Montana USDA Newsletter - June 2021

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Important Montana Program Dates

Ongoing: Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup (Deadline TBA)

April 5: Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP2) Signup Reopened. Signup period will remain open for at least 60 days. (Deadline TBA)

May 15 to July 15: CRP Primary Nesting Season Non-emergency Grazing (prior approval required, with 50% reduction in the carrying capacity)
June 15: 2021 Nominations open for 2021 FSA County Committee Elections

June 15: 2021 FSA Reporting Deadline for Pandemic Cover Crop Program | RMA

June 21: Proposals due for NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Program’s On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials

July 15: 2020 ARC-IC Production Certification Deadline for Crops enrolled in ARC-IC

July 15: 2021 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Annually Seeded Spring Crops, Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program, Perennial Forage not covered under the NAP, and all other crops not required to be reported by a previous reporting date. This is the final date that FSA can accept late-filed 2020 reports for these crops.

July 16: Last day of CRP Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) Signup

July 16: First day of CRP Summer/Fall Non-emergency Haying and Grazing Periods (prior approval required)

Aug. 1: Last day to bale Non-emergency hayed CRP. Bales must be removed within 15 days.

Aug. 2: Last day to submit Nominations for 2021 County Committee Elections to FSA

Aug. 2: Deadline to request a farm reconstitution or farm transfer for 2021

Aug. 15: 2021 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Hemp

Ongoing: Contact FSA right away for notice of loss deadlines and disaster program requirements

Ongoing Notice of Loss Requirements

It’s important for agricultural producers to report losses immediately as all disaster programs are dependent on the timely reporting of the loss. A notice of loss can be filed with USDA Farm Service Agency via phone, email, fax or scheduled office visit.

- **ELAP – Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program:** Starting in 2020, producers will have 15 days from when the loss is first apparent, to file a honeybee notice of loss instead of 30 days,. This change provides consistency between ELAP and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which also has a 15-day notice of loss period for honey. For other covered livestock losses, including livestock feed, grazing and farm-raised fish losses, the notice of loss deadline for ELAP will remain 30 days from when the loss is first apparent to the producer.

- **LIP - Livestock Indemnity Program:** Submit Notice of Loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent. Producers should document the adverse weather conditions and date(s) of weather events.

- **NAP – Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program:** Submit Notice of Loss within 15 calendar days of the earlier of a natural disaster occurrence, the final planting date if planting is prevented by a natural disaster, the date that damage to the crop or loss of production becomes apparent; or the normal harvest date. **Note:** A producer’s signature is required on form CCC-576 when a Notice of Loss is submitted.

- **TAP - Tree Assistance Program:** Final Date to Submit an Application and Supporting Documentation within 90 calendar days of: the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent to the producer.

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**Producers with Crop Insurance to Receive Premium Benefit for Cover Crops - June 15 FSA Reporting Deadline**

**New program helps producers maintain cover crop systems**

Agricultural producers who have coverage under most crop insurance policies are eligible for a premium benefit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) if they planted cover crops during this crop year. The
Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP), offered by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA), helps farmers maintain their cover crop systems, despite the financial challenges posed by the pandemic.

The PCCP is part of USDA’s Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative, a bundle of programs to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions.

About the Premium Benefit

PCCP provides premium support to producers who insured their spring crop with most insurance policies and planted a qualifying cover crop during the 2021 crop year. The premium support is $5 per acre, but no more than the full premium owed.

Illinois, Indiana and Iowa have existing programs for producers to receive a premium benefit for planting cover crops. In these states, participating producers will receive an additional benefit.

All cover crops reportable to FSA are eligible and include cereals and other grasses, legumes, brassicas and other non-legume broadleaves, and mixtures of two or more cover crop species planted at the same time.

To receive the benefit for this program, producers must file a Report of Acreage form (FSA-578) for cover crops with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) by June 15, 2021, which is distinct from the normal acreage reporting date. The normal acreage reporting deadline with FSA has not changed, but to receive the premium benefit, producers must file by June 15. The cover crop fields reported on the Report of Acreage form must match what the producer reported to their insurance company for crop insurance policies. To file the form, producers must contact and make an appointment with their local USDA Service Center.

