loss Assistance for Agricultural Producers](#)
- [USDA Announces Signup for Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program](#)
- [Protect Your Investments in the Soil: USDA's Modernized Lab Data Mart Website Provides User-Friendly, State-of-the-Art Data](#)
- [USDA Grants Available to Spur Innovation Technologies in Montana](#)
- [USDA Announces Cooperative Agreements for Compost and Food Waste Reduction](#)
- [Conserving and Protecting Montana with The Montana Land Reliance](#)
- [USDA Announces Renewed Partnership with Tribal Colleges](#)
- [USDA Offers Cooperative Agreement and Grant Application Support to Underserved Producers and Communities for Risk Management Education Projects, Others](#)
- [USDA Expands Margin Protection for Corn and Soybean Farmers](#)
- [Ag Counts!](#)
- [USDA Provides Payments of Nearly \\$800 Million in Assistance to Help Keep Farmers Farming](#)
- [Preauthorized Debit Available for Farm Loan Borrowers](#)

---

## 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](https://farmers.gov) and [fsa.usda.gov/mt](https://fsa.usda.gov/mt).

**April 1, 2023:** CRP participants may begin submitting offers for CRP CLEAR30 signup 59.

**April 7, 2023:** Close of General CRP signup period

**April 10, 2023:** Application deadline to apply for the Tribal Scholars program.

**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.

**June 2, 2023:** 2022 ELAP, LFP, or LIP notice of loss and application for all covered livestock that may have been eligible in 2022. Producers that have a 2022 ELAP, LFP, or LIP application on file with FSA as of the program deadline or who were placed on an approved register, may revise their 2022 application with the newly updated eligible livestock.

**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.

**July 31, 2023:** CRP CLEAR30 signup 59 ends

**August 1, 2023:** Deadline to request a farm reconstitution or farm transfer for program year 2023.

**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.

[Back to top](#)

---

## From the Desk of the SED: Maureen Wicks

With the precipitation that we've received throughout the winter months, the [U.S. Drought Monitor Map](#) is looking a little friendlier. However, looking at the [NRCS Current Conditions Map](#) of the Major Basin Percentage of Normal, we want to stay vigilant with the possible repercussions of spring runoff. As spring work begins, we're excited and hopeful with the potential that comes with it.

# U.S. Drought Monitor

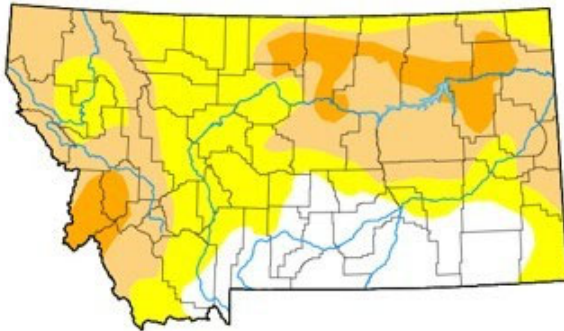
[Current](#) [Maps](#) [Data](#) [Summary](#) [About](#) [Conditions & Outlooks](#) [Ag in Drought](#) [En Español](#) [NADM](#)

[Home](#) > [Montana](#)

## Montana

Map released: Thurs. March 30,  
2023

Data valid: March 28, 2023 at 8 a.m. EDT



### Intensity



### Current Conditions

(Select A Map)

