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A Message from the FSA State Executive Director

On behalf of county Farm Service Agency offices across the state, I want to thank all of our farmer and rancher customers for your assistance with spring acreage certification, which had a deadline of July 15. This process is critical to maintaining your eligibility for FSA program benefits. Most of our offices have wrapped up, or are in the process of wrapping up, this annual activity. If you did not file an acreage report, there is still an opportunity to late-file while physical evidence of the crop still exists. Contact your county FSA office for details.

Recently USDA announced the acceptance of Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres that were offered as part of the most recent sign-up. Over 3.1 million acres were allowed into the program nationwide, and in Nebraska 421,911 acres were approved. Those whose CRP offers were accepted now begin the process of working on a conservation plan for those acres with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff. Landowners will have the chance to review these plans before signing the final CRP paperwork with FSA, so please pay attention to contacts from your local USDA Service Center on this program as the timeline to complete this process is tight.

We are nearing the Aug. 1 deadline for those interested in serving on their FSA County Committee to turn in their nomination forms. County committee members are local farmers and ranchers elected by their peers to serve in a role that advises the activities of their county FSA office. It's a great way to give back to your local agricultural community. If you are interested in learning more, call your county FSA office and ask for your county executive director. She or he will be able to take you through all the requirements and assist with paperwork.

In closing this month, I want to note that USDA continues its efforts to protect its customers and staff from the COVID 19 new variants that continue to cause issues across the nation. This includes analysis of rates of infections and hospitalizations that could lead to the return of a mask requirement while you are doing business at your local FSA office or a reduction of staffing in local offices. Please know that if you are asked to wear a mask, your local FSA staff is following a directive that is intended to keep you (and them) safe. Your continued patience and support are very much appreciated.

That's all for this month. Stay safe in the heat as we slide into August.

--John Berge

Drought Assistance for 2022 Livestock Forage Losses Available in Over 60 Nebraska Counties

Over 60 Nebraska counties have triggered for benefits in 2022 under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP). LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned land, leased land where the producer has risk in the grazing or fire on federally managed land.

FSA county committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is provided from FSA headquarters of qualifying drought conditions as determined by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing livestock on normally permitted federally managed lands due to qualifying fire.

Click [here](#) for a list of counties that are eligible for LFP. This list is updated weekly. Producers must complete a CCC-853 and provide the required supporting documentation before program benefits can be determined and issued. The deadline to apply for 2022 losses is Jan. 30, 2023.

For additional information about LFP, including eligibility criteria for producers and livestock, and information about how the U.S. Drought Monitor is used to determine county eligibility, contact your county FSA office or visit farmers.gov/recover. To find your county FSA office contact information, visit farmers.gov/service-locator.

USDA Announces Assistance for On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for Specialty Crop Growers

USDA's new [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops](#) (FSCSC) program will help to offset costs for specialty crop producers to comply with regulatory requirements and market-driven food safety certification requirements.

Specialty crop operations can apply for assistance for eligible expenses related to a 2022 food safety certificate issued on or after June 21, 2022.

Program Details

FSCSC will assist specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023. For each year, FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing their certification, as well as a portion of their related expenses.

To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation; meet the definition of a small business or very small business; and have paid eligible expenses related to the 2022 (issued on or after June 21, 2022) or 2023 certification.

Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:

- Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification.
- Maintaining or updating an existing food safety plan.
- Food safety certification.
- Certification upload fees.
- Microbiological testing for products, soil amendments and water.

FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each category of eligible costs. A higher payment rate has been set for socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. Details about the payment rates and limitations can be found at farmers.gov/food-safety.

Applying for Assistance

The FSCSC application period for 2022 runs through January 31, 2023, and the application period for 2023 will be announced at a later date. FSA will issue payments at the time of application approval for 2022 and after the application period ends for 2023. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application. The application, along with other required documents, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. Producers can visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find their local FSA office. Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist.

Producers can visit farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

Know Your Signature Policy Options for Efficiency in FSA Business Interactions

Using the correct signature when doing business with FSA can save time and prevent a delay in program benefits.

The following are FSA signature guidelines:

- A married woman must sign her given name: Mrs. Mary Doe, not Mrs. John Doe
- For a minor, FSA requires the minor's signature and one from the minor's parent

Note, by signing a document with a minor, the parent is liable for actions of the minor and may be liable for refunds, liquidated damages, etc.

When signing on one's behalf the signature must agree with the name typed or printed on the form or be a variation that does not cause the name and signature to be in disagreement. Example - John W. Smith is on the form. The signature may be John W. Smith or J.W. Smith or J. Smith. Or Mary J. Smith may be signed as Mrs. Mary Joe Smith, M.J. Smith, Mary Smith, etc.

