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NEWSLETTER



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Wisconsin FSA Newsletter

Wisconsin Farm Service Agency **Greetings from the Wisconsin State Office**

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

As we start 2017, the Wisconsin State Office has a few reminders for our readers:

The **2017 Agriculture Risk Coverage/Price Loss Coverage (ARC/PLC)** contract enrollment period is now open. The deadline to complete enrollment for 2017 ARCPLC is August 1, 2017.

All FSA offices are currently accepting **Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)** applications for all 2017 spring seeded crops. NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters.

An additional 50,000 acres for the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** in Wisconsin has been authorized under the Pollinators and Monarchs SAFE Project Area to restore critical habitats for our nation's pollinators. Eligible counties in Wisconsin cover the southern two-thirds of the state.

We encourage you to contact our local office and schedule an appointment to discuss new programs or review your records and sign any applicable paperwork. To find your local office visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Dates to Remember

February 1, 2017:

Acreage reporting deadline for maple sap

February 20, 2017

USDA Service Centers closed in Observance of President's Day

March 15, 2017

Deadline to purchase Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage for 2017 spring-seeded crops

March 31, 2017

Last day to obtain Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) on 2016 small grains

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It is Now Easier to Transfer Land to the Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers

Beginning Jan. 9, 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will offer 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.

This change to the CRP program is just one of many that USDA has implemented based on recommendations from the Land Tenure Advisory Subcommittee formed by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in 2015.

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 through a sale or lease with an option to buy. 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.

According to the Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land survey, conducted by USDA in 2014, U.S. farmland owners expect to transfer 93 million acres to new ownership during 2015-2019. This represents 10 percent of all farmland across the nation. Details on the early termination opportunity will be available starting on Jan. 9, 2017, at local USDA service centers. For more information about CRP and to find out if your acreage is eligible for early contract termination, contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office or go online at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp. To locate your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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Farm Service Agency Expands Bridges to Opportunity Nationwide

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced the expansion of a unique service for farmers and ranchers. FSA's Bridges to Opportunity program provides a one-stop-shop that connects producers with resources, programs and educational services offered across the department, as well as from other USDA partner organizations. Bridges to Opportunity, which currently provides enhanced customer support to more than 150,000 customers in 20 states, will expand to serve customers across the country before the end of the month using fiscal year 2016 funds.

FSA's presence in over 2,100 county offices, in nearly every rural county, puts the agency in a unique position to partner with non-governmental organizations to reach thousands of agricultural producers who can benefit from the programs and services. Bridges to Opportunity allows FSA employees to search and obtain a list of all local, state, regional and national organizations that may be able to assist local producers with their specific needs. For example, FSA's Houston County office in Texas partnered with many agricultural organizations to serve producers affected by severe drought. When drought-stricken agricultural producers came to the county office looking for assistance, FSA employees were able to provide traditional services, such as the Livestock Forage Program and the Emergency Loan Program administered by FSA, as well as connect local farmers with local, regional, and national organizations that provide drought assistance and education.

Bridges to Opportunity was developed by FSA to provide producers with a more comprehensive customer service experience by connecting them with other USDA agencies and nonfederal partners. Through Bridges to Opportunity, FSA county office employees have the tools to connect farmers, ranchers and anyone interested in agriculture with customized expertise on topics ranging from organic production, beginning farmer resources, integrated pest management, disaster assistance, conservation practices, agricultural educational courses, loans, to grants and other financial assistance that can start, grow or benefit farming and ranching operations.

For more information about Bridges to Opportunity, please contact your local FSA county office. To locate your FSA county office, please see <https://offices.usda.gov>.

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Grasslands Conservation Program Expanded to Small-Scale Livestock Producers

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. 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 for the first time included 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 100 or fewer head of grazing cows (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/x9PF5> 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 on marginally productive agricultural lands. 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 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.

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

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Don't Forget: Farm Loan Website Is New and IMPROVED

This may be the time of year that producers are thinking about financing for the coming crop year. Please keep in mind the Farm Service Agency (FSA) website has undergone full redesign; this includes the [Farm Loan Programs Page](#).

The redesigned site allows the public to click links such as: [Farm Operating Loans](#), [Microloans](#), [Youth Loans](#), [Minority and Women Farmers](#), [Beginning Farmer Loans](#), [Emergency Loans](#) and, more importantly, the sites provide links to the application forms for each subject.

In addition to application forms, the site provides information regarding loan purposes, maximum loan limitations, repayment terms, interest rates and eligibility criteria. The revised Farm Loan Program website also offers a [Lender Tool Kit](#) for our partners in ag lending using the [Guarantee Loan Program](#). The tool kit provides the most frequently used forms for loan making and servicing and describes how lenders obtain the status of Standard Eligible Lender, Certified Lender, or Preferred Lender.

To access the Farm Loan Programs Site visit:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/index>

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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).