Snow Water Equivalent - Major Basin Percentage of Normal ▾

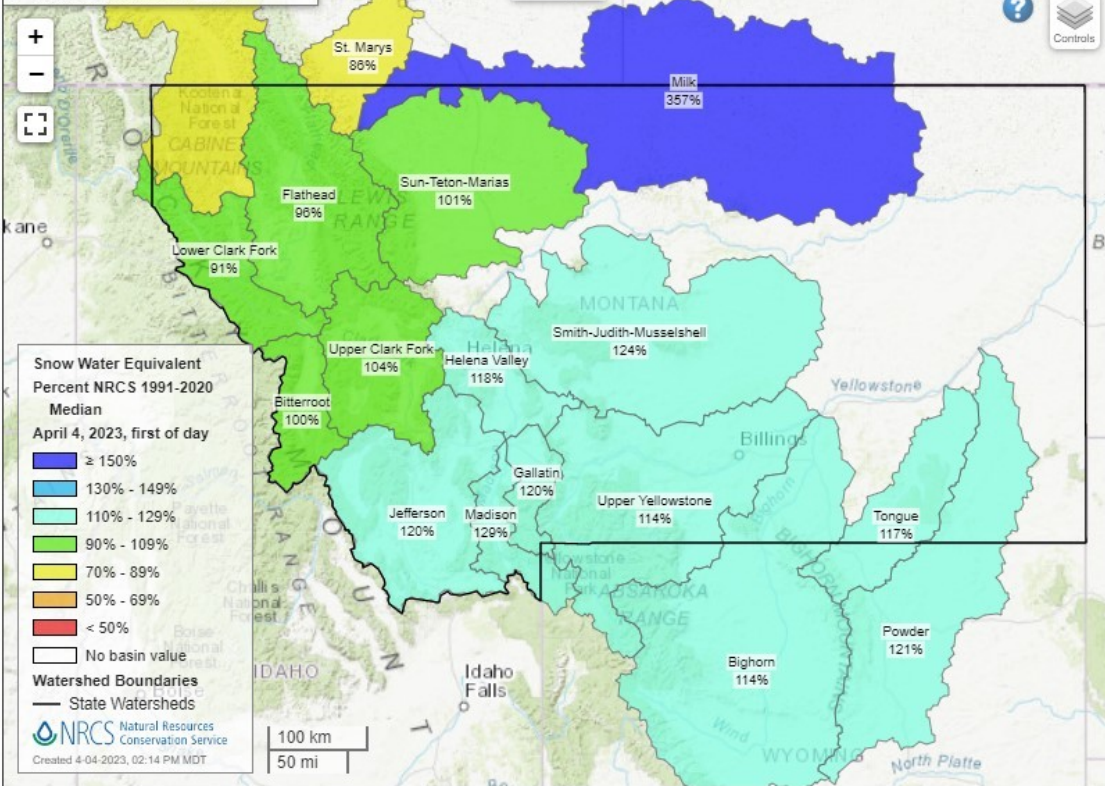
**USDA** Natural Resources Conservation Service  
National Water and Climate Center

United States Department of Agriculture

[Quick Links](#) [Snow & Climate Monitoring](#) [Water Supply](#) [Climate Support](#) [Data Access Help](#) [About Us](#)

Selected Stations: 146

Print/Export



---

# USDA Reminds Customers of Expanded Eligibility for Livestock Disaster Programs

In January, FSA updated the following livestock programs: The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP), the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), and the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).

## Livestock Disaster Assistance Updates

FSA has expanded eligible livestock under ELAP, LFP and LIP.

Previous provisions required that livestock be used for commercial use in the operation; however, FSA has now removed the recreational restriction to allow benefits for horses that are used for pleasure, roping, pets or show.

Livestock used or intended to be used for hunting, consumption by owner, racing and wagering remain ineligible.

Ostriches are also now eligible for LFP and ELAP. FSA is making this change because ostriches satisfy more than 50% of their net energy requirement through the consumption of growing forage grasses and legumes and are therefore considered "grazing animals."

These changes are effective retroactively to the 2022 program year.

LIP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event. LFP and ELAP provide benefits for grazing and feed losses for eligible livestock due to a qualifying event. ELAP also covers losses related to honeybees and farm-raised fish.

## Reporting Losses

Producers impacted by a natural disaster should report losses and damages and file an application with their [FSA county office](#). Timelines for reporting losses and applying for payments differ by program.

For LIP and ELAP, producers will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For LFP, producers must provide a completed application for payment and required supporting documentation to their FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the grazing loss occurred.

Because these deadlines have passed for 2022, FSA is allowing producers affected by these changes the opportunity to apply for the following by the announced deadlines:

## Eligibility Requirements for Producers Who Have Not Previously Participated in ELAP, LFP, or LIP

Eligible producers that now have eligible covered livestock and the producer has never participated in ELAP, LFP, or LIP prior to 2023, FSA will accept a 2022 ELAP, LFP, or LIP notice of loss and application for all covered livestock that may have been eligible in 2022, no later than **June 2, 2023**. All required supporting documentation must be received and on file in the County Office by the established deadline. Producers will be required to meet all other program eligibility requirements needed for their 2022 ELAP, LFP, or LIP application to be considered for payment.

