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Washington State FSA Newsletter

Washington State Farm Service Agency

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Conservation Reserve Program Acres Available

FSA has acres available in the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program under the following initiatives: Highly Erodible Land (HELI) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

Participants in CRP establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees 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. Landowners with successful bids will work with FSA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop conservation plans and ten-year CRP contracts.

Jesus Limon, Member
Sheryl Hagen-Zakarison,
Member

To find contact information
for your local office go to
www.fsa.usda.gov/wa

Highly erodible lands are fragile and vulnerable to erosion. For farmers and landowners with cropland exceeding an Erosion Index >20, establishing grass or tree cover will help maintain the long-term health of the land. These lands are eligible for CRP-HELI. Both new land and CRP set to expire on September 30, 2017 are eligible for HELI at this time. Land not previously enrolled must have been considered cropped or in a conserving use, such as summer fallow, for at least 4 of the 6 years 2008-2013.

The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative, part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), is an initiative to improve wildlife habitat. SAFE acres are available in the following SAFE projects and counties: Palouse Prairie SAFE (Whitman, Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties), Sage and Sharp-Tailed Grouse SAFE (Douglas Co.) and the Shrub-Steppe SAFE (Lincoln, Grant, Adams, Okanogan counties).

To learn more about the Continuous CRP initiatives or to make an appointment, contact your [county FSA office](#).

CRP Early Out Available for Certain Situations

FSA is offering an early termination opportunity for certain Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, making it easier to transfer property to the next generation of farmers and ranchers, including family members. The land that is eligible for the early termination is among the least environmentally sensitive land enrolled in CRP.

Normally if a landowner terminates a CRP contract early, they are required to repay all previous payments plus interest. The new policy waives this repayment if the land is transferred to a beginning farmer or rancher or a member of socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher through a sale or lease with an option to buy. The party acquiring the land can be either a family member or unrelated. With CRP enrollment close to the Congressionally-mandated cap of 24 million acres, the early termination will also allow USDA to enroll other land with higher conservation value elsewhere.

Acres terminated early from CRP under these land tenure provisions will be eligible for priority

enrollment consideration into the CRP Grasslands, if eligible; or the Conservation Stewardship Program or Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

To be eligible for this early out, the land must be enrolled in an eligible general CRP practice, must have an erodibility index of 15 or less as determined by CRP policy, and be at least 120 feet from a perennial water source. Continuous CRP, SAFE, and CREP are not eligible.

For more information about CRP and to find out if your acreage is eligible for early contract termination, contact your [county FSA office](#).

Organic Producers and Handlers May Apply for Certification

Starting March 20, organic producers and handlers will be able to visit Farm Service Agency offices to apply for federal reimbursement to assist with the cost of receiving and maintaining organic or transitional certification.

USDA reimburses organic producers up to 75 percent of the cost of organic certification, but only about half of the nation's organic operations currently participate in the program. Starting March 20, USDA will provide a uniform, streamlined process for organic producers and handlers to apply for organic cost-share assistance either by mail or in person.

USDA is making changes to increase participation in the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program (NOCCSP) and at the same time provide more opportunities for organic producers to access other USDA programs, such as disaster protection and loans for farms, facilities and marketing.

Eligible producers include any certified producers or handlers who have paid organic or transitional certification fees to a [USDA-accredited certifying agent](#). Application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/ arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage are all eligible for a cost-share reimbursement from USDA.

Once certified, producers and handlers are eligible to receive reimbursement for up to 75 percent of certification costs each year up to a maximum of \$750 per certification scope—crops, livestock, wild crops and handling. Transitional certification and state organic program fees are included.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture administers a USDA-approved organic certification program. WSDA has offered cost-share to producers for organic certification costs. WSDA expects to continue to offer certification cost-share. FSA will collaborate with WSDA to enhance efforts instead of duplicating efforts.

To learn more about organic certification cost-share, please visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic or contact your [county FSA office](#).

Crop Insurance Deadlines Approach in the Northwest

Farmers Need to Make Insurance Decisions Soon

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminds farmers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington that the final date to purchase or modify federal crop insurance coverage on most 2017 spring-planted crops is approaching. Farmers can also purchase the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection policy for 2017 crops.

For 2017 spring-planted onions in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, and cabbage in Oregon and Washington, the final date to purchase or modify crop insurance is February 1. The date for all other spring-seeded crops (excluding wheat in counties with fall and spring planted types) is March 15.

Farmers interested in purchasing the Whole Farm Revenue Protection for 2017 also need to do so by March 15. More information about the product can be found on the RMA [Whole-Farm web page](#).

