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Puerto Rico FSA Newsletter

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USDA Climate Hub Building Block: Conservation of Sensitive Lands

USDA Climate Hubs are working with producers, ranchers, pasture and forest landowners to effectively partner in ways to help reduce climate change. To aid in this partnership, USDA established the 10 Building Blocks for Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry.

One such Building Block is the "Conservation of Sensitive Lands". The term "sensitive lands" denotes soils and landscapes that are valuable due to properties (e.g., high organic matter, wet hydrology) and/or function (e.g., wildlife habitat, filtration, and hydrologic storage). Typical examples of these soils are organic rich histosols, floodplains, or wetlands along riparian areas. Properties and functions of these soils are easily disrupted from agricultural or urban land use.

Sensitive lands that are used for agricultural production can be protected by changes in land use (long-term cover). This reduction in land use intensity can

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To find contact information for your local office go to

www.fsa.usda.gov/pr

provide multiple environmental benefits, including substantial GHG mitigation that occurs as carbon is sequestered or preserved in soils and vegetation.

When land is removed from crop production, several activities—including tillage, nitrogen fertilization, and energy use—are substantially reduced or eliminated, generating additional GHG mitigation.

FSA and NRCS are committed to identifying these sensitive lands and encouraging landowners, farmers, and ranchers to voluntarily adopt conservation systems--using financial and technical assistance--to generate GHG benefits. To read more about Conservation of Sensitive Lands, click the following link:

http://www.usda.gov/oce/climate_change/building_blocks/4_SensitiveLands.pdf

For more information about the USDA Climate Hubs click here:

<http://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/>

Dairy Producers Can Enroll to Protect Milk Production Margins

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds dairy producers to enroll for 2017 coverage in the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy) by Sept. 30, 2016. The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating dairy producers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the producer.

The Margin Protection Program gives participating dairy producers the flexibility to select coverage levels best suited for their operation. Enrollment began July 1 and ends on Sept. 30, 2016, for coverage in calendar year 2017. Participating farmers will remain in the program through 2018 and pay a minimum \$100 administrative fee each year. Producers have the option of selecting a different coverage level during open enrollment each year.

USDA has a web tool to help producers determine the level of coverage under the Margin Protection Program that will provide them with the strongest safety net under a variety of conditions. The online resource, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool, allows dairy farmers to quickly and easily combine unique operation data and other key variables to calculate their coverage needs based on price projections. Producers can also review historical data or estimate future coverage needs, based on data projections. The secure site can be accessed via computer, Smartphone or tablet 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To complete enrollment, producers must make coverage elections during the enrollment period and pay the annual \$100 administrative fee that provides basic catastrophic protection that covers 90 percent of milk production at a \$4 margin coverage level. For additional premiums, operations can protect 25 to 90 percent of production history with margin coverage levels from \$4.50 to \$8, in 50 cent increments. Once enrolled, dairy operations are required to participate through 2018 by making coverage elections each year. Producers can mail the appropriate form to the producer's administrative county FSA office, along with applicable fees without necessitating a trip to the local FSA

office. If electing higher coverage for 2017, dairy producers can either pay the premium in full at the time of enrollment or pay 100 percent of the premium by Sept. 1, 2017. Premium fees may be paid directly to FSA or producers can work with their milk handlers to remit premiums on their behalf.

On July 1, 2016, FSA started accepting applications for intergenerational transfers, allowing program participants who added an adult child, grandchild or spouse to the operation during calendar year 2014 or 2015, or between Jan. 1 and June 30, 2016, to increase production history by the new cows bought into the operation by the new family members. For intergenerational transfers occurring on or after July 1, 2016, notification to FSA must be made within 60 days of purchasing the additional cows.

Dairy operations enrolling in the new program must meet conservation compliance provisions and cannot participate in the Livestock Gross Margin Dairy Insurance Program.

For more information, visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy or stop by a local FSA office to learn more about the Margin Protection Program. To find a local FSA office in your area, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Extends Margin Protection Program for Dairy Enrollment Deadline

USDA announced that it will extend the deadline for dairy producers to enroll in the Margin Protection Program (MPP) for Dairy to Dec. 16, 2016, from the previous deadline of Sept. 30. This voluntary dairy safety net program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating dairy producers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the producer. A USDA web tool, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool, allows dairy producers to calculate levels of coverage available from MPP based on price projections.

USDA Provides Funds to Geographically Disadvantaged Agricultural Producers Announces Enrollment Period for 2016

Program helps offset transportation costs for farmers and ranchers outside the contiguous U.S.

USDA will issue payments to agricultural producers enrolled in the Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program (RTCP) for fiscal year 2015. USDA will provide \$1.9 million nationally to help offset transportation costs for geographically disadvantaged producers.

The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorized the program, which allows farmers and ranchers in Alaska, Hawaii and insular areas including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau and the Virgin Islands of the United States to recover transportation costs.

Payments are calculated based on the costs incurred for transportation of the agricultural commodity

or inputs, subject to an \$8,000 limit per producer per federal fiscal year. The payments are scheduled to begin June 6, 2016. Because total claims exceeded available funds, payments to recipients will be reduced by 0.6621465 percent.

Enrollment for fiscal year 2016 will begin on July 18, 2016, and end on Sept. 9, 2016. Applicants must submit their application to their administrative county FSA Office by Sept. 9, 2016. Applicants will have until Nov. 2, 2016, to provide supporting documentation. Payments for fiscal year 2016 will be made once all supporting documentation has been reviewed and approved.