## Eligibility Requirements for Producers Who Have Previously Participated in ELAP, LFP, or LIP

Producers who have participated in ELAP, LFP, or LIP prior to 2023, will only be allowed to file a new or revised 2022 ELAP, LFP, or LIP notice of loss and application for payment for the newly updated eligible livestock categories. All required supporting documentation must be received and on file in the County Office by the established deadline. Producers that have a 2022 ELAP, LFP, or LIP application on file with FSA as of the program



deadline or who were placed on an approved register, may revise their 2022 application with the newly updated eligible livestock no later than **June 2, 2023**.

[Back to top](#)

---

## 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.

[Back to top](#)

---

## Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters 2023

**WHAT IS OPEN FIELDS?** Open Fields, administered through FWP's Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP), is a conservation-based incentive practice geared to **help landowners keep some land enrolled in CRP** and to provide public game bird hunting opportunities.

Montana has lost a significant amount of CRP in recent years, and more is scheduled to expire in the near future. Working together, we can help ensure game birds and other wildlife have productive nesting cover, conserve and improve soil health, and protect water quality.

### PROGRAM DETAILS

- Landowners receive a one-time lease payment of \$5.00 per CRP acre (320-acre max) for each year remaining in their USDA contract.
- CRP is eligible for managed or emergency harvesting or routine grazing activities once in 5 years and when pre-approved by the USDA.
- All enrolled acres are open to free walk-in public access for game bird hunting with no further permission needed.
- Additional acres may be offered to help manage walk-in hunting.
- Landowners may enroll up to 320 CRP acres (maximum) per landownership. More than one application may be submitted if landownerships are at least ¼-mile apart.
- Open Fields contracts begin **September 1** and end **January 1** of the year the USDA contract expires.

**PAYMENT EXAMPLE** (320 CRP acres) X (\$5 per acre) X (10-year enrollment) equals a one-time payment of \$16,000.

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES

- Bonus Payment of \$5.00 per acre for seeding CRP, up to 320 acres.

- CRP Re-enrollment: Additional incentives may be available for mid-contract management activities, such as light disking.

**ELIGIBILITY** To be considered eligible, the following criteria must be met:

- All enrollments must be on private land that is legally accessible for walk-in game bird hunting.
- A minimum of 2 years remaining on your USDA contracts.
- Continuous CRP practices such as SAFE CRP maybe eligible for enrollment if the total access area is 100 acres or more.
- Agree to manage the CRP for wildlife.
- Agree to allow free walk-in game bird hunting access.

**OTHER OPPORTUNITIES** Do you have CRP enrolled in FWP's Block Management, UGBEP projects, or located on State Trust Lands? If so, you may be eligible to enroll in other UGBEP lease options. Contact FWP staff below to learn more.

| Region(s) | Staff                     | Phone        | Email  |
|-----------|---------------------------|--------------|--|
| 4         | Matt Strauch, Great Falls | 406-454-5870 | <a href="mailto:mstrauch@mt.gov">mstrauch@mt.gov</a>               |
| 5         | Megan O'Reilly, Billings  | 406-247-2966 | <a href="mailto:moreilly@mt.gov">moreilly@mt.gov</a>               |
| 6         | Ken Plourde, Flaxville    | 406-474-2244 | <a href="mailto:Kenneth.Plourde@mt.gov">Kenneth.Plourde@mt.gov</a> |
| 7         | Justin Hughes, Miles City | 406-234-0922 | <a href="mailto:Justin.Hughes@mt.gov">Justin.Hughes@mt.gov</a>     |
| HQ        | Debbie Hohler, Helena     | 406-444-5674 | <a href="mailto:dhohler@mt.gov">dhohler@mt.gov</a>                 |

[Back to top](#)

## Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently made several policy updates for acreage reporting for cover crops, revising intended use, late-filed provisions, grazing allotments as well as updated the definitions of "idle" and "fallow."

### Reporting Cover Crops:

Cover crop types can be chosen from the following four categories:

- **Cereals and other grasses**
- **Legumes**
- **Brassicas and other broadleaves**
- **Mixtures**

If the cover crop is harvested for any use other than forage or grazing and is not terminated according to policy guidelines, then that crop will no longer be considered a cover crop and the acreage report must be revised to reflect the actual crop.

**Permitted Revision of Intended use After Acreage Reporting Date:**

New operators or owners who pick up a farm after the acreage reporting deadline has passed and the crop has already been reported on the farm, have 30 calendar days from the date when the new operator or owner acquired the lease on land, control of the land or ownership and new producer crop share interest in the previously reported crop acreage. Under this policy, appropriate documentation must be provided to the County Committee's satisfaction to determine that a legitimate operator or ownership and producer crop share interest change occurred to permit the revision.