Farmers are encouraged to visit their crop insurance agent soon to learn specific details for the 2017 crop year. Crop insurance coverage decisions must be decided on or before the sales closing date.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the RMA [Agent Locator](#). Producers can use the RMA [Cost Estimator](#) to get a premium amount estimate of their insurance needs online. Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at www.rma.usda.gov.

USDA Expands Grasslands Conservation Program to Small-Scale Livestock Producers

Helping Dairy, Beef and Other Producers Protect Working Grasslands in 43 States

USDA will accept over 300,000 acres in 43 states that were offered by producers during the recent ranking period for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands enrollment with emphasis placed on small-scale livestock operations. Washington state had 3,195 acres accepted into the program. Through the voluntary CRP Grasslands program, grasslands threatened by development or conversion to row crops are maintained as livestock grazing areas, while providing important conservation benefits. Approximately 200,000 of the accepted acres were offered by small-scale livestock operations.

The most recent ranking period closed on Dec. 16, 2016, and included for the first time a CRP Grasslands practice specifically tailored for small-scale livestock grazing operations to encourage broader participation. Under this ranking period and for future periods, small-scale livestock operations with 140 or fewer grazing animal units (or the equivalent) can submit applications to enroll up to 200 acres of grasslands per farm. Larger operations may still make offers through the normal process. USDA met its goal of 200,000 acres under this small-scale initiative. The new practice for small-scale livestock grazing operations encourages greater diversity geographically and in all types of livestock operations. Visit <http://go.usa.gov/x9PFS> to view the complete list of acres accepted by state.

Participants in CRP Grasslands establish or maintain long-term, resource-conserving grasses and other plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. CRP Grasslands participants can use the land for livestock production (e.g. grazing or producing hay),

while following their conservation and grazing plans in order to maintain the cover. A goal of CRP Grasslands is to minimize conversion of grasslands either to row crops or to non-agricultural uses. Participants can receive annual payments of up to 75 percent of the county average grazing value of the land and up to 50 percent of the cost of cover practices like cross-fencing to support rotational grazing or improving pasture cover to benefit pollinators or other wildlife. Payment rates are \$15/acre/year in most of eastern Washington and range \$19-\$40/acre/year in western Washington.

USDA selects offers for enrollment based on six ranking factors: (1) current and future use, (2) new farmer/rancher or underserved producer involvement, (3) maximum grassland preservation, (4) vegetative cover, (5) environmental factors, and (6) pollinator habitat. Offers not selected in a ranking period are rolled over into the next ranking period.

Small livestock operations or other farming and ranching operations interested in participating in CRP Grasslands should contact your local [FSA office](#). To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

Prevent Payment Delays or Losses by Reporting Operation Changes

If you have bought or sold land, or if you have picked up or dropped rented land from your operation, or if there has been a death related to your farm operation, make sure you report the changes to your [county FSA office](#) as soon as possible. Remember, if you are participating in Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs, you will need to notify [NRCS](#) of your operation changes also.

You need to provide a copy of your deed or recorded land contract for purchased property for any land changes. Failure to maintain accurate records with FSA on all land you have an interest in can lead to possible program ineligibility and penalties. Making the record changes now will save you time in the spring. Make sure to update signature authorization when changes in the operation occur.

It is your responsibility to report changes timely so that records can be kept current and accurate which may prevent loss of program benefits. Contact your [county FSA office](#) if you need to report changes to your operation. If you participate in NRCS programs, contact your [county NRCS office](#) also.

Signature Problems Can Delay or Prevent Program Payments

Using the correct signature when doing business with FSA can save time and prevent a delay in program benefits. It is important to note that FSA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have different signature policies despite sharing paperwork and records. Pay attention to the signatures needed for each agency.

The following are FSA signature guidelines:

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

Note, by signing the applicable document, 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.

Examples of documents not approved for FAXED signatures include:

- Promissory note
- Assignment of payment
- Joint payment authorization

Acknowledgement of commodity certificate purchase.

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 shall not sign on behalf of each other as an authorized signatory for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations or other similar entities.

Any member of the 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 shall 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 [county FSA office](#).

No office? No problem! FSA Now Offers Text Message Alerts

Keep up with USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) News

Receive text message alerts from FSA while on-the-go, in the field, on the tractor or even on horseback.

Contact your local FSA office to subscribe to receive text message alerts on your cell phone and stay updated on:

- Deadline reminders
- Program notifications
- Reporting requirements
- Local outreach events.

Standard text messaging rates apply. Expect to receive no more than two text messages from FSA each month, on average. Participants may unsubscribe at any time.

