

March 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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**State Executive Director:**  
Nancy Johner

**State Committee:**  
Scott Spilker, *chair*  
Geoff Ruth

### A Message from the State Executive Director

I want to begin my column this month by wishing you Happy National Agriculture Week (March 22-28). The designation is meant to call attention to and celebrate the farmers and ranchers who bring us the abundance and quality of food we have here in the United States.

If timing is everything, then National Agriculture Week nailed it because as we address the coronavirus pandemic here in Nebraska and across the nation, folks have been heading to grocery stores in droves to stock up on food. It's because of your hard work, 365 days a year, that there is product on the shelves and in the coolers and meat cases for purchase. In addition, agriculture and food production have been designated by the U.S.

Lonnie Starke  
Mark Jagels

**Program Chiefs:**

Cathy Anderson,  
*Production/Compliance*  
Doug Klein,  
*Conservation/Price Support*  
Mark Wilke, *Farm Loans*  
Tim Divis, *Executive Officer*

To find more information about FSA programming or contact information for your local office, go to [www.fsa.usda.gov/ne](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ne).

Department of Homeland Security as part of the nation's "critical infrastructure" during the pandemic. Always, but especially during this challenging time, thank you, sincerely, for all you do.

Nebraska Farm Service Agency (FSA) will work hard to continue to support you during this time of cancellations and postponements, but we also want to protect our customers and our employees. To that point, USDA Service Centers across the state are open for business, but with a limited staff in-office and others working remotely. We can assist you by phone appointment, email, mail or fax. See the article below for details. If you need service, please call your county office to discuss options for transacting business remotely.

We will do our best to support you so you can continue to provide the critical service of food, fuel and fiber production for our nation. Again, thank you, and Happy National Ag Week.

Please stay safe and healthy.

--Nancy Johner

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## USDA Service Centers Taking Precautions to Prevent Spread of Coronavirus

U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Centers are encouraging visitors to take proactive protective measures to help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

As of Monday, March 23, USDA Service Centers in Nebraska are open for business by phone appointment only, and field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. While program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with producers by phone, and using online tools whenever possible. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or any other Service Center agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment. In the event a Service Center can't provide services on location, producers can receive assistance from the closest alternate Service Center by phone.

Producers can find Service Center phone numbers at [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](http://farmers.gov/service-center-locator). FPAC agencies continue to look at flexibilities to deliver programs on behalf of producers, just as they have in past situations, such as natural disasters. Farmers and ranchers are resilient and FPAC agencies will continue to deliver the farm safety net programs and resource conservation programs that keep American agriculture in business today and long into the future.

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov) portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway](#). Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance, and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at [farmers.gov/sign-in](http://farmers.gov/sign-in).

For the most current updates on available services and Service Center status visit [farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus).

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## USDA Opens CRP Grasslands Application Period

Farmers and ranchers now may apply to enroll grasslands in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands. The signup runs through May 15.

Through CRP Grasslands, participants retain the right to conduct common grazing practices, such as haying, mowing or harvesting seed from the enrolled land. Timing of some activities may be restricted by the primary nesting season of birds.

Participants will receive an annual rental payment and may receive up to 50 percent cost-share for establishing approved conservation practices. The duration of the CRP contract is either 10 or 15 years. FSA will rank applications using a number of factors including existence of expiring CRP land, threat of conversion or development, existing grassland, and predominance of native species cover, and cost.

The 2018 Farm Bill set aside 2 million acres for CRP Grassland enrollment. CRP is one of the largest conservation programs at USDA. CRP marks its 35-year anniversary in 2020 with 22 million acres currently enrolled.

For more information or to enroll in CRP Grasslands, contact your local FSA county office or visit [fsa.usda.gov/crp](https://fsa.usda.gov/crp). To locate your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

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## Conservation Compliance Critical for Eligibility for Benefits

Agricultural producers and land owners are reminded compliance with Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions is required to maintain eligibility for federal farm program and crop insurance premium benefits. HEL and WC provisions apply across a producer's entire farming operation and a violation of such provisions on one farm can result in a producer's loss of eligibility for applicable benefits on all farms in their operation.

Conservation compliance refers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture requirement that production of agriculture commodities on highly erodible lands maintains compliance with an approved conservation plan or system. This means highly erodible land must be farmed in a manner that maintains a certain level of surface residue and minimizes soil erosion. A conservation plan or system may include taking steps such as incorporating minimal or no-till operations or planting cover crops.