**Acreage Reports:**

In order to maintain program eligibility and benefits, you must timely file acreage reports. Failure to file an acreage report by the crop acreage reporting deadline may result in ineligibility for future program benefits. FSA will not accept acreage reports provided more than a year after the acreage reporting deadline. \*Note: grazing acres need to be reported 15 days prior to grazing period to be considered timely filed if they have a NAP policy.

**Reporting Grazing Allotments:**

FSA offices can now accept acreage reports for grazing allotments. You will use form "FSA-578" to report grazing allotments as animal unit months (AUMs) using the "Reporting Unit" field. Your local FSA office will need the grazing period start and end date and the percent of public land.

**Definitions of Terms**

FSA defines "idle" as cropland or a balance of cropland within a Common Land Unit (CLU) (field/subfield) which is not planted or considered not planted and does not meet the definition of fallow or skip row.

Fallow is considered unplanted cropland acres which are part of a crop/fallow rotation where cultivated land that is normally planted is purposely kept out of production during a regular growing season.

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

[Back to top](#)

---

## **Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance**

The term "sodbusting" is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you're proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.

Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 "Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification," with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.



Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

[Back to top](#)

---

## Getting Acreage Reporting Right

You have a lot at stake in making sure your crop insurance acreage reporting is accurate and on time. If you fail to report on time, you may not be protected. If you report too much acreage, you may pay too much premium. If you report too little acreage, you may recover less when you file a claim.

Crop insurance agents often say that mistakes in acreage reporting are the easiest way for producers to have an unsatisfactory experience with crop insurance. Don't depend on your agent to do this important job for you. Your signature on the bottom of the acreage reporting form makes it, legally, your responsibility. Double-check it for yourself.

Remember - acreage reporting is your responsibility. Doing it right will save you money. Always get a copy of your report immediately after signing and filing it with your agent and keep it with your records. Remember, it is your responsibility to report crop damage to your agent within 72 hours of discovery. Never put damaged acreage to another use without prior written consent of the insurance adjuster. You don't want to destroy any evidence of a possible claim. [Learn more by visiting RMA's website](#).

[Back to top](#)

---

## 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](#).

[Back to top](#)

---

## 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](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus/pandemic-assistance/parp) or review the [PARP fact sheet](#).

### More Information

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

[Back to top](#)

---

## Protect Your Investments in the Soil: USDA's Modernized Lab Data Mart Website Provides User-Friendly, State-of-the-Art Data

Understanding your specific soil and its dynamic properties, which can change over time due to human impacts, land management, and climate change, can be invaluable. The USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#), through the [National Cooperative Soil Survey \(NCSS\)](#), has a team of soil and data scientists who are bringing customers the best soil information using the newest technology through the Lab Data Mart.

The newly updated [Lab Data Mart](#) website, also known as the National Cooperative Lab Characterization Database, brings valuable soil data to the public's fingertips through a user-friendly, state-of-the-art interactive map. It includes data estimating soil properties such as organic carbon, clay content, calcium carbonate equivalent, and pH, which is beneficial in soil health assessments. Architects, educators, engineers, farmers, landowners, researchers, scientists, and anyone looking to learn more about their soil can access the latest data to make more informed decisions and reduce potential [soil risks and hazards](#).

The Lab Data Mart includes mid-infrared (MIR) soil spectroscopy data gathered during soil analysis at the NRCS' Kellogg Soil Survey Laboratory, one of the largest libraries of such data in the world. MIR soil spectroscopy uses the interactions between soil matter and infrared radiation to estimate soil properties.

The Lab Data Mart's interactive map also links to a national database of soil characterization data, allowing users to locate soil samples and "pedons" analyzed in the lab. A pedon is the smallest unit of soil, containing all the soil horizons of a particular soil type. The customized data in the Lab Data Mart is downloadable to multiple applications and web services and is continuously updated as more sampled soil sites are added or re-visited.

### How Can the Lab Data Mart Help You?

- **Determining carbon credits or improving carbon sequestration:** The data can help you determine how much carbon is currently in the top 12 inches of soil and decide whether you want to sequester more carbon and consider methods and management practices to do so.
- **Leasing or buying land:** The data may help determine if your planned management practices will work; and if not, what could be the added cost to do things differently. Understanding the mineralogy of your soil can help you determine if it requires soil amendments, a new tool or piece of equipment to accomplish your goals, or a change to what you farm or your tillage operation.
- **Taking a more systematic view of your land:** Whether working with an NRCS conservation planner or on your own, the data helps you know more about your soil and ties into how you look at the whole [ecological site](#).

