



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Montana Newsletter - January 2024

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

In This Issue:

- [Montana FSA Program Dates/Deadlines](#)
- [From the Desk of the SED: Maureen Wicks](#)
- [Montana's Next Generation Conference returns to Shelby, MT, Jan. 27, 2024](#)
- [Disaster Assistance for 2023 Livestock Forage Losses in 21 Montana counties](#)
- [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#)
- [Disaster Assistance Available for Livestock Losses Under the Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#)
- [Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs Receive 2018 Farm Bill One Year Extension, Farmers Can Now Enroll for the 2024 Crop Year](#)
- [Farmers.gov Feature Helps Producers Find Farm Loans that Fit Their Operation](#)
- [Reminders for FSA Direct and Guaranteed Borrowers with Real Estate Security](#)
- [RMA's Livestock Roadshow has two virtual events scheduled for Jan. 8 and 17.](#)
- [USDA Improves Crop Insurance to Better Support Conservation, Climate-Smart Practices](#)
- [USDA Continues to Build Upon its Expansion of Enterprise Unit Possibilities to Offer Greater Crop Insurance Options](#)
- [Farmers.gov Portal: Login to Manage Conservation Activities and Request Assistance](#)
- [Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants](#)
- [Registration for the 2024 Montana Soil Health Symposium is Now Open](#)

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.

Jan. 13, 2024: Inflation Reduction Act Assistance for Producers Who Experienced Discrimination in USDA Farm Loan Programs application period closes. Applications are due January 13, 2024. To ensure timely processing, there will be no extensions to the deadline. [Read more here.](#)

Jan. 16, 2024: 2024 acreage reporting deadline for established stand alfalfa seed, fall alfalfa seed, and cherries. Please note that this is the final date that FSA can accept late filed 2023 reports for these crops.

Jan. 30, 2024: Application deadline for 2023 LFP. Producers must complete a CCC-853 and provide required supporting documentation no later than January 30, 2024, for 2023 losses.

Jan. 30, 2024: Deadline to file a notice of loss and application for payment for ELAP.

The 30-calendar-day (livestock and farm-raised fish) and 15-calendar-day (honeybees) timeframes to submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent for the 2023 and subsequent program years, has been waived. The new deadline for filing a notice of loss under ELAP will be the same as the final date to submit an application for payment, which is 30 calendar days following the program year of which the loss occurred.

March 1, 2024: Deadline to file a notice of loss and application for payment for LIP.

The 30-calendar-day timeframe to submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent for the 2023 and subsequent program years has been waived. The new deadline for filing a notice of loss under LIP will be the same as the final date to submit an application for payment, which is 60 calendar days after the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred.

March 1, 2024: Montana Leopold Conservation Award Nominations and Application deadline

March 15, 2024: Deadline to elect coverage and enroll in Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2023 crop year.

March 15, 2024: Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage closing date for all spring crops **except** spring-seeded canola, garlic, rye, speltz, triticale, wheat, ALL annual & perennial grass & mixed forage, 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.

[Back to top](#)

From the Desk of the SED: Maureen Wicks

As we reflect on the previous year and look to our new year's resolutions, I want to encourage you to be aware of dates that are important to our farm programs. I will take a moment and highlight a few programs that have deadlines this month.

The January 30, 2024 deadline to submit applications for the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) and the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) is swiftly approaching. The LFP and ELAP programs are eligible in 21 Montana counties. In the December Newsletter I touched on the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP). Additionally, on December 18, 2023, USDA announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs for the 2024 crop year. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024. Please read the articles below for more information:

- [Disaster Assistance for 2023 Livestock Forage Losses in 21 Montana counties](#)
- [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#)
- [Disaster Assistance Available for Livestock Losses Under the Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#)
- [Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs Receive 2018 Farm Bill One Year Extension, Farmers Can Now Enroll for the 2024 Crop Year](#)

I am excited to see what the new year holds and wish you all a very Happy New Year!

[Back to top](#)

Montana's Next Generation Conference returns to Shelby, MT, Jan. 27, 2024

The 2024 Montana's Next Generation Conference is back and in-person on Saturday, January 27 at the Shelby High School in Shelby, MT. The conference will provide 35 workshops to choose from including recordkeeping, market outlooks, marketing, crop and livestock production, succession planning and business topics.

Each hour, participants will be able to choose from six different workshops to attend. Topics will include workshops designed for beginning producers as well as advanced knowledge for continuing education. Pesticide points have been applied for and will be posted if approved prior to the conference.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers can complete their borrower training requirements by attending six workshops and completing an evaluation at the end.

For a full list of all the conference topics, agenda and registration, check it out online at www.mtnextgen.com or paper registration forms are available from your local extension office. Early registration discounts are available through Monday, Jan. 17, and the final registration deadline is Jan. 24. Best Western has a block of rooms reserved for \$99.99/night and Comfort Inn has rooms at \$89/night for a single room and \$94/night for a double. Please mention "Montana's Next Generation Conference" for the discounted rate.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in this event should contact Lacy Roberts at (406) 873-5618, ext. 2 or Federal Relay Service at 1 (800) 877-8339 by Jan. 18, 2024.

