

March 2016



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Nebraska FSA Newsletter

Nebraska Farm Service Agency

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www.fsa.usda.gov/ne

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Message from the State Executive Director

A critical component of our program delivery is providing credit. We make loans to those who cannot get commercial credit, however most of our loan assistance is direct to beginning farmers and ranchers, veterans, and underserved producers. We have an operating microloan and a new farm ownership microloan (\$50,000 and less). Microloans offer a reduced application and flexible collateral requirements for the smaller loan amounts. We have also expanded our facility loan program to include milk and dairy products, aquaculture, floriculture, hops, meat and poultry. This expansion includes storage and handling equipment for local and direct marketing.

Division Chiefs:

Cathy Anderson
Doug Klein
Greg Reisdorff
Mike Sander
Mark Wilke

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or county.

FSA and NRCS have been monitoring highly erodible land and wetlands since 1986. If you are unsure of your conservation plan or system, talk to your local office. No till, residue requirements, tiling and other activities may impact USDA programs including your crop insurance premium subsidy. If you are uncertain, give your Service Center a call.

Now is the time to enroll in the 2016 ARC PLC programs. If you have not done so, give FSA a call for an appointment.

Conservation Compliance Critical To Eligibility for Benefits

Producers are reminded that compliance with Highly Erodible Lands (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions is required to maintain eligibility for federal farm programs and crop insurance subsidies. Conservation compliance refers to the USDA requirement that highly erodible lands be farmed in a manner that maintains a certain level of surface residue and minimizes soil erosion. This may include taking steps such as incorporating minimal or no-till operations, or planting cover crops. Conservation compliance also prohibits the conversion of a wetland, or planting of an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland, including a wetland that was converted in prior years. Converting a wetland may include activities such as removal of trees, installing new drainage, or modifying existing drainage to an area.

Producers should file Form AD-1026 with FSA prior to breaking new ground, and conducting land clearing or drainage type projects to ensure the proposed actions meet compliance criteria. Once the AD-1026 is filed, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will need to review the project area to ensure the proposed work will not put your eligibility for benefits at risk. It's important to ensure this review is completed prior to initiating the work.

It's important to review and understand the existing highly erodible land (HEL) and wetland (W) determinations on your farms, and indicated on FSA maps, and visit with NRCS regarding what steps are required on HEL to ensure that an approved conservation system is being actively applied. Producers can request that NRCS develop a conservation plan to outline the use of crop rotations, tillage methods, cover crops, and other conservation practices to ensure compliance with HEL provisions. When weather events or some other circumstance occurs that is not addressed in the conservation plan, producers should consult with NRCS staff to ensure any proposed changes in tillage or cropping will not result in a compliance issue.

Enrollment Period for 2016 USDA Safety Net Coverage Ends Aug. 1

Producers who elected coverage from the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs can visit FSA county offices through Aug. 1, 2016, to sign contracts to enroll in coverage for 2016. The two programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for covered commodities. Contract enrollment must occur each year. If a farm is not enrolled during the 2016 enrollment period, producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or

revenue benchmarks established by the programs. As you complete your 2016 enrollment, please take time to carefully review contracts for each farm to ensure the correct participants and shares have been designated.

For more details regarding these programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc. For more information or an appointment to complete ARCPLC enrollment, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office.

USDA Financial Assistance Available to Help Organic Farmers Create Conservation Buffers

USDA is assisting organic farmers with the cost of establishing up to 20,000 acres of new conservation buffers and other practices on and near farms that produce organic crops.

The financial assistance is available from the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”) to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

For conservation buffers, funds are available for establishing shrubs and trees, or supporting pollinating species, and can be planted in blocks or strips. Interested organic producers can offer eligible land for enrollment in this initiative at any time.

Other USDA FSA programs that assist organic farmers include:

- The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) that provides financial assistance for 55 to 100 percent of the average market price for organic crop losses between 50 to 65 percent of expected production due to a natural disaster.
- Marketing assistance loans (MAL) that provide interim financing to help producers meet cash flow needs without having to sell crops during harvest when market prices are low, and loan deficiency payments (LDP) to producers who forgo the loan in return for a payment on the eligible commodity.
- A variety of loans for operating expenses, ownership or guarantees with outside lenders, including streamlined microloans that have a lower amount of paperwork.
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL) that provide low-interest financing to build or upgrade storage facilities for organic commodities, including cold storage, grain bins, bulk tanks and drying and handling equipment.
- Services such as mapping farm and field boundaries and reporting organic acreage that can be provided to a farm’s organic certifier or crop insurance agent.

Visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic to learn more about how FSA can help organic farmers. For an interactive tour of CRP success stories, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/CRPis30 or follow #CRPis30 on Twitter. To learn more about FSA programs visit a local FSA office or www.fsa.usda.gov. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Fire Management on CRP Acres

Landowners who participate in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are responsible for fire management on their CRP acreage. Fireguard technical practices should be outlined in the Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO).