### Who Can Help You Use Lab Data Mart and Help You Understand Your Data?

NRCS State Soil Scientists and their staff, as well as technical service providers, can assist with obtaining the data in Lab Data Mart and understanding it. Contact NRCS at your [local USDA Service Center](#) for help and more information.

Visit the [Lab Data Mart website](#), or learn more about NRCS' [Soil Science](#).

[Back to top](#)

---

# USDA Grants Available to Spur Innovation Technologies in Montana

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for grants until May 26, 2023, to fund Montana projects that could stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) generally fund pilot projects, field demonstrations and on-farm conservation research.

Tom Watson, NRCS state conservationist for Montana, said \$225,000 is available for the state-component CIG this year. He said applicants can request up to \$75,000 for projects lasting one to three years.

Watson said projects should address one or more of the resource concerns identified for this program: community agriculture, soil health, irrigation technology, range health, and water quality and quantity. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches to agricultural producers, into government technical manuals and guides, or to the private sector.

The Montana CIG program provides special consideration to projects substantially involving or benefitting [historically underserved](#) producers or groups of producers. This includes proposals from historically underserved producers, veteran farmers or ranchers, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. Such entities may include those developing innovative conservation approaches or technologies specifically targeting historically underserved producers' unique needs, 1890 or 1994 land grant institutions and tribal colleges, and others.

Applications must be submitted electronically through [grants.gov](#) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on May 26, 2023.

Information about this CIG opportunity and the application process is available online at [grants.gov](#). Search for Montana CIG. General CIG information can be found at [mt.nrcs.usda.gov](#).

[Back to top](#)

---

## USDA Announces Cooperative Agreements for Compost and Food Waste Reduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the availability of up to \$9.5 million for Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CFWR) pilot projects for fiscal year 2023. The cooperative agreements support projects that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans. They are part of USDA's broader efforts to support urban agriculture.

USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) – led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service – will accept applications on [Grants.gov](#) until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 15, 2023. Projects should span two years with a start date of Dec. 1, 2023, and completion date of Dec. 1, 2025.

"These cooperative agreements support communities in their efforts to reduce and divert food waste from landfills," NRCS Chief Terry Cosby said. "These projects will empower communities to reduce waste and support agricultural producers through increased access to compost to improve soil health on their operations."

Cooperative agreements support projects led by local governments or other eligible entities that:

- Generate compost;
- Increase access to compost for agricultural producers;
- Reduce reliance on and limit the use of fertilizer;

- Improve soil quality;
- Encourage waste management and permaculture business development;
- Increase rainwater absorption;
- Reduce municipal food waste; and
- Divert food waste from landfills.

OUAIP will prioritize projects that anticipate or demonstrate economic benefits, incorporate plans to make compost easily accessible to farmers, including community gardeners, integrate other food waste strategies, including food recovery efforts and collaborate with multiple partners. Additional details are available in the [grants.gov notice](#).

This is the third year that OUAIP has offered this funding opportunity. For example, last year, the Interior Alaska Food Waste Reduction and Education Initiative in Fairbanks, Alaska, received funds to support a free backyard composting program, distribution of educational materials, and various workshops that appeal to compost beginners including students.

Meanwhile, the Moving Towards Zero Waste: Expanding Food Waste Diversion and Composting project in Providence, Rhode Island, is subsidizing training and supplies for backyard composting, develop a public education campaign focused on the benefits of food waste diversion and that drives participation in locally available food waste diversion services.

### **Webinar**

A pre-recorded webinar will provide an overview of the cooperative agreements' purpose, project types, eligibility and basic requirements for submitting applications. The webinar will be posted at [farmers.gov/urban](#).

### **More Information**

OUAIP was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture and innovative production. The grants are part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture. Other efforts include:

- The UAIP Competitive Grants Program, which announced \$7.5 million in funding opportunities this year.
- Creating and managing a Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production to advise the Secretary on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban agriculture.
- Reopening the People's Garden Initiative. People's Gardens across the country grow fresh, healthy food and support resilient, local food systems; teach people how to garden using sustainable practices; and nurture habitat for pollinators and wildlife and greenspace for neighbors.
- Providing technical and financial assistance through conservation programs offered by NRCS.
- Organizing 17 Farm Service Agency urban county committees.
- Investing nearly \$133 million in grants through the Agricultural Marketing Service's [Local Agriculture Market Program \(LAMP\)](#) that develop, coordinate, and expand producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets, and local food enterprises.
- Helping child nutrition program operators incorporate local foods through the Food and Nutrition Services [Farm to School Program](#).