To maintain compliance with wetland conservation provisions, producers must agree they will not plant an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland. Specifically, persons are ineligible for certain farm program benefits if they plant an agricultural commodity on wetlands that were converted after Dec. 23, 1985, or if they convert a wetland after Nov. 28, 1990. Some examples of the conversion of a wetland are draining, dredging, tiling, leveling or removing woody vegetation. Program regulations indicate that even accidental planting of a small portion of a converted wetland must be treated as a wetland violation, and therefore would make the producer ineligible for USDA benefits on all farms for which they receive benefits.

Producers should contact their local USDA Service Center to file Farm Service Agency (FSA) Form AD-1026 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 identify highly erodible lands and wetlands based on the project and can provide further planning assistance, such as a conservation plan, to producers if requested.

For more information on conservation compliance provisions, contact the County FSA office. To find a county office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

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## Under Financial Stress? Ask About 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.

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## Guaranteed Loan Program

FSA guaranteed loans allow lenders to provide agricultural credit to farmers who do not meet the lender's normal underwriting criteria. Farmers and ranchers apply for a guaranteed loan through a lender, and the lender arranges for the guarantee. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of principal and interest on a loan. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.

Guaranteed farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, construct or repair buildings, develop farmland to promote soil and water conservation or to refinance debt.

Guaranteed operating loans can be used to purchase livestock, farm equipment, feed, seed, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance and other operating expenses.

FSA can guarantee farm ownership and operating loans up to \$1,776,000. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.

Please contact your lender or local FSA farm loan office for more information on guaranteed loans.

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## Unauthorized Disposition of Grain

If loan grain has been disposed of through feeding, selling or any other form of disposal without prior written authorization from the county office staff, it is considered unauthorized disposition. The financial penalties for unauthorized dispositions are severe and a producer's name will be placed on a loan violation list for a two-year period. Always call before you haul any grain under loan.

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## 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. 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.

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## FSA March Interest Rates

### **OPERATING/OWNERSHIP**

Farm Operating: 2.625%

Microloan Operating: 2.625%

Farm Ownership: 3.25%

Farm Ownership - Joint Financing: 2.5%

Farm Ownership - Down Payment: 1.5%

Emergency - Actual Loss: 3.625%

### **FARM STORAGE**

Farm Storage Facility Loan 3 year term: 1.375%

Farm Storage Facility Loan 5 year term: 1.375%

Farm Storage Facility Loan 7 year term: 1.5%

Farm Storage Facility Loan 10 year term: 1.625%

Farm Storage Facility Loan 12 year term: 1.625%

### **MARKETING ASSISTANCE**

Commodity Loan: 2.5%

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## Dates to Remember

**April 1, 2020** – 2019 Marketing Assistance Loan availability deadline for barley, canola, crambe, flaxseed, honey, oats, rapeseed, wheat and sesame seed

**May 15, 2020** – CRP Grasslands application deadline

**June 1, 2020** – 2019 Marketing Assistance Loan availability deadline for corn, dry peas, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, safflower seed, chickpeas, soybeans and sunflower seed

**June 30, 2020** – 2020 enrollment deadline for the Ag Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs

**\*\*Please note any above NAP calendar references may not be inclusive for all NAP-covered crops; NAP participants should contact their County FSA Office to confirm important program deadlines.**

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## USDA Stands Up New Team to Better Serve Beginning Farmers, Ranchers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is standing up a new team of USDA staff that will lead a department-wide effort focused on serving beginning farmers and ranchers.

To institutionalize support for beginning farmers and ranchers and to build upon prior agency work, the 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to create a national coordinator position in the agency and state-level coordinators for four of its agencies – Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Rural Development (RD).

Sarah Campbell was selected as the national coordinator to lead USDA's efforts. A beginning farmer herself, Campbell held previous positions with USDA and has a wealth of experience working on issues impacting beginning farmers and ranchers. She recently served as acting director of customer experience for the Farm Production and Conservation Business Center, where she led the piloting of innovative, customer-centric initiatives.

In her new role, she will work closely with the state coordinators to develop goals and create plans to increase beginning farmer participation and access to programs while coordinating nationwide efforts on beginning farmers and ranchers.

Each state coordinator will receive training and develop tailored beginning farmer outreach plans for their state. Coordinators will help field employees better reach and serve beginning farmers and ranchers and will also be available to assist beginning farmers who need help navigating the variety of resources USDA has to offer.

### More on Beginning Farmers

Twenty seven percent of farmers were categorized as new and beginning producers, with 10 years or less of experience in agriculture, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

USDA offers a variety of farm loan, risk management, disaster assistance, and conservation programs to support farmers, including beginning farmers and ranchers. Additionally, a number of these programs have provisions specifically for beginning farmers, including targeted funding for loans and conservation programs as well as waivers and exemptions.

### More Information

Learn more about USDA's resources for beginning farmers as well as more information on the national and state-level coordinators at [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov). For more information on available programs in your area, contact your local [USDA service center](#).

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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).