



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Montana Newsletter - March 2024

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

**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 2024 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.

**March 15, 2024:** The next sales closing date to purchase insurance through RMA is March 15, 2024.

**March 29, 2024:** Bob Miller Memorial Scholarship, Native Student Summer Internship Scholarship Application deadline and National Youth Advisory Council application deadline. Please visit [indianag.org/youth](https://indianag.org/youth) for a full list of requirements. If you have any questions, please contact Sunshine Tso at [sunshine@indianag.org](mailto:sunshine@indianag.org).

**March 29, 2024:** General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup period closes.

**April 29, 2024:** End of enrollment period for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC), an important safety net program offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides producers with price support to help offset milk and feed price differences.

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## From the Desk of the SED: Maureen Wicks

March is National Women's Month and houses National Agriculture Day. With women now making up approximately one-third of the workforce on Montana's farms, it's never been a more appropriate pairing of events. We here at the Montana Farm Service Agency (FSA), are proud to celebrate these events with you and even more proud to serve our farmers and ranchers across the state.

With spring slowly inching towards us, please remember to make an appointment at your local service center to review and update your farm records if you needed. Lots of things can change from year to year. Having up to date records will set you up with a good foundation for participating in FSA programs. To find your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator).

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## USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program General Signup for 2024

**Sign up for the general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) starts March 4 and runs through March 29, 2024**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin signing up for the general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) **starting March 4 and running through March 29, 2024**. The announcement was made earlier today by Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator of the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) at this year's National Pheasant Fest, in Sioux Falls, SD.

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 Sept. 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including CRP, to continue operating.

As one of the largest private lands conservation programs in the United States, CRP offers a range of conservation options to farmers, ranchers, and landowners. It has been an especially strong opportunity for

farmers with less productive or marginal cropland, helping them re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and support wildlife habitat.

Producers and landowners enrolled about 926,000 acres in General CRP in 2023, bringing the total of enrolled acres in General CRP to 7.78 million. This, combined with all other acres in CRP through other enrollment opportunities, such as Grassland and Continuous CRP, bring the current total of enrolled acres to 24.8 million.

### **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.

General CRP is one of several ways agricultural producers and private landowners can participate in the program.

### **Other CRP Options**

This past January FSA began accepting applications for the [Continuous CRP](#) signup. Under this enrollment, 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 USDA also offers financial assistance to producers and landowners enrolled in CRP to improve the health of their forests through the [Forest Management Incentive](#) (FMI), which can help participants with forest management practices, such as brush management and prescribed burning.

FSA will announce the dates for [Grassland CRP](#) signup in the near future.

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.

### **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.

### **[USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program General Signup for 2024](#)**

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## **Dairy Producers Can Enroll for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage Beginning Feb. 28**

As of February 28, 2024, dairy producers will be able to enroll for 2024 Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC), an important safety net program offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides producers with price support to help offset milk and feed price differences. This year's DMC signup begins Feb. 28, 2024, and ends April 29, 2024. For those who sign up for 2024 DMC coverage, payments may begin as soon as March 4, 2024, for any payments that triggered in January 2024.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has revised the regulations for DMC to allow eligible dairy operations to make a one-time adjustment to established production history. This adjustment will be accomplished by

combining previously established supplemental production history with DMC production history for those dairy operations that participated in Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage during a prior coverage year. DMC has also been authorized through calendar year 2024. Congress passed a 2018 Farm Bill extension requiring these regulatory changes to the program.

DMC is a voluntary risk management program that offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed price (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer. In 2023, Dairy Margin Coverage payments triggered in 11 months including two months, June and July, where the margin fell below the catastrophic level of \$4.00 per hundredweight, a first for Dairy Margin Coverage or its predecessor Margin Protection Program.

## **2024 DMC Coverage and Premium Fees**

FSA has revised DMC regulations to extend coverage for calendar year 2024, which is retroactive to Jan. 1, 2024, and to provide an adjustment to the production history for dairy operations with less than 5 million pounds of production. In previous years, smaller dairy operations could establish a supplemental production history and receive Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage. For 2024, dairy producers can establish one adjusted base production history through DMC for each participating dairy operation to better reflect the operation's current production.

For 2024 DMC enrollment, dairy operations that established supplemental production history through Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage for coverage years 2021 through 2023, will combine the supplemental production history with established production history for one adjusted base production history.

For dairy operations enrolled in 2023 DMC under a multi-year lock-in contract, lock-in eligibility will be extended until Dec. 31, 2024. In addition, dairy operations enrolled in multi-year lock-in contracts are eligible for the discounted DMC premium rate during the 2024 coverage year. To confirm 2024 DMC lock-in coverage or opt out in favor of an annual contract for 2024, dairy operations having lock-in contracts must enroll during the 2024 DMC enrollment period.

