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Dates to Remember

May 13, 2022: [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Grassland](#) Sign Up Deadline

May 20, 2022: Deadline to submit EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) and RCPP (Regional Conservation Partnership Program) Applications

May 30, 2022: USDA Service Centers Closed in observance of Memorial Day

May 31, 2022: [Marketing Assistance Loan](#) applications due for prior year harvested corn, soybeans and other oilseeds, rice, grain sorghum, and pulse crops

May 31, 2022: [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) deadline for Nursery crops for 2023 crop year

June 13, 2022: Deadline to submit New or Modified Proposals for [State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Program \(SAFE\)](#)

Five Facts About the United States Drought Monitor

This is likely no surprise to you, but drought persists across the western U.S. and is intensifying in some areas. No geographic area is immune to the potential of drought at any

given time. The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) provides a weekly drought assessment, and it plays an important role in USDA programs that help farmers and ranchers recover from drought.

Fact #1 - Numerous agencies use the Drought Monitor to inform drought-related decisions.

The map identifies areas of drought and labels them by intensity on a weekly basis. It categorizes the entire country as being in one of six levels of drought. The first two, None and Abnormally Dry (D0), are not considered to be drought. The next four describe increasing levels of drought: Moderate (D1), Severe (D2), Extreme (D3) and Exceptional (D4).

While many entities consult the Drought Monitor for drought information, drought declarations are made by federal, [state](#) and local agencies that may or may not use the Drought Monitor to inform their decisions. Some of the ways USDA uses it to determine a producer's eligibility for certain [drought assistance programs](#), like the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) and [Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres](#) and to "fast-track" [Secretarial drought disaster designations](#).

Fact #2 - U.S. Drought Monitor is made with more than precipitation data.

When you think about drought, you probably think about water, or the lack of it. Precipitation plays a major role in the creation of the Drought Monitor, but the map's author considers [numerous indicators](#), including [drought impacts](#) and local insight from over 450 expert observers around the country. Authors use several dozen indicators to assess drought, including precipitation, streamflow, reservoir levels, temperature and evaporative demand, soil moisture and vegetation health. Because the drought monitor depicts both short and long-term drought conditions, the authors must look at data for multiple timeframes. The final map produced each week represents a summary of the story being told by all the pieces of data. To help tell that story, authors don't just look at data. They converse over the course of the map-making week with experts across the country and draw information about drought impacts from media reports and private citizens.

Fact #3 - A real person, using real data, updates the map.

Each week's map author, not a computer, processes and analyzes data to update the drought monitor. The [map authors](#) are trained climatologists or meteorologists from the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (the academic partner and website host of the Drought Monitor), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and USDA. The author's job is to do what a computer can't – use their expertise to reconcile the sometimes-conflicting stories told by each stream of data into a single assessment.

Fact #4 - The Drought Monitor provides a current snapshot, not a forecast.

The Drought Monitor is a "snapshot" of conditions observed during the most recent week and builds off the previous week's map. The map is released on Thursdays and depicts conditions based on data for the week that ended the preceding Tuesday. Rain that falls on the Wednesday just before the USDM's release won't be reflected until the next map is published. This provides a consistent, week-to-week product and gives the author a window to assess the data and come up with a final map.

Fact #5 – Your input can be part of the drought-monitoring process.

State climatologists and other trained observers in the drought monitoring network relay on-the-ground information from numerous sources to the US Drought monitor author each week. That can include information that you contribute.

The Drought Monitor serves as a trigger for multiple forms of federal disaster relief for agricultural producers, and sometimes producers contact the author to suggest that drought conditions in their area are worse than what the latest drought monitor shows. When the author gets a call like that, it prompts them to look closely at all available data for that area, to see whether measurements of precipitation, temperature, soil moisture and other indicators corroborate producer-submitted reports. This is the process that authors follow whether they receive one report or one hundred reports, although reports from more points may help state officials and others know where to look for impacts.

There are multiple ways to contribute your observations:

1. **Talk to your state climatologist** - Find the current list at the [American Association of State Climatologists](#) website.
2. **Email** - Emails sent to droughtmonitor@unl.edu inform the USDM authors.
3. **Become a CoCoRaHS observer** - Submit drought reports along with daily precipitation observations to the [Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network](#).
4. **Submit Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR)** - go.unl.edu/CMOR.

For more information, read our [Ask the Expert blog with a NDMC climatologist](#) or visit farmers.gov/protection-recovery.

