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USDA Expands and Renews Conservation Reserve Program

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program’s role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including $330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and $25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement today at the White House National Climate Task Force meeting to demonstrate USDA’s commitment to putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

The Biden-Harris Administration is working to leverage USDA conservation programs for climate mitigation, including continuing to invest in innovation partnership programs like RCPP and On-Farm Trials as well as strengthening programs like CRP to enhance their impacts.

Conservation Reserve Program

USDA’s goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world’s largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.
CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.

CRP’s long-term goal is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, improve soil health and carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a number of signups, including the general signup and continuous signup, which are both open now, as well as a CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing 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. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

- **Adjusting soil rental rates.** This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.
- **Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%**. This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.
- **Increasing payments for water quality practices**. Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.
- **Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate**. This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

Enhanced Natural Resource Benefits

To boost impacts for natural resources, FSA is:

- **Moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup**. Unlike the general signup, producers can sign up year-round for the continuous signup and be eligible for additional incentives.
- **Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones**. This aims to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups.**
Expanding Prairie Pothole Soil Health and Watershed Programs

CRP has two pilot programs — the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) and the Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers 30-year contracts (CLEAR30).

- For SHIPP, which is a short-term option (3, 4, or 5-year contracts) for farmers to plant cover on less productive agricultural lands, FSA will hold a 2021 signup in the Prairie Pothole states.
- The CLEAR30 pilot, a long-term option through CRP, will be expanded from the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay pilot regions to nationwide.

Increasing Technical Assistance Capacity and Impact Measurement

USDA technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is critical to enable producers to plan and implement conservation practices that are appropriate for their needs. To ensure increased enrollment and support for producers, USDA is increasing NRCS technical assistance capacity for CRP by $140 million.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA will invest $10 million in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

To learn more about updates to CRP, download our “What's New with CRP” fact sheet.

Partnership Programs Contribute to Priorities

In addition to changes to CRP, Secretary Vilsack also announced significant investments for climate-smart policies. First, NRCS is investing $330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to address climate change and other natural resources challenges. NRCS will announce more details on the RCPP project selections on April 26.

Second, NRCS is investing $25 million in proposals for On-Farm Trials, which are part of the Conservation Innovation Grants program. NRCS is seeking proposals through June 21. Project priorities include climate-smart agricultural solutions and soil health practices.

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.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices,
making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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**USDA Offers Disaster Assistance for Producers Facing Inclement Weather**

Severe weather events create significant challenges and often result in catastrophic loss for agricultural producers.

Despite every attempt to mitigate risk, your operation may suffer losses. USDA offers several programs to help with recovery.

**Risk Management**

For producers who have risk protection through Federal Crop Insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), we want to remind you to report crop damage to your crop insurance agent or the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

If you have crop insurance, contact your agency within 72 hours of discovering damage and be sure to follow up in writing within 15 days. If you have NAP coverage, file a Notice of Loss (also called Form CCC-576) within 15 days of loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

**Disaster Assistance**

USDA also offers disaster assistance programs, which is especially important to livestock, fruit and vegetable, specialty and perennial crop producers who have fewer risk management options.

First, the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage. And, the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) provides assistance to producers of grazed forage crop acres that have suffered crop loss due to a qualifying drought. Livestock producers suffering the impacts of drought can also request Emergency Haying and Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres.

Next, the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) provides cost share assistance to rehabilitate and replant tree, vines or shrubs loss experienced by orchards and nurseries. This complements NAP or crop insurance coverage, which cover the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases.

For LIP and ELAP, you will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For TAP, you will need to file a program application within 90 days.
Documentation

It’s critical to keep accurate records to document all losses following this devastating cold weather event. Livestock producers are advised to document beginning livestock numbers by taking time and date-stamped video or pictures prior to after the loss.

Other common documentation options include:

- Purchase records
- Production records
- Vaccination records
- Bank or other loan documents
- Third-party certification

Other Programs

The Emergency Conservation Program and Emergency Forest Restoration Program can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

Additionally, FSA offers a variety of loans available including emergency loans that are triggered by disaster declarations and operating loans that can assist producers with credit needs. You can use these loans to replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, or refinance farm-related debts, and other needs.

Meanwhile, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial resources through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes.

Additional Resources

Additional details – including payment calculations – can be found on our NAP, ELAP, LIP, and TAP fact sheets. On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool can help you determine program or loan options.

While we never want to have to implement disaster programs, we are here to help. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center. All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments because of the pandemic.

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans
The USDA Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership loans can help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

There are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a Direct Farm Ownership Microloan option for smaller financial needs up to $50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a joint financing loan is $600,000, and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

The operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about farm loans, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

After Identifying Gaps in Previous Aid, USDA Announces ‘Pandemic Assistance for Producers’ to Distribute Resources More Equitably

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA is establishing new programs and efforts to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions. The new initiative—USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers—will reach a broader set of producers than in previous COVID-19 aid programs.

USDA is dedicating at least $6 billion toward the new programs. The Department will also develop rules for new programs that will put a greater emphasis on outreach to small and socially disadvantaged producers, specialty crop and organic producers, timber harvesters, as well as provide support for the food supply chain and producers of renewable fuel, among others. Existing programs like the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will fall within the new initiative and, where statutory authority allows, will be refined to better address the needs of producers.

USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers was needed, said Vilsack, after a review of previous COVID-19 assistance programs targeting farmers identified a number of gaps and disparities in how assistance was distributed as well as inadequate outreach to underserved producers and smaller and medium operations.
USDA will reopen sign-up for CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning on April 5, 2021. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has committed at least $2.5 million to improve outreach for CFAP 2 and will establish partnerships with organizations with strong connections to socially disadvantaged communities to ensure they are informed and aware of the application process.

**USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers – 4 Parts**

*Part 1: Investing $6 Billion to Expand Help & Assistance to More Producers*

USDA will dedicate at least $6 billion to develop a number of new programs or modify existing proposals using discretionary funding from the Consolidated Appropriations Act and other coronavirus funding that went unspent by the previous administration.

*Part 2: Adding $500 Million of New Funding to Existing Programs*

USDA expects to begin investing approximately $500 million in expedited assistance through several existing programs this spring, with most by April 30.

*Part 3: Carrying Out Formula Payments under CFAP 1, CFAP 2, CFAP AA*

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, enacted December 2020 requires FSA to make certain payments to producers according to a mandated formula. USDA is now expediting these provisions because there is no discretion involved in interpreting such directives, they are self-enacting.

- An increase in CFAP 1 payment rates for cattle. Cattle producers with approved CFAP 1 applications will automatically receive these payments beginning in April. Information on the additional payment rates for cattle can be found on [farmers.gov/cfap](http://farmers.gov/cfap). Eligible producers do not need to submit new applications, since payments are based on previously approved CFAP 1 application. USDA estimates additional payments of more than $1.1 billion to more than 410,000 producers, according to the mandated formula.

- Additional CFAP assistance of $20 per acre for producers of eligible crops identified as CFAP 2 flat-rate or price-trigger crops beginning in April. This includes alfalfa, corn, cotton, hemp, peanuts, rice, sorghum, soybeans, sugar beets and wheat, among other crops. FSA will automatically issue payments to eligible price trigger and flat-rate crop producers based on the eligible acres included on their CFAP 2 applications. Eligible producers do not need to submit a new CFAP 2 application. For a list of all eligible row-crops, visit [farmers.gov/cfap](http://farmers.gov/cfap). USDA estimates additional payments of more than $4.5 billion to more than 560,000 producers, according to the mandated formula.

- USDA will finalize routine decisions and minor formula adjustments on applications and begin processing payments for certain applications filed as part of the CFAP Additional Assistance program in the following categories:
  - Applications filed for pullets and turfgrass sod;
  - A formula correction for row-crop producer applications to allow producers with a non-Actual Production History (APH) insurance policy to use 100% of the 2019 Agriculture Risk Coverage-County Option (ARC-CO) benchmark yield in the calculation;
Sales commodity applications revised to include insurance indemnities, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program payments, and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus payments, as required by statute; and Additional payments for swine producers and contract growers under CFAP Additional Assistance remain on hold and are likely to require modifications to the regulation as part of the broader evaluation and future assistance; however, FSA will continue to accept applications from interested producers.

Part 4: Reopening CFAP 2 Sign-Up to Improve Access & Outreach to Underserved Producers

As noted above, USDA will re-open sign-up for of CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning on April 5, 2021.

- FSA has committed at least $2.5 million to establish partnerships and direct outreach efforts intended to improve outreach for CFAP 2 and will cooperate with grassroots organizations with strong connections to socially disadvantaged communities to ensure they are informed and aware of the application process.

Please visit [www.farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov) for additional information and announcements under the USDA Pandemic Assistance to Producers initiative, which will help to expand and more equitably distribute financial assistance to producers and farming operations during the COVID-19 national emergency.

Celebrate Earth Day with USDA and Climate-Smart Agriculture

Our nation’s farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners have long been stewards of our lands and natural resources. Today, on Earth Day, we re-affirm USDA’s commitment to support and partner with you in building resilient agricultural and forest systems to provide for local communities, sequester carbon, and address climate change.

[Learn More](#)

Conservation Stewardship Program Applications due April 30, 2021

Whether it’s setting conservation and management goals or striving to meet those you already have for your Oklahoma operation, there’s a great chance that the staff of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help. One proven way to do so is through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).
However, NRCS reminds Oklahoma producers that the next deadline for CSP applications to be considered for funding this year is just days away, April 30, 2021.

The equation for success with the program is simple: CSP pays participants for conservation performance, so the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Oklahoma's challenges and opportunities vary across the state from area to area. Rather than a one-size-fits-all, CSP addresses various resource concerns including soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, and animal resources as well as energy.

How does it accomplish this? CSP provides two possible types of payments through five-year contracts: annual payments for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices; and supplemental payments for adopting a resource-conserving crop rotation.

Applicants in Oklahoma may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian tribes that meet the stewardship threshold for at least two priority resource concerns when they apply. They must also agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional priority resource concern by the end of the contract. Producers must have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract.

Eligible lands include private and tribal agricultural lands, cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland, and nonindustrial private forest land. CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or type of crops produced, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas.

While visitors are not currently allowed in USDA Service Centers in Oklahoma, our program delivery staff will be in the office, and they will be working with our producers by phone, and, using online tools.

You can locate your local USDA Service Center at farmers.gov/service-locator. While applications are accepted throughout the year, interested Oklahoma producers should submit applications to their local NRCS office by April 30, 2021 to ensure their applications are considered for 2021 funding.

Payments are made soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous year.

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**Applying for Guaranteed Conservation Loans**

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Guaranteed Conservation Loans are available for applicants who want 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.