CFWR is part of USDA's broader efforts to advance equity, support local and regional food systems and access to food, and encourage use of conservation and climate-smart practices. For example, this year, USDA is investing up to \$70 million in [Equity in Outreach Cooperative Agreements](#) to support outreach to underserved producers and communities about opportunities for natural resource conservation, climate-smart agriculture and forestry. Additionally, USDA's [Food Systems Transformation Framework](#) builds a more resilient, fairer food supply chain with more and better market options for consumers and producers while reducing carbon pollution; makes nutritious food more accessible and affordable for consumers; emphasizes equity by creating wealth that stays in small towns and underserved communities.



USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).

[Back to top](#)

---

## Conserving and Protecting Montana with The Montana Land Reliance

Since 1978, The Montana Land Reliance (MLR) has partnered with Montana's landowners to permanently protect agricultural lands, fish and wildlife habitat, and open spaces through conservation easements. USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service partners with MLR by providing funding through our [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) to make easements happen. In the last 10 years alone, the partnership has helped MLR triple the number of conservation easements it purchases from interested landowners and increase the acreage protected by those easements by a factor of 10. See the [infographic](#) for more information.

[Back to top](#)

---

## 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](mailto:1994@usda.gov) for further information.

[Back to top](#)

---

## USDA Offers Cooperative Agreement and Grant Application Support to Underserved Producers and Communities for Risk Management Education Projects, Others

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering a new service that assists entities serving underserved agricultural producers and communities with completing applications for funding opportunities. This includes a current funding opportunity for risk management education and outreach projects through USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA).

RMA is contracting with Metaphase Consulting, LLC, to provide technical and writing assistance to organizations that serve underserved producers and communities with applying for grants.

"Often individuals and organizations within underserved communities have not been provided the opportunity to develop the professional grant writing skills required for writing effective funding proposals," says Marcia Bunker, RMA Administrator. "As a result, they are at an inherent disadvantage as they compete with organizations that have the infrastructure, skills and knowledge to draft strong applications. The availability of this service agreement is to provide access for underserved organizations to our funding opportunities."

Specifically, Metaphase Consulting, LLC, will assist applicants in:

1. Formulating statements of work, performance work statements and statements of objectives.
2. Completing cooperative agreement award and grant applications.
3. Project management for those applicants receiving a cooperative agreement award or grant so that recipients meet all the milestones and reporting obligations, abide by proper funds management and burn-rate, and demonstrate successful execution, monitoring and controlling, and project closeout.

This service is available to underserved communities, ag-related non-profits, Tribal colleges and universities, Tribal higher education programs, 1890 Land Grant Universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities.

RMA encourages interested parties to email [rma.risk-ed@usda.gov](mailto:rma.risk-ed@usda.gov) for more details.

Other agencies, including USDA's Farm Service Agency, are working to offer a similar service to entities applying for future funding opportunities.

### Risk Management Education

This new service can assist organizations applying for RMA's [funding for the Risk Management Education \(RME\) Program](#). Currently, \$2 million is available for cooperative agreements for risk management education and training programs that support underserved producers. The notice of funding has additional details and can be viewed at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=346284>. RME applications must be received through the Results Verification System at <http://rvs.umn.edu> by April 24, 2023.

RMA is hosting webinars covering the application process for the RME Program. The next webinar will be today at 2 p.m. ET at <https://z.umn.edu/RMA-Application-Webinar-2>. The recording will also be available for viewing after on RMA's [Education and Outreach webpage](#).

### More Information

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](http://www.usda.gov).

[Back to top](#)

---

## USDA Expands Margin Protection for Corn and Soybean Farmers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding its [Margin Protection insurance plan](#), adding more than a thousand counties to the insurance option that provides coverage against an unexpected decrease in operating margin for corn and soybean producers. This expansion, which is in direct response to growing interest among producers, will be available by June 30, 2023. Interested producers will need to purchase their coverage by Sept. 30, 2023, to be eligible for the 2024 crop year.