Faxed signatures will be accepted for certain forms and other documents provided the acceptable program forms are approved for faxed signatures. Producers are responsible for the successful transmission and receipt of faxed information.

Spouses may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and CCC programs in which either has an interest, unless written notification denying a spouse this authority has been provided to the county office.

Spouses cannot sign on behalf of each other as an authorized signatory for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations or other similar entities. Likewise, a spouse cannot sign a document on behalf of the other in order to affirm the eligibility of oneself.

Any member of a general partnership can sign on behalf of the general partnership and bind all members unless the Articles of Partnership are more restrictive. Spouses may sign on behalf of each other's individual interest in a partnership, unless notification denying a spouse that authority is provided to the county office. Acceptable signatures for general partnerships, joint ventures, corporations, estates, and trusts must consist of an indicator "by" or "for" the

individual's name, individual's name and capacity, or individual's name, capacity, and name of entity.

For additional clarification on proper signatures contact your local FSA office.

Filing CCC-941 Adjusted Gross Income Certifications

If you have experienced delays in receiving Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) payments, Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs) and Market Gains on Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs), it may be because you have not filed form CCC-941, *Adjusted Gross Income Certification*.

If you don't have a valid CCC-941 on file for the applicable crop year you will not receive payments. All farm operators/tenants/owners who have not filed a CCC-941 and have pending payments should immediately file the form with their recording county FSA office. Farm operators and tenants are encouraged to ensure that their landowners have filed the form.

FSA can accept the CCC-941 for 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Unlike the past, you must have the CCC-941 certifying your AGI compliance before any payments can be issued.

FSA Has Program Opportunities to Assist Beginning Farmers, Ranchers

Accessing capital to begin, extend or support an agriculture operation can be especially challenging to new producers. Farm Service Agency offers a variety of resources to assist those who are just starting out, including "Beginning Farmer" direct and guaranteed loan programs that have funding targeted for qualified applicants. To access these programs, beginning farmers/ranchers must meet these basic qualifiers:

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

Individuals interested in learning more should contact their county FSA office. A couple of loan programs to inquire about include:

- **Direct Farm Ownership Down Payment Loan** – this type of loan may be used by beginning farmers/ranchers to purchase a farm or ranch. It requires a 5% cash down payment, but also offers a low interest rate that can be as low as 1.5%.

- **Direct Farm Ownership Loan – Joint Financing** - this type of loan may be used by any qualified borrower but is often used by beginners to purchase a farm or ranch with no down payment required. Financing is provided jointly by FSA and another lender. This program also offers a low interest rate, with a floor of 2.5%.
- **Microloans** – this type of loan may be used by any qualified borrower but is designed to meet the needs of small and beginning farmers/ranchers by easing some requirements and offering less paperwork. It can be used for purchasing a farm or ranch (ownership), but also for operational expenses (operating) and other needs. It does have a \$50,000 loan limit for each type of loan.

Other loan programs may be appropriate, depending on individual needs. Potential customers are encouraged to check out www.farmers.gov/fund to access the Farm Loan Discovery Tool.

There also are FSA farm programs that have specific provisions for individuals meeting the beginning farmer/rancher definition, and producers are encouraged to ask about these programs at their FSA office. For example, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) helps producers manage risk for both crop losses and crop plantings that were prevented due to natural disaster. NAP is available for crops not covered by federal crop insurance and basic coverage is available at no cost to qualified beginning farmers/ranchers. Other programs with beginning farmer/rancher provisions include the Emergency Conservation Program and the Dairy Margin Coverage Program, among others.

For additional information about these and other FSA resources for beginning farmers/ranchers, contact your county FSA office. To find your local office, visit farmers.gov/service-center.

Reminders for FSA Direct, 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](#).

FSA July Loan Interest Rates

OPERATING/OWNERSHIP

Farm Operating: 3.875%
Microloan Operating: 3.875%
Farm Ownership: 4.125%
Farm Ownership - Joint Financing: 2.5%
Farm Ownership - Down Payment: 1.5%
Emergency - Actual Loss: 3.750%

FARM STORAGE FACILITY LOAN

3-year term: 3%
5-year term: 3%
7-year term: 3.125%
10-year term: 3%
12-year term: 3.125%

MARKETING ASSISTANCE

Commodity Loan: 3.375%

USDA Offers Producers the Option for Virtual Appointments Via Computer or Mobile Phone

Nebraska USDA Service Centers can use Microsoft Teams to provide customers an option for virtual appointments that are conducted via computer or mobile phone.