Program Details

Certain policies are not eligible because they have underlying coverage, which would already receive the benefit or are not designed to be reported in a manner consistent with the Report of Acreage form (FSA-578). PCCP is not available for Whole-Farm Revenue Protection, Enhanced Coverage Option, Hurricane Insurance Protection – Wind Index, and Supplemental Coverage Option. Stacked Income Protection (STAX) and Margin Protection (MP) policies are only eligible for PCCP when insured as a standalone policy. STAX and MP endorsements to underlying policies are not eligible for PCCP.

PCCP does not change acreage reporting dates, reporting requirements, or any other terms of the crop insurance policy.

Cover Crop Conservation Practice Standard

Meanwhile, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has made the determination not to update its conservation practice standard for cover crops. NRCS originally proposed restricting mechanical harvest of cover crops, but after reviewing input from agricultural producers and groups, NRCS recognizes this could present challenges for producers who use this important conservation practice. The latest version of the conservation practice standard can be found in the Field Office Technical Guide under Section IV, Conservation Practices and Supporting Documents, by State.

More Information

A Notice of Funding Availability was posted on the Federal Register today. Additional information on PCCP, including frequently asked questions, can be found at farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance/cover-crops.

RMA is authorizing additional flexibilities due to coronavirus while continuing to support producers, working through AIPs to deliver services, including processing policies, claims and agreements. RMA staff are working with AIPs and other customers by phone, mail and electronically to continue supporting crop insurance coverage for producers. Farmers with crop insurance questions or needs should continue to contact their insurance agents about conducting business remotely (by telephone or email). More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.
FSA County Committee Elections - 2021 Local Administrative Areas Public Notification

The USDA Farm Service Agency nomination period for the 2021 county committee election cycle opens June 15 and closes Aug. 2, 2021. Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for these members who make important decisions about how federal farm programs are administered locally. The following is the annual public notification for FSA offices in Montana. You can click on your county’s name to view the description and map of the LAA scheduled in your area. Visit FSA’s election page to learn more about the FSA county committee elections.

2021 Montana LAA Public Notification - pdf

July 15th Deadline for FSA Maps - 2021 Acreage Reporting/Crop Certification

USDA Farm Service Agency offices in Montana are currently open to appointments only; but can still work with producers on timely filing crop acreage reports. FSA staff can provide assistance over the phone, by email, scheduled office visits and through virtual meetings via a software program called Microsoft Teams.

The deadline for acreage certification is **July 15, 2021**, and applies to crops such as spring alfalfa seed, Conservation Reserve Program, perennial forage (not covered by NAP), annually spring seeded crops, and any other crop not reported by a previous deadline.

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers, including livestock producers, must file an accurate crop acreage report by the deadline. FSA staff is available to assist producers in completing acreage reports and providing maps.

Certification plans may vary by office, so customers can assist FSA by:

- Paying close attention to email or mail from their county FSA office that outlines the process put in place for 2021 spring certification in their office and following the requested steps; and
- Keeping good records of what is planted, where and when it is planted, and ensuring that information is accurately reported on the maps and provided to FSA as soon as possible following the completion of planting.

Producers are encouraged to work with their county office to arrange for getting map packets and completing the certification process using available options. Upon receipt of completed maps, FSA will make software updates and contact the producer to obtain signatures on the FSA-578 to complete the certification process by the July 15 deadline. Crops not certified by this date may be subject to late-filed fees.

The following exceptions apply to the July 15 acreage reporting date:

- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting deadline, the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after the purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation to support the newly acquired land must be provided to the county office.
- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of July 15, 2021 or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop.

Reporting Prevent Plant Acres: Producers also must report crop acreage that they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were unable to plant. Prevent planted acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA’s
Risk Management Agency. If you have acreage that was prevented from being planted, please notify your county office and they can assist you in completing this form.