[Back to top](#)

Disaster Assistance for 2023 Livestock Forage Losses in 21 Montana counties

21 MT Counties Triggered; U.S. Drought Monitor Updated Weekly

Livestock producers in **21 Montana counties** are eligible to apply for 2023 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on small grain, native pasture, improved pasture, annual ryegrass, and forage sorghum. LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or leased land, or fire on federally managed land. County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought, or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire. The following **21 Montana counties** have triggered the 2023 LFP drought criteria: **Blaine, Chouteau, Flathead, Garfield, Glacier, Hill, Lake, Lewis & Clark, Liberty, Lincoln, McCone, Mineral, Missoula, Pondera, Phillips, Powell, Roosevelt, Sanders, Teton, Toole, and Valley.**

Producers must complete a CCC-853 and provide required supporting documentation no later than January 30, 2024, for 2023 losses.

Producers in these counties are also eligible to apply for benefits under the 2023 Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) for losses relating to feed transportation, livestock transportation and water transportation costs. The new deadline for filing a notice of loss under ELAP

will be the same as the final date to submit an application for payment, which is 30 calendar days following the program year of which the loss occurred. Applications for payment and notices of loss must be completed no later than January 30, 2024, for 2023 losses.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact the local USDA Service Center and/or visit www.farmers.gov and/or fsa.usda.gov/mt.

[Back to top](#)

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

ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to disease, adverse weather or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible losses include:

- **Livestock** - grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, additional cost of transporting water and feed because of an eligible drought and additional cost associated with gathering livestock to treat for cattle tick fever.
- **Honeybee** - loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, cost of additional feed purchased above normal quantities due to an eligible adverse weather condition, colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.
- **Farm-Raised Fish** - death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

If you've suffered eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses during calendar year 2023, you must file a notice of loss and an application for payment by Jan. 30, 2024.

[Back to top](#)

Disaster Assistance Available for Livestock Losses Under the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)

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 and 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
- Livestock beginning inventory documentation

USDA has established normal mortality rates for each type and weight range of eligible livestock, i.e. Adult Beef Cow = 1%; Non-Adult Beef Cattle 799 pounds or less = 4.10% and Non-Adult Beef Cattle 800 pounds or more = 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 additional information about LIP, including eligible livestock, contact the [local USDA Service Center](#) and/or visit www.farmers.gov and/or fsa.usda.gov/mt.

[Back to top](#)

Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs Receive 2018 Farm Bill One Year Extension, Farmers Can Now Enroll for the 2024 Crop Year

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

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

2024 Elections and Enrollment

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

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

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

2022 Crop Year Payments

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

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

Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

Web-Based Decision Tools

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

More Information

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

[Back to top](#)

Farmers.gov Feature Helps Producers Find Farm Loans that Fit Their Operation

Farmers and ranchers can use the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* on farmers.gov to find information on USDA farm loans that may best fit their operations.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of loan options to help farmers finance their operations. From buying land to financing the purchase of equipment, FSA loans can help.

USDA conducted field research in eight states, gathering input from farmers and FSA farm loan staff to better understand their needs and challenges.

How the Tool Works

Farmers who are looking for financing options to operate a farm or buy land can answer a few simple questions about what they are looking to fund and how much money they need to borrow. After submitting their answers, farmers will receive information on farm loans that best fit their specific needs. The loan application and additional resources also will be provided.

Farmers can download application quick guides that outline what to expect from preparing an application to receiving a loan decision. There are four guides that cover loans to individuals, entities, and youth, as well as information on microloans. The guides include general eligibility requirements and a list of required forms and documentation for each type of loan. These guides can help farmers prepare before their first USDA service center visit with a loan officer.

Farmers can access the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* by visiting farmers.gov/fund and clicking the "Start" button. Follow the prompts and answer five simple questions to receive loan information that is applicable to your agricultural operation. 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.

About Farmers.gov

In 2018, USDA unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where farmers will be able to apply for programs, process transactions, and manage accounts.

The *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* is one of many resources on farmers.gov to help connect farmers to information that can help their operations. Earlier this year, USDA launched the *My Financial Information* feature, which enables farmers to view their loan information, history, payments, and alerts by logging into the website.

USDA is building farmers.gov for farmers, by farmers. In addition to the interactive farm loan features, the site also offers a Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool. Farmers can visit farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1 to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#) and/or visit www.farmers.gov or visit fsa.usda.gov.

[Back to top](#)

Reminders for FSA Direct and Guaranteed Borrowers with Real Estate Security

Farm loan borrowers who have pledged real estate as security for their Farm Service Agency (FSA) direct or guaranteed loans are responsible for maintaining loan collateral. Borrowers must obtain prior consent or approval from FSA or the guaranteed lender for any transaction that affects real estate security. These transactions include, but are not limited to:

- Leases of any kind
- Easements of any kind
- Subordinations
- Partial releases
- Sales

Failure to meet or follow the requirements in the loan agreement, promissory note, and other security instruments could lead to nonmonetary default which could jeopardize your current and future loans.