For more information on RTCP, farmers and ranchers in the eligible areas can visit their FSA county office or the FSA website at www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Announces Safety Net Assistance for Milk Producers Due to Tightening Dairy Margins

May/June 2016 Average Margins Below \$6

USDA today announced approximately \$11.2 million in financial assistance to American dairy producers enrolled in the 2016 Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy). The payment rate for May/June 2016 will be the largest since the program began in 2014. The narrowing margin between milk prices and the cost of feed triggered the payments, as provided for by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Dairy producers should evaluate their enrollment options for 2017, as the enrollment period ends Dec. 16, 2016.

Dairy producers who enrolled at the \$6 through \$8 margin trigger coverage level will receive payments. MPP-Dairy payments are triggered when the national average margin (the difference between the price of milk and the cost of feed) falls below a level of coverage selected by the dairy producer, ranging from \$4 to \$8, for a specified consecutive two-month period. All final USDA prices for milk and feed components required to determine the national average margin for May/June 2016 were released on July 29, 2016.

The national average margin for the May/June 2016 two-month consecutive period is \$5.76277 per hundred weight (cwt.).

State specific payment amounts can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy.

To learn more about the Margin Protection Program for dairy, visit the Farm Service Agency (FSA) online at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy or stop by a local FSA office. Producers may visit www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool to calculate the best levels of coverage for their dairy operation. To find an FSA office near you, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

FSA Offers Improved Program to Limit Losses on Forages

Reduced forage quality is now considered a production loss for weather disaster assistance coverage under the new buy-up provisions of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Noninsured Crop Disaster

Assistance Program (NAP).

This safety net is important for cattlemen who produce non-insurable forages for feeding livestock. Previously, FSA only considered a decrease in overall forage tonnage produced when determining if the producer suffered a compensable loss after a qualifying weather event. Under FSA's new NAP buy-up provisions, a decrease in forage quality – such as protein content – is also considered.

To receive coverage for the 2017 crop year, producers must enroll their eligible forage in NAP by December 1, 2016. Beginning, limited resource and targeted underserved farmers or ranchers are eligible for a waiver of the NAP service fee and a 50 percent premium reduction in buy-up provisions.

For more information on NAP, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/nap.

FSAfarm+, FSA's Customer Self-Service Portal

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) has launched a new tool to provide farmers and ranchers with remote access to their personal farm information using their home computers. Farmers and ranchers can now view, print or export their personal farm data all without visiting an FSA county office.

The program, known as FSAfarm+, provides you with secure access to view your personal FSA data, such as base and yields, Conservation Reserve Program data, other conservation program acreage, Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation status information, field boundaries, farm imagery, name and address details, contact information and membership interest and shares in the operation. This data will be available in real time, at no cost to the producer and allow operators and owners to export and print farm records, including maps. Producers also can electronically share their data with a crop insurance agent from their own personal computer.

Farm operators and owners first will need "Level 2 eAuthentication" to access the webportal. This level of security ensures that personal information is protected for each user. Level 2 access can be obtained by going to www.eauth.usda.gov, completing the required information and then visiting your local FSA office to finalize access.

For more information on FSAfarm+, the customer self-service portal, contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA county office, click <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Results

More Than 800,000 Acres Selected Through Highly Competitive Application Rounds

USDA announced the enrollment of more than 800,000 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Through CRP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) helps farmers offset the costs of restoring, enhancing and protecting certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and strengthen wildlife habitat. Farmers' and ranchers' participation in CRP continues to provide numerous benefits to our nation, including helping reduce emissions of harmful greenhouse gases and providing resiliency to future weather changes.

A nationwide acreage limit was established for this program in the 2014 Farm Bill, capping the total number of acres that may be enrolled at 24 million for fiscal years 2017 and 2018. At the same time, USDA has experienced a record demand from farmers and ranchers interested in participating in the voluntary program. As of March 2016, 23.8 million acres were enrolled in CRP, with 1.7 million acres

set to expire this fall.

Over three million acres have been offered for enrollment this year across the three main categories within CRP, with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) receiving over 26,000 offers to enroll more than 1.8 million acres during the general enrollment period, and over 4,600 offers to enroll more than one million acres in the new CRP Grasslands program. Coming off a record-setting 2015 continuous enrollment of over 860,000 acres, more than 364,000 acres already have been accepted for 2016 in the CRP continuous enrollment, triple the pace of last year.

FSA will accept 411,000 acres in general enrollment, the most competitive selection in the history of the program, with the acreage providing record high conservation benefits. USDA selected offers by weighing environmental factors plus cost, including wildlife enhancement, water quality, soil erosion, enduring benefits, and air quality.

The results of the first-ever enrollment period for CRP Grasslands, FSA will also accept 101,000 acres in the program, providing participants with financial assistance for establishing approved grasses, trees and shrubs on pasture and rangeland that can continue to be grazed. More than 70 percent of these acres are diverse native grasslands under threat of conversion, and more than 97 percent of the acres have a new, veteran or underserved farmer or rancher as a primary producer. FSA continues to accept CRP Grasslands offers and will conduct another ranking period later this year.

Participants in CRP 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 on marginally productive agricultural lands. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation or contact a local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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) is offering farm ownership microloans, creating a new financing avenue for farmers to buy and improve property. These microloans are 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, which celebrates its third anniversary this week, 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 have gone to new farmers.

Now, microloans will be available to also help with farm land 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>.

Save Time – Make an Appointment with FSA

Producers are encouraged to call their local FSA office to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of their time and to make sure FSA staff is available to tend to their important business needs. Please call your local FSA office ahead of your visit to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that might be needed during your appointment. To find your local FSA office, visit: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

Selected Interest Rates for September 2016

Farm Operating Loans — Direct 2.125%

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 3.125%

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher 1.50%

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).