DMC offers different levels of coverage, even an option that is free to producers, minus a \$100 administrative fee. The administrative fee is waived for dairy producers who are considered limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged or a military veteran. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the [online dairy decision tool](#).

## **DMC Payments**

DMC payments are calculated using updated feed and premium hay costs, making the program more reflective of actual dairy producer expenses. These updated feed calculations use 100% premium alfalfa hay.

## **More Information**

USDA also offers other risk management tools for dairy producers, including the [Dairy Revenue Protection \(DRP\)](#) plan that protects against a decline in milk revenue (yield and price) and the [Livestock Gross Margin \(LGM\)](#) plan, which provides protection against the loss of the market value of milk minus the feed costs. Both DRP and LGM livestock insurance policies are offered through the Risk Management Agency. Producers should contact their local [crop insurance agent](#) for more information.

For more information on DMC, visit the [DMC webpage](#) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

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# Agricultural Producers Have Until March 15 to Enroll in USDA's Key Commodity Safety Net Programs for the 2024 Crop Year Montana Enrollment Currently At 70% of Expected Contracts

Agricultural producers who have not yet enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2024 crop year have until March 15, 2024, to revise elections and sign contracts. Both safety net programs, delivered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), provide vital income support to farmers who experience substantial declines in crop prices or revenues for the 2024 crop year. In Montana, producers have completed 17,432 contracts to date, representing 70% of the more than 20,000 expected contracts.

"Agriculture Risk Coverage or Price Loss Coverage programs provide excellent risk protection, for market declines, at no cost to the producer. While we always hope for strong markets, anyone involved in production agriculture knows, the only thing certain is uncertainty," said Maureen Wicks, State Executive Director for FSA in Montana. Many producers may be holding off on making your program elections pending planting decisions or maybe you're working with a local advisor to consider how changes in the effective reference price might impact your election decisions. Please contact your local FSA county office as soon as possible to set an appointment so you're on the books well in advance of the March 15 deadline." [Read the full news release here.](#)

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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 2024 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 3, 2025.

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## Applying for Beginning Farmer Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm.

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

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## Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has several loan programs to help you start or continue an agriculture production. Farm ownership and operating loans are available.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of targeted underserved applicants.

A targeted underserved applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities.

For purposes of this program, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

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

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

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## Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) for the Rocky Mountain Region Reminds MT Producers about Youth Program Opportunities

There are three youth program opportunities available to eligible youth participants in Montana. **All three applications have a deadline of Friday, March 29th, 2024, at 11:59 PM (PST).**

**Bob Miller Memorial Scholarship:** Up to twenty-four (24) recipients will receive a \$2,000 scholarship, receiving \$1,000 in the fall semester and \$1,000 in the spring semester. Preference will be given to full-time, undergraduate students. Part-time or graduate students will be considered after full-time, undergraduate students.

**Native Student Summer Internship:** IAC, in partnership with NRCS, is recruiting undergraduate, junior college, and community college students or Native individuals seeking experience in Tribal agriculture and natural resources. This is an excellent opportunity for those who are passionate about promoting the regeneration of natural resources and addressing food scarcity within their communities.

Throughout the internship, students will gain an in-depth perspective and innovative understanding of how to effectively inspire conservation on the landscape, healthy eating habits, and food sovereignty. This internship is great for youth who seek opportunities for professional development such as networking with peers and organizations or agencies, traveling, public speaking, and attending career-building workshops.

**National Youth Advisory Council:** IAC's National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC) serves as the advising body under the IAC Youth Program. NYAC will openly communicate with the Youth Program Director to ensure the needs of youth throughout Indian Country are properly met within the IAC's offered programming.

2024 NYAC applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until positions have been filled. Open Council positions are for the following regions: Alaska, Eastern, Great Lakes, Navajo, Rocky Mountain, Southwest, Southern Plains, and Western. Eligible applicants shall be 18-27 years of age.

**Please visit [indianag.org/youth](https://indianag.org/youth) for a full list of requirements. If you have any questions, please contact Sunshine Tso at [sunshine@indianag.org](mailto:sunshine@indianag.org).**

Montana IAC Points of Contact:

Zane Not Afraid  
Inter-Regional Manager  
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Craig Harry  
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[marlene@indianag.org](mailto:marlene@indianag.org)

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## USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

*Bozeman, Mont. Feb. 27, 2024* – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making available up to \$6.1 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. [USDA will accept applications on Grants.gov](#) until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 9, 2024.

Planning Projects initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs. Projects may target areas of food access, education, business



and start-up costs for new farmers and the development of plans related to zoning and other needs of urban production.

Implementation Projects accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor and other agricultural practices that serve farmers and communities. Projects may improve local food access, include collaboration with partner organizations, and support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, and educational endeavors.

A pre-recorded webinar on the [Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grants](#) webpage provides an overview of the grants' purpose, project types, eligibility and basic requirements for submitting an application. You will also find a fact sheet and frequently asked questions on that page.

