USDA Extends General Signup for Conservation Reserve Program

The USDA is extending the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup period, which had previously been announced as ending on Feb. 12, 2021. USDA will continue to accept offers as it takes this opportunity for the incoming Administration to evaluate ways to increase enrollment. Under the previous Administration, incentives and rental payment rates were reduced resulting in an enrollment shortfall of over 4 million acres. The program, administered by USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA), provides annual rental payments for 10 to 15 years for land devoted to conservation purposes, as well as other types of payments. Before the General CRP Signup period ends, producers will have the opportunity to adjust or resubmit their offers to take advantage of planned improvements to the program.

This signup for CRP gives producers an opportunity to enroll land for the first time or re-enroll land under existing contracts that will be expiring Sept. 30, 2021. All interested producers, including those on Indian reservations and with trust lands, are encouraged to contact their local USDA Service Center for more information.
FSA Implements Set-Aside Loan Provision for Customers Impacted by COVID-19

Set-Aside Delays Loan Payments for Borrowers

USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will broaden the use of the Disaster Set-Aside (DSA) loan provision, normally used in the wake of natural disasters, to allow farmers with USDA farm loans who are affected by COVID-19, and are determined eligible, to have their next payment set aside. In some cases, FSA may also set aside a second payment for farmers who have already had one payment set aside because of a prior designated disaster.

FSA direct loan borrowers will receive a letter with the details of the expanded Disaster Set-Aside authorities, which includes the possible set-aside of annual operating loans, as well as explanations of the additional loan servicing options that are available. To discuss or request a loan payment Set-Aside, borrowers should call or email the farm loan staff at their local FSA county office.

The set-aside payment’s due date is moved to the final maturity date of the loan or extended up to twelve months in the case of an annual operating loan. Any principal set-aside will continue to accrue interest until it is repaid. This aims to improve the borrower’s cashflow in the current production cycle.

FSA previously announced it was relaxing the loan-making process and adding flexibilities for servicing direct and guaranteed loans to provide credit to producers in need. Direct loan applicants and borrowers are encouraged to contact their local FSA county office to discuss loan making and servicing flexibilities and other needs or concerns. Customers participating in FSA’s guaranteed loan programs are encouraged to contact their lender. Information on these flexibilities, and office contact information, can be found on farmers.gov/coronavirus.

FSA will be accepting most forms and applications by facsimile or electronic signature. Some services are also available online to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and certain program applications and payments. 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.

USDA Extends Application Deadline for the Quality Loss Adjustment Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is extending the deadline from March 5 to April 9 for agricultural producers to apply for the Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) Program because of recent winter storms and some clarifications to program rules. This program assists producers who suffered crop quality losses due to qualifying 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.
The QLA program assists producers whose eligible crops suffered quality losses due to qualifying drought, excessive moisture, flooding, hurricanes, snowstorms, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity, or wildfires.

Eligible crops include those for which federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage is available, except for grazed crops and value loss crops, such as honey, maple sap, aquaculture, floriculture, mushrooms, ginseng root, ornamental nursery, Christmas trees, and turfgrass sod. Additionally, crops that were sold or fed to livestock or that are in storage may be eligible.

Assistance is available in counties that received a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or Secretarial Disaster Designation, or for drought, a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D3 (extreme drought) or higher. Producers in counties that did not receive a qualifying declaration or designation may still apply but must also provide supporting documentation.

FSA will issue payments once the application period ends. If the total amount of calculated QLA payments exceeds available program funding, payments will be prorated.

More Information

FSA began accepting applications on January 6 and has received more than 8,100 applications so far.

To apply, contact your local USDA Service Center. Additional information is also available at farmers.gov/quality-loss. Producers can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364.

While USDA offices are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. Additionally, more information related to USDA’s response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

March 15 Deadline to Complete Election & Enrollment for 2021 Agriculture Risk Coverage, Price Loss Coverage Programs

Agricultural producers who have not yet elected and enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for 2021 have until March 15. Producers who have not signed a contract or who want to make an election change should contact their local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center to make an appointment. Right now, about 1.4 million farms have enrolled, about 81% of expected participation.

“In times like these, from winter storms to a pandemic, we’re reminded of the importance of managing risk,” said Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator of USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). “The Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs provide critical support to farmers to protect them from substantial drops in crop prices or revenues. If you have not enrolled or made elections, please do so by the March 15 deadline.”

Producers who enrolled for the 2019 crop year received more than $5 billion in payments last fall. If an ARC or PLC payment triggers for a particular crop for the 2021 crop year and there is no signed 2021 contract on file, then the producer is ineligible for that program payment.

Producers are eligible to enroll farms with base acres for the following commodities: barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats,
peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium- and short-grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

**Decision Tools**

To help producers make elections, FSA makes program data available to help producers make ARC and PLC decisions.

Additionally, USDA partnered with universities to offer web-based decision tools:

- **Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator**, the University of Illinois tool that offers farmers the ability to run payment estimates modeling for their farms and counties for ARC-County and PLC.
- **ARC and PLC Decision Tool**, the Texas A&M tool that allows producers to analyze payment yield updates and expected payments for 2019 and 2020.

**Crop Insurance Considerations**

Producers are reminded that enrolling in ARC or PLC programs can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products offered by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA). Producers who elect and enroll in PLC also have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider, but producers of covered commodities who elect ARC are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres.

Unlike SCO, RMA’s Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by participating in ARC for the same crop, on the same acres. You may elect ECO regardless of your farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan, or STAX, on their planted cotton acres.

**More Information**

For more information on ARC and PLC, visit farmers.gov/arc-plc.

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**USDA Offers New Forest Management Incentive for Conservation Reserve Program**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making available $12 million for use in making payments to forest landowners with land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in exchange for their implementing healthy forest management practices. Existing CRP participants can now sign up for the Forest Management Incentive (FMI), which provides financial incentives to landowners with land in CRP to encourage proper tree thinning and other practices.

Right now, less than 10% of land currently enrolled in CRP is dedicated to forestland. But, these nearly 2 million acres of CRP forestland, if properly managed, can have enormous benefits for natural resources by reducing soil erosion, protecting water quality, increasing water quantity, and diversifying local farm operations and rural economies.

Only landowners and agricultural producers with active CRP contracts involving forest cover can enroll. However, this does not include active CRP contracts that expire within two years. Existing
CRP participants interested in tree thinning and prescribed burning must comply with the standards and specifications established in their CRP contract.

CRP participants will receive the incentive payment once tree thinning and/or other authorized forest management practices are completed. The incentive payment is the lower of:

- The actual cost of completing the practice; or
- 75% of the payment rate offered by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) if the practice is offered through NRCS conservation programs.

CRP signup is currently open. FSA will announce deadline later this year. Interested producers should contact their local FSA county office.

### Selected Interest Rates for March

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loan Type</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-Day Treasury Bill</td>
<td>0.125%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Operating Loans - Direct</td>
<td>1.375%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Ownership Loans - Direct</td>
<td>2.750%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Ownership Loans - Direct Down payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Loans</td>
<td>2.375%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 Years)</td>
<td>0.875%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodity Loans</td>
<td>0.125%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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).