"Increasing the availability of a program is sometimes the best way we can improve upon an effective program and serve our farmers with more risk management resources," said Marcia Bunger, Administrator for the Risk Management Agency (RMA). "This expansion of Margin Protection will provide a viable insurance option for so many more farmers across the country, giving them greater protection possibilities, and helping us continue our commitment of increasing the availability and effectiveness of Federal crop insurance as a risk management tool."

Margin Protection, first implemented for the 2016 crop year, protects against decreases in margin caused by reduced county yields, reduced commodity prices, increased price of certain inputs or any combination of these issues. It is area-based, using county-level estimates of average revenue and input costs to establish the amount of coverage and indemnity payments.

RMA's expansion of the Margin Protection plan will add 1,255 counties for soybeans and 1,729 counties for corn. This will add coverage in 22 states for soybeans with 34 states being covered in total. It will also make Margin Protection available for corn in the contiguous United States ([see maps](#)). The plan is available in select counties for rice (Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas), and wheat (Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota).

In the 2022 crop year, there were 1.7 million acres of corn and 1 million acres of soybeans insured under the Margin Protection insurance plan.

Margin Protection can be purchased by itself, or in conjunction with a Yield Protection or Revenue Protection policy purchased from the same Approved Insurance Provider that issued the Margin Protection policy. Margin Protection cannot be purchased with the Supplemental Coverage Option or the Enhanced Coverage Option.

### More Information

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](https://rma.usda.gov) or by contacting your [RMA Regional Office](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).

[Back to top](#)

---

## Ag Counts!

*By: Eric Sommer, State Statistician, Montana, USDA NASS Mountain Region*

NASS continues to contact producers and collect data for the 2022 Census of Agriculture. This is the time to share your story. The story of 2022 in Montana all the positives and all the negatives. Census of Agriculture data is the most complete and encompassing source of county agricultural data available. Data users, producers, ag businesses, ag lenders, and Federal/State/county governments use this data in making decisions.

At a time when people don't know where their food comes from or who produces it or why should producers receive help or develop new varieties your story matters. Please take a few minutes to share your story. Here are a few highlights from the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Montana accounted for 1 % of the nation's total agriculture sales, 94 % of all farms in Montana were family-owned, and 11 % of Montana producers had served or were serving in the U.S. military. The 2022 Census of Agriculture allows America's farmers and ranchers to tell the story of U.S. ag. Respond at [agcounts.usda.gov](https://agcounts.usda.gov) #AgDay23 #AgCensus

Thank you, Montana Producers, for all your hard work and dedication.

[Back to top](#)

---

## USDA Provides Payments of Nearly \$800 Million in Assistance to Help Keep Farmers Farming

USDA announced that distressed borrowers with qualifying USDA farm loans have already received nearly \$800 million in assistance, as part of the \$3.1 billion in assistance for distressed farm loan borrowers provided through Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The IRA directed USDA to expedite assistance to distressed borrowers of direct or guaranteed loans administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) whose operations face financial risk.

This recent announcement in October 2022 kicks off a process to provide assistance to distressed farm loan borrowers using several complementary approaches, with the goal of keeping them farming, removing obstacles that currently prevent many of these borrowers from returning to farming, and improving the way that USDA approaches borrowing and servicing. Through this assistance, USDA is focused on generating long-term stability and success for distressed borrowers.

Work has already started to bring some relief to distressed farmers. As of Oct. 2022, over 13,000 borrowers have already benefited from the resources provided under the Inflation Reduction Act as follows:

- Approximately 11,000 delinquent direct and guaranteed borrowers had their accounts brought current. USDA also paid the next scheduled annual installment for these direct loan borrowers giving them peace of mind in the near term.
- Approximately 2,100 borrowers who had their farms foreclosed on and still had remaining debt have had this debt resolved in order to cease debt collections and garnishment relieving that burden that has made getting a fresh start more difficult.

In addition to the automatic assistance already provided, USDA has also outlined steps to administer up to an additional \$500 million in payments to benefit the following distressed borrowers:

- USDA will administer \$66 million in separate automatic payments, using COVID-19 pandemic relief funds, to support up to 7,000 direct loan borrowers who used FSA's disaster-set-aside option during the pandemic to move their scheduled payments to the end of their loans.
- USDA is also initiating two case-by-case processes to provide additional assistance to farm loan borrowers. Under the first new process, FSA will review and assist with delinquencies from 1,600 complex cases, including cases in which borrowers are facing bankruptcy or foreclosure. The second new process will add a new option using existing direct loan servicing criteria to intervene more quickly and help an estimated 14,000 financially distressed borrowers who request assistance to avoid even becoming delinquent.