OUAIP was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (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.

To learn more, visit [usda.gov/urban/grants](https://usda.gov/urban/grants).

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## Requesting Site Access for Grazing Land Field Study

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is conducting a grazing land field study. The study is part of the National Resources Inventory (NRI), an annual, nationwide survey of the status of resource conditions on non-federal lands. This consistent, statistical, dataset supports USDA agricultural and environmental policy and program development. The focus is on key issues in range and pasture science such as range and soil health, woody encroachment, and weed management. The information is a valuable tool to prioritize conservation efforts and recognize conservation successes in Montana.

Each year, sample sites are randomly distributed on non-federal, range or pastureland across the Nation in every county. In Montana, over sixty percent of non-federal 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 **late March**. You will receive a letter if one or more of the sites is located on your property. The mailing will also include a permission form and self-addressed stamped envelope. Site visits will generally take less than one day and occur sometime between **May and September**. These activities do not disturb the landscape and are similar to other NRCS conservation planning activities. Landowner participation in the field is always welcomed.

Please consider allowing site access for this important conservation effort. The NRI is based on scientific and rigorous protocols. These protocols include maintaining and protecting the site integrity and confidentiality. This safeguards both the survey and your rights as a private landowner. All data collectors sign a USDA Confidentiality Agreement for non-disclosure of point locations and site data. Data is combined into a common dataset, giving you complete anonymity. Your name or other personal information is not linked to the dataset and individual plot results are not published.

If you have further questions about the NRI on-site grazing land study, please contact the District Conservationist at your local USDA Service Center <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center> or Julie Tesky, State Resource Inventory Coordinator, NRCS Montana State Office, [julie.tesky@usda.gov](mailto:julie.tesky@usda.gov).



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## USDA NASS Notifies Producers of the Agricultural Resource Management Survey Phase Three

In March, USDA NASS will be finishing the Agricultural Resource Management Phase 3 Survey focused on cost of raising barley and oats. We will also be conducting the March Planting Intentions survey. This is the first glimpse of the new crop year.

NASS published the 2022 Census of Agriculture February 13. The Census of Agriculture is the most comprehensive source of Agricultural data. Over 30,000 Montana producers received the Census and were asked about their operation. This is their story and the story of Montana Agriculture. The data from the Census of Agriculture will be the base data for many USDA programs and grants.

Thank you, producers, for taking the time to share your story. To find results of NASS surveys please visit [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Montana/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Montana/index.php)

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Eric Sommer State Statistician, Montana at 1-800-392-3202.

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## USDA Provides more than \$70 Million to Protect our Food Supply and Natural Resources from Invasive Pests and Diseases in 2024

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing over \$70 million in 374 projects through the Plant Protection Act's Section 7721 program. The work will strengthen the country's defenses against plant pests and diseases, safeguard the U.S. nursery system, and enhance pest detection and mitigation efforts. Universities, states, Tribal organizations, federal agencies, and others will manage these projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Jenny Moffitt, Under Secretary for USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs, highlighted that these funds provide states, universities, tribal organizations, and partners nationwide the tools they need to protect U.S. agriculture, our natural resources, and food security. "With our partners throughout the country, these projects will help in the fight against invasive plant pests and diseases, protecting growers and creating more export opportunities for American products," Moffitt said. [Read the full news release here.](#)

Montana is receiving funding for 6 plant health protection projects as part of this funding announcement. For more project-specific funding readers can visit the [PPA 7721 Funding Plan.](#)

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## Farm and Food Workers Relief Grant Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm and Food Worker Relief (FFWR) Grant Program awarded approximately \$670 million to fourteen nonprofit organizations and one Tribal entity to issue one-time \$600 relief payments to eligible farm and food workers. The program is funded through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 funds. The full list of grant recipients is published at: [FFWR description of funded projects](#).

The purpose of this program is to defray worker expenses incurred preparing for, preventing exposure to, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers may receive a one-time \$600 payment if they were hired for and worked in an eligible front-line job in the U.S. during the public health emergency, which officially started on January 20, 2020, and ended on May 11, 2023.

### **To Apply for a \$600 Relief Payment or Check the Status of Your Application:**

Contact the organization serving your area. To find your local organization visit, the [FFWR Awarded Grants](#) webpage.

Workers must provide proof of identity and employment to one of the USDA approved grant recipients or their local partners.

### **Additional Resources**

- [USDA Farm and Food Worker Relief Grant Program Fact Sheet \(pdf\)](#)

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State Executive Director:  
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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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Phone: 406-587-6811  
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State Conservationist:  
TOM WATSON

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USDA Risk Management Agency  
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Billings, MT 59102-7302  
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Web: <https://www.rma.usda.gov/>

Regional Director:  
ERIC BASHORE

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

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