2022 Avian Influenza in the United States - What you need to know!

To date, USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in commercial and backyard flocks in several states including Wisconsin. Avian influenza viruses are classified as either "low pathogenic (LPAI)" or "highly pathogenic (HPAI)" based on their genetic features and the severity of the disease they cause in poultry. Caused by an influenza type A virus, HPAI can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and wild birds (especially waterfowl).

The clinical signs of birds affected with all forms of Avian Influenza may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Decreased water consumption up to 72 hours before other clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production

- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

In addition to the disease infecting domestic birds, it is important to know that wild birds can also be infected and show no signs of illness. They can carry the disease to new areas when migrating, potentially exposing domestic poultry to the virus. The [APHIS' wild bird surveillance program](#) provides an early warning system for the introduction and distribution of avian influenza viruses of concern in the United States, allowing APHIS and the poultry industry to take timely and rapid action.

With the recent detections of avian influenza in wild birds and domestic poultry in the United States, bird owners should review their biosecurity practices and stay vigilant to protect poultry and pet birds from transmission of this disease. The following bio-safety guidelines are effective methods for safeguarding commercial operations and smaller flocks:

- Backyard flock owners should practice strict biosecurity, including preventing birds from exposure and/or co-mingling with wild birds and other types of poultry.
- Shower, change clothes, and clean and disinfect footwear before entering your poultry housing areas.
- Respiratory protection such as a medical facemask would also be important and remember to always wear clean clothes when encountering healthy domestic birds.
- Carefully follow safe entry and exit procedures into your flock's clean area.
- Reduce the attractiveness for wild birds to stop at your place by cleaning up litter and spilled feed around poultry housing areas.
- If you have free range guinea fowl and waterfowl, consider bringing them into coops or flight pens under nets to prevent interaction of domesticated poultry with wild birds and their droppings.
- It is best to restrict visitors from interacting with your birds currently.
- Do not touch sick or dead wildlife and keep them away from domestic poultry
- Try not to handle sick or deceased domestic birds (if you must, use proper personal protective equipment to minimize direct contact and cautiously disinfect anything that comes into contact with the deceased and or sick bird).

As part of the existing USDA Avian Influenza response plans, Federal and State partners as well as industry are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps:

- **Quarantine** – restricting movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;

- **Eradicate** – depopulate the affected flock(s);
- **Monitor region** – testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine area;
- **Disinfect** – kills the virus in the affected flock locations; and
- **Test** – confirming that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

Sick or deceased domestic birds should be reported to your local veterinarian. Positive domestic cases are handled by APHIS and its partners. States that have confirmed cases of Avian Influenza should work closely with USDA-APHIS on surveillance, reporting and control efforts. Disposal methods will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis depending on a variety of factors, including the size of the flock, space requirements, associated costs, local conditions, and applicable laws/regulations.

The United States has the strongest Avian Influenza surveillance program in the world, where we actively look for the disease and provide fair market value compensation to affected producers to encourage reporting.

If you do not raise domestic birds or have a poultry operation but you encounter sick or dead wild birds, please use bio-safety measures, and report your findings through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, this strain of Avian Influenza is a low risk to the public. While the transmission rate from animals to humans is low, it is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be shared between species. To learn more about Avian Influenza and to remain up to date on the latest related news and information, you can visit the [USDA APHIS webpage](#).

Current FSA Loan Interest Rates

Current loan rates as of April 1, 2022.

Farm Loan Interest Rates:

Farm Operating - Direct	2.875%
Farm Operating - Microloan	2.875%
Farm Ownership - Direct	3.375%
Farm Ownership - Microloan	3.375%
Farm Ownership - Direct, Joint Financing	2.500%
Farm Ownership - Down Payment	1.500%
Emergency - Amount of Actual Loss	3.750%

Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL):

3-year FSFL	2.625%
5-year FSFL	2.625%
7-year FSFL	2.625%
10-year FSFL	2.625%
12-year FSFL	2.625%

Please visit the [Farm Loan Program](#) webpage for more information.

USDA Accepts 2 Million Acres in Conservation Reserve Program General Signup

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting more than 2 million acres in offers from agricultural producers and landowners through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup, which included more than 5,000 acres in Wisconsin. This is the first of the program's multiple signups occurring in 2022. With about 3.4 million acres expiring this year, Vilsack encourages producers and landowners to consider the Grassland and Continuous signups, both of which are currently open.