More details on each of the categories of assistance, including a downloadable fact sheet, are available on the [Inflation Reduction Act webpage on farmers.gov](#).

Similar to other USDA assistance, all of these payments will be reported as income and borrowers are encouraged to consult their tax advisors. USDA also has resources and partnerships with cooperators who can provide additional assistance and help borrowers navigate the process.

The announcement today is only the first step in USDA's efforts to provide assistance to distressed farm loan borrowers and respond to farmers and to improve the loan servicing efforts at USDA by adding more tools and relaxing unnecessary restrictions. Additional announcements and investments in assistance will be made as USDA institutes these additional changes and improvements.

This effort will ultimately also include adding more tools and relaxing unnecessary restrictions through assistance made possible by Congress through the IRA. Further assistance and changes to the approach will be made in subsequent phases.

## **Background**

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans, which do not include farm storage facility loans or marketing assistance loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of IRA, 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 how USDA goes about loan servicing in the long run so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations and remain in good financial standing.

In January 2021, [USDA suspended foreclosures](#) and other adverse actions on direct farm loans due to the pandemic and encouraged guaranteed lenders to follow suit. Last week, USDA reiterated this request to guaranteed lenders to provide time for the full set of IRA distressed borrower assistance to be made available before lenders take irreparable actions.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)) or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also call the FSA call center at 877-508-8364 between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. Eastern. USDA has tax-related resources available at [farmers.gov/taxes](#).



[Back to top](#)

---

## Preauthorized Debit Available for Farm Loan Borrowers

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has implemented pre-authorized debit (PAD) for Farm Loan Program (FLP) borrowers. PAD is a voluntary and alternative method for making weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments on loans.

PAD payments are pre-authorized transactions that allow the National Financial and Accounting Operations Center (NFAOC) to electronically collect loan payments from a customer's account at a financial institution.

PAD may be useful if you use nonfarm income from regular wages or salary to make payments on loans or adjustment offers or for payments from seasonal produce stands. PAD can only be established for future payments.

To request PAD, customers, along with their financial institution, must fill out form RD 3550-28. This form has no expiration date, but a separate form RD 3550-28 must be completed for each loan to which payments are to be applied. A fillable form can be accessed on the USDA Rural Development (RD) website at [rd.usda.gov/publications/regulations-guidelines](http://rd.usda.gov/publications/regulations-guidelines). Click forms and search for "Form 3550-28."

If you have a "filter" on the account at your financial institution, you will need to provide the financial institution with the following information: Origination ID: 1220040804, Agency Name: USDA RD DCFO.

PAD is offered by FSA at no cost. Check with your financial institution to discuss any potential cost. Preauthorized debit has no expiration date, but you can cancel at any time by submitting a written request to your local FSA office. If a preauthorized debit agreement receives three payment rejections within a three-month period, the preauthorized debit agreement will be cancelled by FSA. The payment amount and due date of your loan is not affected by a cancellation of preauthorized debit. You are responsible to ensure your full payment is made by the due date.

For more information about PAD, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

[Back to top](#)



### Montana

USDA Farm Service Agency  
PO Box 670  
Bozeman, MT 59771

Phone: 406.587.6872

Fax: 855.546.0264

Web: [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt)

State Executive Director:  
MAUREEN WICKS

State Committee:  
RYAN LANKFORD  
CASEY BAILEY  
STEVE CARNEY  
SARAH DEGN  
JAKE MERKEL

**FSA Policy Reminders:** 2021 Annual Notification to FSA Customers

---

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
10 East Babcock Street, Room 443  
Bozeman, MT 59715-4704  
Phone: 406-587-6811  
Fax: 855-510-7028  
Web: [nrcs.usda.gov/montana](https://nrcs.usda.gov/montana)

State Conservationist:  
TOM WATSON

---

USDA Risk Management Agency  
Billings Regional Office  
3490 Gabel Road, Suite 100  
Billings, MT 59102-7302  
Phone: 406-657-6447  
Fax: 406-657-6573  
Email: [rsomt@rma.usda.gov](mailto:rsomt@rma.usda.gov)  
Web: <https://www.rma.usda.gov/>

Regional Director:  
ERIC BASHORE

---

**Contact information for your local office, visit:** [www.farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov).

---

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. 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).