**Reporting Organic Crops:** Producers who selected the “organic” option on their NAP application must report the applicable crop as organic and provide a copy of their current organic plan and recent written certification in effect from a certifying agency. Please note that if you have applied for organic certification and do not receive it before the acreage reporting deadline, you may provide the necessary information to FSA immediately upon receipt.

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**Disaster Assistance for 2021 Livestock Forage Losses in 14 Montana counties**

**U.S. Drought Monitor Updated Weekly**

Livestock producers in 14 Montana counties are eligible to apply for 2021 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 Montana counties have triggered the 2021 LFP drought criteria: **Carter, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, McCone, Phillips, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Valley and Wibaux**. Producers must complete a CCC-853 and the required supporting documentation no later than January 31, 2022, for 2021 losses.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact the local USDA Service Center and/or visit [fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://fsa.usda.gov/mt).

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**USDA Emergency Haying and Grazing Eligibility**

**Eligible Counties Updated Weekly**

USDA Farm Service Agency announced changes for emergency haying and grazing use of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program last year. This included changes outlined in the 2018 Farm Bill that streamlines the authorization process for farmers and ranchers.

Drought conditions are tough for our livestock producers, but emergency haying and grazing use of Conservation Reserve Program acres provides temporary relief to these producers. Thanks to a streamlined authorization process, Montana producers will be able to more quickly obtain emergency use approval to begin emergency haying or grazing of CRP acres.

**Program Changes**

Previously emergency haying and grazing requests originated with FSA at the county level and required state and national level approval. Now approval will be based on drought severity as determined by the **U.S. Drought Monitor**.

To date, 29 counties in Montana have triggered eligibility for emergency haying and grazing on CRP acres. A [list by state and map](http://fsa.usda.gov) of eligible counties are updated weekly and available on FSA’s website.
Producers located in a county that is designated as severe drought (D2) or greater on March 1st are eligible for emergency haying and grazing on all eligible acres. Counties that trigger for Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) payments based on the U.S. Drought Monitor may hay only certain practices on less than 50% of eligible contract acres. Producers should contact their local FSA county office for eligible CRP practices.

Producers who don’t meet the drought monitor qualifications but have a 40% loss of forage production may also be eligible for emergency haying and grazing outside of the primary nesting season.

**CRP Emergency Haying and Grazing Provisions**

Before haying or grazing eligible acres, producers must submit a request for CRP emergency haying or grazing to FSA and obtain a modified conservation plan from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Emergency grazing is authorized for up to 90 days and emergency haying is authorized for up to 60 days outside of the primary nesting season which is May 15-July 15. Under the emergency grazing provisions, producers can use the CRP acreage for their own livestock or may grant another livestock producer use of the CRP acreage. The eligible CRP acreage is limited to acres located within the approved county.

For emergency haying, producers are limited to one cutting and are permitted to sell the hay. Participants must remove all hay from CRP acreage within 15 days after baling and remove all livestock from CRP acreage no later than 1 day after the end of the emergency grazing period. There will be no CRP annual rental payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing authorizations.

**More Information**

For more information on CRP emergency haying and grazing visit fsa.usda.gov/crp or contact your FSA county office. To locate your FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator. For more disaster recovery assistance programs, visit farmers.gov/recover.

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**FSA Opens CFAP 2 Signup for Additional Enrollment; Updates Additional CFAP Provisions**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced that signup reopened for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2) as part of the Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative. The initial CFAP 2 signup ended on Dec. 11, 2020, but USDA has reopened sign-up for CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning April 5, 2021, for producers to apply or make modifications to existing CFAP 2 applications.

CFAP 2 provides direct financial relief to producers due to market disruptions and associated costs because of COVID-19. CFAP 2 payments will be made for three categories of commodities – Price Trigger Commodities, Flat-rate Crops and Sales Commodities. Visit farmers.gov/cfap/commodities for a full list of eligible commodities for each category.

**Applying for CFAP 2**

Visit farmers.gov/cfap for details on all eligible commodities, producer eligibility, payment limitations and structure and additional program resources.