Producers submitted re-enrollment offers for just over half of expiring acres, similar to the rate in 2021. Offers for new land under General CRP were considerably lower compared to last year's numbers, with fewer than 400,000 acres being offered this year versus over 700,000 acres offered last year.

It is important to note that submitting and accepting a CRP offer is the start of the process, and producers still need to develop a conservation plan before enrolling their land on October 1, 2022. Each year, during the window between offer acceptance and land enrollment, some producers change their mind and ultimately decide not to enroll some accepted acres without penalty.

The three other types of CRP — Grassland, Continuous, and CREP — are still available for either working-lands or targeted, often smaller sub-field, offers. Producers have submitted offers on nearly 260,000 acres through the Continuous and CREP signup so far this year. The Grassland signup – which last year had its highest participation ever – closes May 13, 2022.

More Information

While the General Signup is closed, producers and landowners can still apply for the Continuous and Grassland signups by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#).

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits. Learn more at fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Wisconsin NRCS Announces Second EQIP Sign-up for 2022 Funding, Apply by May 20, 2022

Farmers and forest landowners will want to plan ahead and sign-up early for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation funding. Eric Allness, [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) Acting State Conservationist in Wisconsin, announced farmers and forest landowners interested in [Environmental Quality Incentives](#)

[Program \(EQIP\)](#) or [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#) producer contracts need to apply by May 20, 2022, for a second round of funding in fiscal year 2022.

Although NRCS accepts applications year-round, please apply NOW for a second round of fiscal year 2022 funding consideration. Applications are being taken at all [USDA Service Centers](#) in Wisconsin. Applications received after May 20 will automatically be deferred to the next funding cycle.

EQIP and RCPP are the primary programs available to farmers and landowners for farm and woodland conservation work, offering payments for more than 120 basic conservation practices. Last year, Wisconsin NRCS invested \$33 million in conservation practices through EQIP and RCPP practices.

All eligible applications received by May 20, 2022, will be evaluated, prioritized and ranked for funding in 2022. Farmers may contact their local USDA Service Center to get started on producer eligibility and planning.

Sign-up for several special initiatives focusing on conservation efforts. Special sign-up opportunities are open for Climate Smart Agriculture & Forestry, as well as several landscape-based initiatives. Special initiatives are available for Beginning Farmer, Socially Disadvantaged and other historically underserved producers, such as Tribes, at increased payment rates. All offer technical and financial assistance through EQIP or RCPP.

Climate Smart Agriculture & Forestry: A sub-set of practices for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, sequestering carbon and ultimately mitigating the impacts of climate change. The benefits are two-fold: producers improve the health, productivity, resiliency and profitability of their operations while mitigating the impacts of climate change for our entire nation.

Conservation Planning Activities (CPA), Design Implementation Activities (DIA) and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA): CPAs: Activities that result in a conservation plan documenting client decisions regarding selected alternatives including identification of desired primary and supporting practices that the client would like to use to treat identified resource concerns. **DIAs:** Activities that allow for development of specific practice designs, management prescriptions, or other instructions that allow the client to implement the conservation practice or system of conservation practices. **CEMAs:** Activities that include evaluation, monitoring, testing, or assessment for a specific purpose, to complete practice implementation requirements, or to determine the effectiveness of conservation practices and activities.

EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts (EQIP-CIC): Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) provide additional opportunities for eligible producers to further the adoption, management and maintenance of conservation practices and activities through the implementation of incentive practices. Incentive contracts are an option that blend EQIP and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) by providing producers with financial assistance to adopt conservation activities on working landscapes. The EQIP-CIC focus for fiscal year 2022 is on climate smart agriculture and forestry practices.

Working Lands for Wildlife – Monarch: Through Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), USDA uses a win-win approach to systematically target conservation efforts to improve agricultural and forest productivity while enhancing wildlife habitat on working landscapes. Target species

are used as barometers for success because their habitat needs are representative of healthy, functioning ecosystems where conservation efforts benefit a much broader suite of species.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: Through the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#) (GLRI), NRCS offers financial assistance to agricultural producers for implementing practices that improve water quality and benefit wildlife in selected watersheds. Eligible watersheds include Door-Kewaunee Rivers, Lower Fox River, Manitowoc-Sheboygan, Milwaukee River, Oconto River, Peshtigo River, Pensaukee River, Upper Fox River, Wolf River and Lake Winnebago watersheds.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative: The overall goals of the [Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative](#) (MRBI) are to improve water quality by minimizing contributions of phosphorus and nitrogen to the surface waters in the basin and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. Conservation practices target avoiding, controlling and trapping nutrients and sediment before they enter surface waters. Within the larger Rush River watershed, five sub watersheds are eligible for MRBI funding: Town of Martell-Rush River, Goose Creek-Trimbelle River, Spring Creek-Trimbelle River, Little Trimbelle River and Crystal Springs Coulee-Rush River.