Contact your local FSA office to subscribe to the text message alerts service. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Extension and WSDA Offer Food Safety Classes for Producers

Washington State University Extension has teamed up with the WA State Dept. of Agriculture to offer the FSPCA (Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance) – Preventive Controls for Human Food Training. This training is directed towards small and medium-sized specialty crop growers and processors in the state.

This 2.5 day course has been designed by the Food Safety Preventative Controls Alliance (FSPCA) in collaboration with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is currently the only course recognized by FDA at present in meeting their requirements. By successfully completing this course, you will meet the requirements as a FSPCA Preventive Controls Qualified Person who can manage a food safety preventive controls program in accordance with the Hazard Analysis and Preventive Controls Rule of the US Food and Drug Administration.

The next classes will be February 13 – 15, 2017 in Pullman and April 11-13, 2017 in Bothell. The classes are subsidized by a Specialty Crop Block Grant but do have a \$200 fee. Check <http://foodprocessing.wsu.edu/fsmapc/> for online registration and additional information or contact Cathy Blood, WSU Event Coordinator, blood@wsu.edu or 509-335-2845.

USDA Offers Loans for Portable Farm Storage and Handling Equipment

Portable Equipment Can Help Producers, including Small-Scale and Local Farmers, Get Products to Market Quickly

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides a financing option to help farmers purchase portable storage and handling equipment. The loans, which include a smaller microloan option with lower down payments, are designed to help producers, including new, small and mid-sized producers, grow their businesses and markets.

The microloan option allows applicants seeking less than \$50,000 to qualify for a reduced down payment of five percent and no requirement to provide three years of production history. Farms and ranches of all sizes are eligible. The microloan option is expected to be of particular benefit to smaller farms and ranches, and specialty crop producers who may not have access to commercial storage or on-farm storage after harvest. These producers can invest in equipment like conveyers, scales or refrigeration units and trucks that can store commodities before delivering them to markets. Producers do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply.

FSA significantly expanded the list of commodities eligible for Farm Storage Facility Loans. Eligible commodities include aquaculture; floriculture; fruits (including nuts) and vegetables; corn, grain sorghum, rice, oilseeds, oats, wheat, triticale, spelt, buckwheat, lentils, chickpeas, dry peas sugar, peanuts, barley, rye, hay, honey, hops, maple sap, unprocessed meat and poultry, eggs, milk,

cheese, butter, yogurt and renewable biomass. FSFL microloans can also be used to finance wash and pack equipment used post-harvest, before a commodity is placed in cold storage.

To learn more about Farm Storage Facility Loans, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport or contact a local FSA [county office](#).

ARC/PLC Enrollment Continues at FSA Offices

Producers on farms with base acres under the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, can enroll for the 2017 crop year at your local [county office](#) until **Aug. 1, 2017**.

Since shares and ownership of a farm can change year-to-year, producers on the farm must enroll by signing a contract each program year. If a farm is not enrolled during the 2017 enrollment period, the producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs for the 2017 crop if crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. Producers who made their elections in 2015 must still enroll during the 2017 enrollment period.

For more details regarding these programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc. To make an appointment, contact your [county FSA office](#).

Loan Servicing Help to Relieve Financial Stress

In the current financial climate, it can be challenging to make ends meet. Even the most efficient producers are realizing reduced profitability during the downturn in many agricultural sectors. For FSA direct loan borrowers, the Agency has several tools at its disposal to assist during times of financial stress.

Eligible borrowers may be able to take advantage of loan restructures, re-amortizations, deferrals, installment set-asides and many other options that can ensure financial viability for the future. If you are a borrower who may be unable to make payments on a loan, contact your local FSA farm loan team to learn about the options available to you.

Important Dates and Deadlines

Feb. 20, 2017 – FSA offices closed for President's Day.

March 15, 2017 – Deadline for applications for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP).

March 15, 2017 – Deadline to request 2017 NAP coverage for artichokes, beets (seed or fresh), buckwheat, camelina, carrots (for seed or fresh), small grain forages (wheat, barley, oats, peas), and any other spring planted crops not mentioned in other NAP application for coverage closing dates.

March 20, 2017 - FSA offices begin accepting applications for organic certification cost-share.

March 31, 2017 – Final date to request a 2016 crop Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) for wheat, barley, oats, honey, canola, crambe, flaxseed, rapeseed, and sesame seed.

May 31, 2017 – Final date to request a 2016 crop Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) for corn, chickpeas, dry peas, lentils, mustard seed, safflower seed, soybeans, sunflower seed, grain sorghum, and rice.

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).