Producers have multiple options to apply for CFAP 2, including through an online application portal and by working directly with the FSA office. Customers seeking one-on-one support with the CFAP 2 application process can call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.
USDA Announces New Initiative to Quantify Climate Benefits of Conservation Reserve Program

Proposals for CRP Climate Change Mitigation Assessment Initiative Due July 2

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced an initiative to quantify the climate benefits of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts. This multi-year effort will enable USDA to better target CRP toward climate outcomes and improve existing models and conservation planning tools while supporting USDA’s goal of putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation Projects

FSA has historically worked with partners to identify Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) projects to quantify CRP environmental benefits to water quality and quantity, wildlife and rural economies. The agency will now invest $10 million through this program to measure and monitor the soil carbon sequestration and other climate and environmental benefits of conservation practices over the life of CRP contracts.

This effort will allow USDA to better target climate outcomes through CRP while gaining critical data to calibrate, validate and further improve quantification methods within existing models and tools. One model of focus is the Daily Century Model, or DayCent, which simulates the movement of carbon and nitrogen through agricultural systems and informs the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory. Data will also be used to strengthen the COMET-Farm and COMET-Planner tools, which enable producers to evaluate potential carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions based on specific management scenarios.

Request for Proposals

USDA is seeking proposals for projects to survey, sample and measure the climate benefits of land enrolled in the following CRP practice types over time:

- Predominately Perennial grass with legumes and shrubs, depending on the practice
- Tree
- Wetland, including both mineral and organic soils and both floodplain and non-floodplain wetlands

A project can cover one or more of the above practice types and should be for a three- to five-year term, with the potential for renewal. Projects should be a minimum of $1 million and not exceed $9 million.

Applications are welcome from all types of organizations, including public, private and nonprofit institutions. Project proposals can be from a single entity or from a group of partners who coordinate efforts. Applications from or in partnership with Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU), Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCU) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) or organizations will be considered as part of the selection process.

The deadline for proposals is July 2, 2021. Visit the request for proposals for more information on requirements, project deliverables, evaluation criteria and how to submit your proposal. Visit FSA’s Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation page for additional information on CRP MAEs.

Conservation Reserve Program

CRP is one of the world’s largest voluntary conservation programs with an established track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, reducing nitrogen runoff and providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

In exchange for a yearly rental payment, agricultural producers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Land is enrolled in CRP for 10 to 15 years, with the option of re-enrollment. FSA offers multiple CRP
signups, including the general signup and continuous signup – both currently open – as well as CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

In April, USDA announced updates to CRP including higher payment rates, new incentives for environmental practices and a more targeted focus on the program’s role in climate change mitigation. This included a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. Download our “What’s New” fact sheet to learn more about program updates.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local and Tribal governments.

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**USDA to Begin Loan Payments to Socially Disadvantaged Borrowers under American Rescue Plan Act Section 1005**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) published the first notice of funding availability (NOFA) (PDF, 242 KB) announcing loan payments for eligible borrowers with qualifying direct farm loans under the American Rescue Plan Act Section 1005. The official NOFA was published in the Federal Register and USDA expects payments to begin in early June and continue on a rolling basis. A subsequent notice addressing guaranteed loan balances and direct loans that no longer have collateral and have been previously referred to the Department of Treasury for debt collection for offset, will be published within 120 days.

Section 1005 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provides funding and authorization for USDA FSA to pay up to 120 percent of direct and guaranteed loan outstanding balances as of January 1, 2021, for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as defined in Section 2501(a) of the Food, Agriculture Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(a)). Section 2501(a) defines a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher as a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group, which is further defined as a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Qualifying loans as part of the announcement are certain direct loans under the Farm Loan Programs (FLP) and Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFL).

To learn more about the loan payments to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, visit www.farmers.gov/americanrescueplan.

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**USDA Announces Cooperative Agreements for Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction**

$2 million in cooperative agreements is available for local governments to host Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CCFWR) pilot projects. The cooperative agreements support projects that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans and they are part of USDA’s broader efforts to support urban agriculture.