National Water Quality Initiative: The [National Water Quality Initiative](#) (NWQI) is designed to help individual agricultural producers take actions to reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients and pathogens into waterways where water quality is a critical concern. The goal is to implement conservation practices in focused watersheds in a concentrated area so that agriculture no longer contributes to the impairment of water bodies within these priority watersheds. Eligible watersheds include Bear Lake-Little Wolf River in Waupaca County, La Prairie Township & City of Beloit Lower Rock River East in Rock County and North Branch Little River in Oconto County.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program: The [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP) promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance through innovative approaches to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance to producers through partnership agreements and through program contracts or easement agreements. Current active projects for water quality improvement are located within the Oconomowoc River, Yahara and Milwaukee River watersheds. RCPP funding is also available in the Driftless Area to improve fish and wildlife habitat, stream and riparian habitat, select counties in Northern Wisconsin to improve Golden-winged and Kirtland's warbler habitats, and select areas of Southern Wisconsin to improve soil health and protect agriculturally productive farmland.

USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the *Federal Register*](#).

More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discover Tool on farmers.gov](#) (also available in Spanish) or by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

Breaking New Ground

Agricultural producers are reminded to consult with FSA and NRCS before breaking out new ground for production purposes, as doing so without prior authorization may put a producer's federal farm program benefits in jeopardy. This is especially true for land that must meet Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions.

Producers with HEL determined soils are required to apply tillage, crop residue and rotational requirements as specified in their conservation plan.

Producers should notify FSA as a first point of contact prior to conducting land clearing or drainage type projects, such as clearing any trees to create new cropland, to ensure the proposed actions meet compliance criteria. These areas will need to be reviewed to ensure such work will not risk your eligibility for benefits.

Landowners and operators complete form AD-1026 - Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification to identify the proposed action and allow FSA to determine whether a referral to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for further review is necessary.

Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently made several policy updates for acreage reporting for cover crops, revising intended use, late-filed provisions, grazing allotments as well as updated the definitions of "idle" and "fallow."

Reporting Cover Crops:

Cover crop types can be chosen from the following four categories:

- **Cereals and other grasses**
- **Legumes**
- **Brassicacae and other broadleaves**
- **Mixtures**

If the cover crop is harvested for any use other than forage or grazing and is not terminated according to policy guidelines, then that crop will no longer be considered a cover crop and the acreage report must be revised to reflect the actual crop.

Permitted Revision of Intended use After Acreage Reporting Date:

New operators or owners who pick up a farm after the acreage reporting deadline has passed and the crop has already been reported on the farm, have 30 calendar days from the date when the new operator or owner acquired the lease on land, control of the land or ownership and new producer crop share interest in the previously reported crop acreage. Under this policy, appropriate documentation must be provided to the County Committee's satisfaction to determine that a legitimate operator or ownership and producer crop share interest change occurred to permit the revision.

Acreage Reports:

In order to maintain program eligibility and benefits, you must timely file acreage reports. Failure to file an acreage report by the crop acreage reporting deadline may result in ineligibility for future program benefits. FSA will not accept acreage reports provided more than a year after the acreage reporting deadline.

Reporting Grazing Allotments:

FSA offices can now accept acreage reports for grazing allotments. You will use form "FSA-578" to report grazing allotments as animal unit months (AUMs) using the "Reporting Unit" field. Your local FSA office will need the grazing period start and end date and the percent of public land.

Definitions of Terms

FSA defines "idle" as cropland or a balance of cropland within a Common Land Unit (CLU) (field/subfield) which is not planted or considered not planted and does not meet the definition of fallow or skip row.

Fallow is considered unplanted cropland acres which are part of a crop/fallow rotation where cultivated land that is normally planted is purposely kept out of production during a regular growing season.

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

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