It is critical that borrowers keep an open line of communication with their FSA loan staff or guaranteed lender when it comes to changes in their operation. For more information on borrower responsibilities, read [Your FSA Farm Loan Compass](#).

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#) and/or visit www.farmers.gov or visit fsa.usda.gov.

[Back to top](#)

RMA's Livestock Roadshow has two virtual events scheduled for Jan. 8 and 17.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is hosting two virtual workshops in January for producers to learn about new and expanded livestock risk management products. The "Livestock Roadshow," hosted by USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), will highlight policy improvements based on feedback from America's livestock producers, part of the agency's broader outreach and education efforts. **The Livestock Roadshow virtual sessions are scheduled for January 8 and 17.** [Learn more, get login information and add to your calendar.](#) Read the full news release here: [USDA Launches Workshops on Livestock Risk Management Products | RMA](#)

[Back to top](#)

USDA Improves Crop Insurance to Better Support Conservation, Climate-Smart Practices

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating the Federal crop insurance program to affirm the use of USDA conservation practices as Good Farming Practices for crop insurance. Recently, USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) recently updated the [Good Farming Practices Handbook](#), as part of the agency's broader efforts to support conservation and climate-smart activities as well as to improve crop insurance for agricultural producers.

"RMA wants to encourage America's farmers and ranchers to integrate conservation and climate-smart practices into their operations. These practices are both good for the environment and good for production and yield," RMA Administrator Marcia Bunker said. "This update affirms producers can have peace of mind that using conservation practices will not impact their crop insurance. We are supporting stewardship-minded producers as

well as the crop insurance agents selling insurance with clearer, simpler policy around conservation practices.”
[Read the full news release by clicking here.](#)

[Back to top](#)

USDA Continues to Build Upon its Expansion of Enterprise Unit Possibilities to Offer Greater Crop Insurance Options

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is further expanding the opportunities for producers to consider Enterprise Units as risk management options. The USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) is expanding Enterprise Unit availability to additional specialty crops and other actual production history (APH) crop programs. Together with the six crop types announced July 6, 2023, for Enterprise Unit protection, these crops could benefit from the availability of Enterprise Units where they were previously unavailable. This expansion meets producer requests for Enterprise Units and will provide producers with more options to manage their risk.

An [Enterprises Unit](#) allows a producer to insure all acres of the insured crop in the county together, as opposed to other unit structures that separate the acreage for insurance. Enterprise Units are attractive to producers due to lower premium rates offered to recognize the lower risk associated with the geographic diversification. In general, the larger the Enterprise Unit, the lesser the risk, and the greater the Enterprise Unit discount. [Read the full news release by clicking here.](#)

[Back to top](#)

Farmers.gov Portal: Login to Manage Conservation Activities and Request Assistance

Farmers and ranchers can manage their conservation activities and request assistance from the USDA through a feature on [farmers.gov](#). These conservation features join several others already available through the farmers.gov portal, including the ability to view farm loan information. As more content and capabilities are added, farmers.gov is quickly becoming the one-stop shop for USDA customers to find resources, submit applications and assistance requests, and make connections when doing business with NRCS, Farm Service Agency, and other agencies.

Click “sign up” in the top right to get more information about creating a farmers.gov portal account.

[Back to top](#)

Montana Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Applicants

Nominations and applications are now being accepted for the 2024 Montana Leopold Conservation Award®.

The \$10,000 award honors ranchers, farmers and forestland owners who go above and beyond in their management of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on working land.

[Sand County Foundation](#) and national sponsor [American Farmland Trust](#) present the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 27 states. In [Montana](#), the award is presented with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Montana Rangeland Resources Committee.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to environmental improvement. In his influential 1949 book, "[A Sand County Almanac](#)," Leopold called for what he called "a land ethic," an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage.

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.

Applications are reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders. Last year's recipient was [Kurt and PJ Myllymaki](#) of Stanford.

The application deadline is March 1, 2024.

[Back to top](#)

Registration for the 2024 Montana Soil Health Symposium is Now Open

The [Montana Soil Health Symposium](#) is hosted by the Montana Association of Conservation Districts and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. It brings together national and local speakers to discuss soil health techniques and innovations.

This two-day event features well-known voices for regenerative agriculture and soil health like Kelsey Scott of The DX Ranch on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, Anne Bikle who wrote *What Your Food Ate: How to Health the Land and Reclaim our Health*, and Dr. Jon Lundgren of the ECDYSIS Foundation and Blue Dasher Farm.

Adding to these speakers are eight Montana producers covering topics relevant to farmers, ranchers, and gardeners of all sizes working to produce healthy, nutritious foods using the soil health principles.

You'll also hear from several other well-known speakers from across the country that are dedicated to innovative, regenerative agriculture and sharing their experience from farming, ranching, consulting, and running their own businesses.

A pre-conference workshop on Holistic Management with Joshua and Tara Dukart is scheduled for Feb. 6, 2024.

[Register now!](#)

[Back to top](#)



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FSA Policy Reminders: [2021 Annual Notification to FSA Customers](#)

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

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