

April 2018



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Virginia FSA State Newsletter

Virginia FSA State Office

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USDA Working to Bring Broadband to Rural Areas

Having access to quality high-speed broadband on a reliable network is becoming more and more critical for USDA-Farm Service Agency's customers to have in their farming operations. Many farm operations rely off of high speed broadband to market products, communicate with customers, and complete banking transactions. Unfortunately, in rural parts of Virginia, only 55% of homes have access to high-speed broadband according to a study by the Virginia Department of Commerce that was published in the Washington Post on May 26, 2017.

High-speed broadband is now just as critical as having roads, bridges, and airports in terms of economic development. President Trump has made it a priority to rebuild American infrastructure and forge a path towards greater prosperity. The president's infrastructure agenda directs 25 percent of new federal money—

Hours

Monday - Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

State Office Staff

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\$50 billion of \$200 billion—to rural America. USDA is working to help improve broadband access in rural areas nationwide by providing funding and technical assistance to projects to deliver broadband. Broadband will help communities to improve agriculture, food production and quality of life.

In addition to the infrastructure agenda, the FY 2018 Omnibus Spending Package passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump in March 2018 includes \$600 million for a new pilot grant/loan program to provide broadband to underserved rural areas. This new pilot broadband program creates new opportunities for a wide range of entities to bring broadband e-Connectivity to rural communities, including rural telephone and broadband providers; rural electric co-ops; private firms; nonprofits; and governments. Investing in broadband can strengthen rural economic growth and improve a farmer's ability to monitor market conditions, weather forecasts, and complete online banking.

USDA Rural Development is now accepting applications through May 14 in the [Community Connect](#) grant program. Grants from \$100,000 to \$3 million are available to state and local governments, federally-recognized tribes, nonprofits and for-profit corporations. Applicants must be able to provide a 15 percent match on the desired grant amount. The funds must be used to provide broadband service at a minimum rate-of-data transmission of 25 megabits downstream and 3 megabits upstream, which is the speed benchmark that the Federal Communications Commission has officially adopted for broadband connectivity. Awardees must use USDA funding to offer free broadband service to all critical community facilities in their proposed service areas for two years and provide a community center with free broadband service for two years.

USDA Rural Development is also accepting applications through June 4 in the [Distance Learning and Telemedicine \(DLT\)](#) grant program. The grants range from \$50,000 to \$500,000 to use broadband e-Connectivity to improve access to health care and educational services in rural communities. The grants can be used to finance telecommunication equipment, computer networks, and advanced technologies to support job training, academic instruction, or access to specialized medical care in rural areas. Most state and local government entities, federally-recognized tribes, nonprofits, for-profit businesses, or a consortia of these are eligible to apply.

Proposals for projects whose primary purpose is to provide opioid prevention, treatment, or recovery will receive 10 priority points when applications are scored. USDA is approaching the opioid misuse crisis with a dedicated urgency because it impacts the quality of life, economic opportunity, and prosperity in rural communities. Rural Development will also provide up to 10 priority points for projects that offer access to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses.

By providing rural America access to high speed broadband it help enhance access for FSA's producers in remote areas and allow our

rural customers a new way to connect with the USDA. Having access to high speed broadband in rural America will save FSA producers time traveling to our local service centers. This will allow the Farm Service Agency to help achieve Secretary Purdue's vision to make USDA the most efficient, most effective and most customer-focused department in the federal government.

New Improvement to Streamline Crop Reporting

Update Lets Farmers and Ranchers Report Common Acreage Information Once

Farmers and ranchers filing crop acreage reports with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and participating insurance providers approved by the Risk Management Agency (RMA) now can provide the common information from their acreage reports at one office and the information will be electronically shared with the other location.

This new process is part of the USDA Acreage Crop Reporting Streamlining Initiative (ACRSI). This interagency collaboration also includes participating private crop insurance agents and insurance companies, all working to streamline the information collected from farmers and ranchers who participate in USDA programs.

Once filing at one location, data that's important to both FSA and RMA will be securely and electronically shared with the other location avoiding redundant and duplicative reporting, as well as saving farmers and ranchers time.

USDA has been working to streamline the crop reporting process for agricultural producers, who have expressed concerns with providing the same basic common information for multiple locations. In 2013, USDA consolidated the deadlines to 15 dates for submitting these reports, down from the previous 54 dates at RMA and 17 dates for FSA. USDA representatives believe farmers and ranchers will experience a notable improvement in the coming weeks as they approach the peak season for crop reporting later this summer.

More than 93 percent of all annual reported acres to FSA and RMA now are eligible for the common data reporting, and USDA is exploring adding more crops. Producers must still visit both locations to validate and sign acreage reports, complete maps or provide program-specific information. The common data from the first-filed acreage report will now be available to pre-populate and accelerate completion of the second report. Plans are underway at USDA to continue building upon the framework with additional efficiencies at a future date.

Farmers and ranchers are also reminded that they can now access their FSA farm information from the convenience of their home computer. Producers can see field boundaries, images of the farm, conservation status, operator and owner information and much more.

The new customer self-service portal, known as **FSAFarm+**, gives farmers and ranchers online access to securely view, print or export their personal farm data. To enroll in the online service, producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for details. To find a local FSA office in your area, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Reporting Organic Crops

Producers who want to use the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) organic price and selected the "organic" option on their NAP application must report their crops as organic.