Landowners must complete the necessary management activities outside of the Primary Nesting Season. In Nebraska, the Primary Nesting Season is May 1 through July 15 for grazing benefits and all other activities. The goal is to suppress the amount of fuel in the event of a wildfire while still promoting the diversity of the conservation cover.

FSA encourages producers to be proactive in preventing the spread of wildfire. Fire management includes installing firebreaks, which should be included in the contract support document and installed according to NRCS firebreak standards.

Barren firebreaks will only be allowed in high risk areas, such as transportation corridors, rural communities, and adjacent farmsteads. A conservationist must certify that there will not be an erosion hazard from the barren firebreak. If erosion becomes a problem, remedial action will be taken.

Filing a Notice of Loss

The CCC-576, Notice of Loss, is used to report failed acreage and prevented planting and may be completed by any producer with an interest in the crop. Timely filing a Notice of Loss is required for all crops including grasses. For losses on crops covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), you must file a CCC-576, Notice of Loss, in the FSA County Office within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent.

Producers of hand-harvested crops must notify FSA of damage or loss through the administrative County Office within 72 hours of the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent. This notification can be provided by filing a CCC-576, by email, fax or phone. Producers who notify the County Office by any method other than by filing the CCC-576 are still required to file a CCC-576, Notice of Loss, within the required 15 calendar days.

If filing for prevented planting, an acreage report and CCC-576 must be filed within 15 calendar days of the final planting date for the crop.

Update Your Records

It is important to keep your FSA records accurate and current. Each time you visit your local office to enroll in programs, report acreage, or conduct other business, please review your records and report any changes or updates that need to be made. This could include a change of address or other contact information, creation of a new business entity, additions of land to your operation by purchase or lease, changes in lease arrangements, new producers with an interest in a farm, new land broken out, changes in direct deposit information, etc. Producers participating in FSA and NRCS programs are required to timely report changes in their farming operation and update their CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan as necessary.

USDA Expands Microloans to Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

Producers, Including Beginning and Underserved Farmers, Have a New Option to Gain Access to Land

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will begin offering farm ownership microloans, creating a new financing avenue for farmers to buy and improve property. These microloans will be especially helpful to beginning or underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

The microloan program has been hugely successful, providing more than 16,800 low-interest loans, totaling over \$373 million to producers across the country. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013. Seventy percent of loans were made to new farmers.

Now, microloans will be available to also help with farmland and building purchases, and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers, and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

This microloan announcement is another USDA resource for America's farmers and ranchers to utilize, especially as [new and beginning farmers and ranchers](#) look for the assistance they need to get started. To learn more about the FSA microloan program visit www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans, or contact your local FSA office. To find your nearest office location, please visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Microloans for Land and Equipment

Watch FSA Administrator Val Dolcini describe how microloans can help you!

<http://fsa.blogs.govdelivery.com/2016/03/04/microloan-message-from-administrator/>

Loan Servicing

There are options for Farm Service Agency loan customers during financial stress. If you are a borrower who is unable to make payments on a loan, contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager to learn about the options available to you.

What Are Playas

We grew up on the High Plains thinking of those occasionally muddy pasture depressions as "buffalo wallows" or "mud holes." Turns out, scientists are learning those playas play a significant role in recharging the Ogallala aquifer. They are the most numerous wetland in the region, more than 75,000 of them, and they are an important source of water — both for people and wildlife. Learn more in this short radio spot by Playa Lakes Joint Venture. Audio: http://pljv.org/radio_episodes/what-are-playas/

***These spotlights are brought to you through USDA's partnership with the Playa Lakes Joint Venture— The mission of Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) is to conserve the playas, prairies and landscapes of the western Great Plains — including portions of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. <http://pljv.org/>

March FSA Interest Rates

Farm Operating: 2.625%
Microloan Operating: 2.625%
Farm Ownership: 3.75%
Farm Ownership - Joint Financing: 2.50%
Farm Ownership - Down Payment: 1.50%
Emergency - Actual Loss: 3.625%
Farm Storage Facility Loan 7 year term: 1.625%
Farm Storage Facility Loan 10 year term: 1.875%
Farm Storage Facility Loan 12 year term: 2.000%
Commodity Loan: 1.500%

Dates to Remember

March 31, 2016 - Deadline to request 2015 MAL or LDP for barley, canola, crambe, flaxseed, honey, oats, rapeseed, wheat, and sesame seed

May 31, 2016 - Deadline to request 2015 MAL or LDP for corn, dry peas, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, safflower seed, chickpeas, soybeans, sunflower seed

July 15, 2016 - Deadline to report all spring-seeded crops, including Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage, and all other crops for the 2016 crop year

August 1, 2016 - Enrollment period for 2016 ARC/PLC ends; deadline to request farm transfers or reconstitutions for 2016

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).