Learn more about the Cooperative Agreements
Application Period Open for Conservation Innovation Grants Program

NRCS is investing up to $15 million to support the development of new tools, approaches, practices and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands through the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program. CIG partners use creative problem solving and innovation to address our nation’s water quality, air quality, soil health and wildlife habitat challenges, all while improving agricultural operations.

Learn more about the Conservation Innovation Grants

USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

$4 million in competitive grants is available

$4 million in competitive grants is available to support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production projects. USDA will accept applications on Grants.gov for planning and implementation projects until midnight July 30, 2021.

Planning Projects 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, urban agroforestry or food forests, and development of policies related to zoning and other needs of urban production.

Implementation Projects Implementation projects that accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor and other agricultural practices that serve multiple farmers. Projects will improve local food access and collaborate with partner organizations and may support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, educational endeavors and urban farming policy implementation.

Find out more about these grants


The U.S. Drought Monitor's reporting feature offers producers an opportunity to submit drought impact and condition reports.

The USDA, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, produced the U.S. Drought Monitor to include a reporting feature that allows producers to report local drought impacts and conditions.

The report allows producers to:

- Provide a written description of drought impacts on livelihood, activities, etc.;
- Select categories to show losses and gains as a result of the drought;
- Report on the duration of drought event;
- Select Affected Places – geographic areas ranging from an entire state to a small area within a state;
- Submit images that document the drought and its impact;
- Provide contact information (includes an option to keep information confidential).
Guaranteed Conservation Loans

Guaranteed Conservation Loans are available for applicants to install a conservation practice. These funds may be used for any conservation activities included in a conservation plan or Forest Stewardship Management plan. A copy of the conservation plan is required to complete the application. These loans are not limited to just family farmers. In some cases, applicants can operate non-eligible enterprises. Loan funds are issued by a participating commercial lender and guaranteed up to 80 percent by FSA or up to 90 percent for beginning and historically underserved producers.

Emergency Loans Available in Montana

FSA's Emergency Loan Program is available for agricultural producers in counties designated as primary or contiguous natural disaster areas. See map below of current Disaster Designations in Montana. Contact your local FSA office for specific designations in your area and time frames to apply. Eligible producers have eight months from the date of the disaster designation to apply for low-interest emergency loans to 1.) restore or replace essential property; 2.) pay all or part of production costs associated with the disaster year; 3.) pay essential family living expenses; or 4.) refinance certain debts, excluding real estate. Producers interested in applying for an emergency loan, or other FLP loans, should contact their local FSA office to set up an appointment with the Farm Loan Program staff serving your area.

- Current Disaster Designations in Montana - (by county)
- Emergency Loan Factsheet (pdf)
- FSA Farm Loan Program (Web)

Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) to Prevent Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

FSA and RMA jointly support the prevention of fraud, waste and abuse of the Federal Crop Insurance Program. FSA has been, and will continue to, assist RMA and insurance providers by monitoring crop conditions throughout the growing season. FSA will continue to refer all suspected cases of fraud, waste and abuse directly to RMA. Producers can report suspected cases to the county office staff, the RMA office or the Office of the Inspector General.

NRCS: USDA Seeks Proposals for Innovative Approaches to Conservation on Agricultural Lands - June 21 Proposal Deadline

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is seeking proposals through June 21 for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials (On-Farm Trials). On-Farm Trials, part of the agency’s Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program, feature collaboration between NRCS and partners to implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact. Incentive payments are provided to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches.
This program harnesses the expertise, resources and capacity of partner organizations nationwide to help NRCS boost natural resource conservation on private lands and support climate smart agriculture. (Read more)

Montana Farm and Ranch Stress Resource Clearinghouse

Montana State University Extension and an associated statewide advisory council have developed an online clearinghouse of resources for a wide range of topics related to stress and mental health. The clearinghouse was created specifically for ag producers and their families, but it contains a wealth of information for anyone interested in learning more about causes of stress, stress prevention and management, and overall mental health. To access the site, please click on this link: https://msuextension.org/wellness/stress-management/mt_farm_stress_clearing_house/