Teams is a Microsoft software program. Producers who call to schedule an appointment with their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office can opt to have their appointment conducted via Teams. Once a meeting date and time is set, the USDA Service Center staff will send the producer a Teams meeting invite through email. On the date and time of the appointment, the producer can join Service Center staff for the meeting from their computer or mobile phone by clicking on the “Join Microsoft Teams Meeting” link within the email. For producers interested in learning more, we offer [step-by-step instructions](#) for getting started via desktop, laptop, or mobile device.

Producers who are connecting to an appointment from a mobile phone will need to first download the Microsoft Teams app onto their phone, while producers joining an appointment from a computer will only need to click the “Join Meeting as a Guest” option when prompted.

By using Teams, the producer and USDA employees can see each other and can share their screens to view forms, maps and other important information during the virtual appointment.

Teams provides an online option for providing service. If you are interested, ask about a virtual appointment when contacting your USDA Service Center.

USDA Begins Issuing Payments for Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is increasing the amount of funding available for the [Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program](#) (SMHPP) and expects to issue approximately \$62.8 million in pandemic assistance payments to hog producers starting this week. SMHPP assists eligible producers who sold hogs through a spot market sale from April 16, 2020, through Sept. 1, 2020. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) accepted SMHPP applications through April 29, 2022.

SMHPP Payments

SMHPP payments will be calculated by multiplying the number of head of eligible hogs, not to exceed 10,000 head, by the payment rate of \$54 per head.

FSA originally planned to apply a payment factor if calculated payments exceeded the allocated \$50 million in pandemic assistance funds for SMHPP. Payments are not expected to be factored due to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's decision to increase funding enabling producers to receive 100% of the calculated SMHPP payment.

There is no per person or legal entity payment limitation on SMHPP payments.

SMHPP Background

USDA offered SMHPP in response to a reduction in packer production due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in fewer negotiated hogs being procured and subsequent lower market prices. The program is part of USDA's broader [Pandemic Assistance for Producers](#) initiative and addresses gaps in previous assistance for hog producers.

Ask The Expert: Saving America's Grasslands Q&A with Dr. Dirac Twidwell



In this Ask the Expert, Dr. Dirac Twidwell, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Science Advisor and Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska outlines how landowners can work together to protect and conserve grasslands through conservation. Dr. Twidwell is responsible for conserving grasslands on the Great Plains through science-backed efforts that span ownership boundaries. His research and publications have [identified the largest remaining continuous grasslands in the United States](#) and have outlined a 'call to action' to protect and preserve these invaluable biomes.

He also runs the Large-Scale Rangeland Conservation Lab at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which focuses on providing a framework for ecosystem management across multiple states. Dr. Twidwell recently co-authored [Reducing Woody Encroachment in Grasslands: A Guide for Understanding Risk and Vulnerability](#) that provides the first-ever framework for addressing woody encroachment in the Great Plains.

To read the full blog visit farmers.gov/blog/ask-expert-saving-americas-grasslands-qa-with-dr-dirac-twidwell.

Conservation Practice Adoption and Motivations Survey Underway Through Aug. 19

The Conservation Practice Adoption Motivations Survey is now underway. This survey is a joint project between USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) aimed at assessing the adoption rates of different conservation practices. Survey data will be used to guide the implementation of NRCS programs in the future. **The data collection period runs from May 30 to August 19.**

There are four different conservation categories which are surveyed: crop practices, grazing practices, confined livestock practices, and forestry practices. Each category will have a questionnaire that has been designed to gather information specific to the practices involved in each category.

NASS is sending questionnaires for crop practices and confined livestock practices in 2022. Questionnaires for grazing practices and forestry practices will be sent in 2024.

If you received a survey, please respond securely online at accounts.usda.gov, using the 12-digit survey code mailed with the survey. Producers responding online will now use NASS's new Respondent Portal. On the portal, producers can complete their surveys, access data visualizations and reports of interest, link to other USDA agencies, get a local weather update and more. Completed questionnaires may also be mailed back in the prepaid envelope provided.

Results from both versions of the survey will be available Sept. 15, 2022, at nass.usda.gov and in NASS's Quick Stats database at quickstats.nass.usda.gov.

[Learn more.](#)

Dates to Remember

Aug. 1, 2022 – FSA deadline for producers to request a farm transfer or a farm reconstitution

Aug. 1, 2022 – Deadline to return candidate nominations to USDA Service Center for FSA County Committee Election

Aug. 5, 2022 – FSA deadline for contract offers for CLEAR30 CRP special water quality initiative

Sept. 5, 2022 – USDA Service Centers closed for federal holiday

Oct. 31, 2022 – FSA deadline for applications to the Organic Certification Cost Share Program and the Organic and Transitional Education Certification Program

****Please note any above NAP calendar reference 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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FSA State Committee

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Bill Armbrust, *Elkhorn*
Aaron LaPointe, *Winnebago*
Becky Potmesil, *Alliance*
Paula Sue Steffen, *Humboldt*

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