When certifying organic acres, the buffer zone acreage must be included in the organic acreage.

Producers must also provide a current organic plan, organic certificate or documentation from a certifying agent indicating an organic plan is in effect. Documentation must include:

- name of certified individuals
- address
- telephone number
- effective date of certification
- certificate number
- list of commodities certified
- name and address of certifying agent
- a map showing the specific location of each field of certified organic, including the buffer zone acreage.

Certification exemptions are available for producers whose annual gross agricultural income from organic sales totals \$5,000 or less. Although exempt growers are not required to provide a written certificate, they are still required to provide a map showing the specific location of each field of certified organic, transitional and buffer zone acreage.

For questions about reporting organic crops, contact your local FSA office. To find your local office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Organic Certification Cost Share Program

The Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) provides cost share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). Certified operations may receive up to 75 percent of their certification costs paid from Oct. 1, 2017, through Sept. 30, 2018, not to exceed \$750 per certification scope.

Eligible costs include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage.

Ineligible costs include equipment, materials, supplies, transitional certification fees, late fees and inspections necessary to address National Organic Program regulatory violations.

Producers and handlers may submit OCCSP applications to FSA county offices or they may apply through participating State Agencies, which will be listed at <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index> as their agreements to administer the program are finalized.

The FSA OCCSP application form is available at [USDA's eForms site](#), by selecting "Browse forms" and entering "OCCSP" in the "title or keywords" field on the search page.

To learn more about organic certification cost share, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic or contact a local FSA office by visiting <http://offices.usda.gov>.

FSA Offers Disaster Assistance for Qualifying Tree, Bush and Vine Losses

Orchardists and nursery tree growers who experience losses from natural disasters during calendar year 2018 must submit a TAP application either 90 calendar days after the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent. TAP was authorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 as a permanent disaster program. TAP provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Eligible tree types include trees, bushes or vines that produce an annual crop for commercial purposes. Nursery trees include ornamental, fruit, nut and Christmas trees that are produced for commercial sale. Trees used for pulp or timber are ineligible.

To qualify for TAP, orchardists must suffer a qualifying tree, bush or vine loss in excess of 15 percent mortality from an eligible natural disaster, plus an adjustment for normal mortality. The eligible trees, bushes or vines must have been owned when the natural disaster occurred; however, eligible growers are not required to own the land on which the eligible trees, bushes and vines were planted.

If the TAP application is approved, the eligible trees, bushes and vines must be replaced within 12 months from the date the application is approved. The cumulative total quantity of acres planted to trees, bushes or vines, for which a producer can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 500 acres annually.

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) are a resource to 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.

Depending on the applicant's needs, 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 \$300,000 and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

To be eligible, 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 FSA Loan programs, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Maintaining Good Credit History

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Farm Loan programs require that applicants have a satisfactory credit history. A credit report is requested for all FSA direct farm loan applicants. These reports are reviewed to verify outstanding debts, if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash flow.

Information found on a customer's credit report is strictly confidential and is used only as an aid in conducting FSA business.

Our farm loan staff will discuss options with you if you have an unfavorable credit report and will provide a copy of your report. If you dispute the accuracy of the information on the credit report, it is up to you to contact the issuing credit report company to resolve any errors or inaccuracies.

There are multiple ways to remedy an unfavorable credit score.

- Make sure to pay bills on time. Setting up automatic payments or automated reminders can be an effective way to remember payment due dates.
- Pay down existing debt.
- Keep your credit card balances low.
- Avoid suddenly opening or closing existing credit accounts. FSA's farm loan staff will guide you through the process, which may require you to reapply for a loan after improving or correcting your credit report. For more information on FSA farm loan programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Selected Interest Rates for April 2018

90-Day Treasury Bill - 1.50%

Farm Operating Loans — Direct - 3.50%

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct - 4.00%

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

Emergency Loans - 3.75%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years) - 2.375%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) - 2.625%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) - 2.750%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) - 2.875%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) - 2.875%

Commodity Loans 1996-Present - 3.000%

Dates to Remember

May 11:

Deadline for eligible 2016 cotton producers to submit Cotton Cost Share Ginning Program application.

May 31:

Deadline to request 2017 crop corn, cotton, grain sorghum and soybean marketing assistance loans (MAL) for stored commodities.

Jul. 16:

2018 acreage reporting deadline for corn, cotton, cover crop, CRP, grain sorghum, peanuts, soybeans, tobacco and vegetables.

Aug. 1:

Deadline to sign and submit your 2018 ARCPLC Contracts.

Cont.:

Submit CREP Offers.

Cont.:

Timely report changes in your farming operation to the County Office to update your payment eligibility and your CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan for 2018.

Cont.:

Submit your AD-1026 prior to forest land being cleared for agricultural use and new ground (hay and pasture) to be planted to a row crop or vegetable.

Cont.:

Need on farm grain, hay or cold storage, consider FSFL for your storage needs. Contact your local FSA Office for more details.

For more information on bulletin subjects or details regarding your GovDelivery subscription with the Virginia FSA State Office, contact Diane Lenoir-Giles at diane.lenoir-giles@va.usda.gov or call at 804-287-1537.

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