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Conservation Efforts Continue on America’s Farms, Ranches Amid Challenging Year

The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service continued its conservation work across the country despite a tough 2020 marked with a pandemic and several natural disasters. The agency helped farmers, ranchers and forest landowners implement conservation practices on their working lands, which help conserve natural resource such as soil, water and wildlife as well as boost producers’ bottom lines. Additionally, NRCS launched new online tools that increased the efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of crucial programs.

This year, NRCS worked with producers and communities to:

• Develop more than 100,000 conservation plans. · Co-invest $1.32 billion through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to put conservation practices on 10 million acres, as well as $507 million through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to put conservation enhancements on 9.3 million acres. · Enroll more than 430 new easements, totaling 230,000 acres, into the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
• Enter into over 420 agreements with local sponsors to cooperatively implement emergency recovery measures through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) and obligated more than $251 million in EWP funds in FY 2020.

Rule Change Helps Producers Implement More Conservation Activities
USDA released the final rule for its Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP provides many benefits, including increased crop yields, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements, and increased resilience to adverse weather. CSP is for working lands, including cropland, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land, and agricultural land under Indian tribe jurisdiction.

Based on feedback from 600 comments on the interim rule, NRCS made the following changes in the final rule include:

- Added emphasis to enhancing soil health as a way that program participants can achieve program goals.
- Allowed for more than one contract renewal but extend the two-year program ineligibility period to include those who apply for renewal and are not selected.
- Increased payment rates for adoption of cover crop rotations.
- Introduced a new supplemental payment for advanced grazing management.
- Created a one-time payment for developing a comprehensive conservation plan.
- Provided specific support for organic and transitioning to organic production activities.

NRCS state offices announce sign-up periods for CSP. Additionally, existing CSP participants may have an opportunity to renew their contracts in the first half of the fifth year of their five-year contract. For more information on how to sign up for CSP in your state, visit your state website from nrcs.usda.gov, or contact your local NRCS field office.

Farmers Help America Keep Soil Healthy

Our lives are dependent on healthy soil. Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife and beautiful landscapes. It’s the reason why USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service experts are in your community and across the nation.

Soil is composed of air, water, organic matter and minerals. A community of organisms – functioning as a soil food web – lives all or parts of their lives in soil. More individual organisms are in a teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth. Increasing soil organic matter typically improves soil health, since organic matter improves several critical functions of soil.

To improve the health of their soil, more and more farmers and ranchers are keeping soil covered, reducing disturbance activities such as tilling, keeping plants growing throughout the year, and diversifying the crops they’re planting in a rotation. Taking these steps allow farmers and ranchers to help reduce erosion while increasing the soil’s ability to provide nutrients and water to the plant at critical times during the growing season.

When producers focus on improving soil health, they often have larger harvests, lower input costs, optimized nutrient use, and improved crop resilience during drought years like last year. In heavy rainfall years, healthy soil holds more water, reducing runoff that helps avert flooding downstream.

And because healthy soil allows for greater water infiltration and less erosion, nutrients and pesticides stay on the farm where they benefit crops, and are far less likely to be carried off the farm into streams and lakes where they can cause harm.

NRCS helps farmers install conservation practices such as cover crops to maintain and improve soil health – all of which can lead to productive, profitable and sustainable farming and ranching operations for generations to come. For more information, contact your Fremont County USDA Service Center at 307-856-7524 or visit nrcs.usda.gov

Are you being affected by drought?
If you are affected by drought-like conditions, please, take a few moments to file a producer report. This will help the drought monitor folks be aware of the severity of conditions and the impact at the producer level.

To see our current drought status:

To share your local drought conditions:
https://droughtimpacts.unl.edu/ConditionMonitoringObservations.aspx

It is important for our producers to provide input to ensure accuracy of the monitor in our local areas. We, at the Fremont County FSA, appreciate you taking the time to share your observations.

Keeping Livestock Inventory Records

Livestock inventory records are necessary in the event of a natural disaster, so remember to keep them updated.

When disasters strike, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) can help you if you’ve suffered excessive livestock death losses and grazing or feed losses due to eligible natural disasters.

To participate in livestock disaster assistance programs, you’ll be required to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to your local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent. For grazing or feed losses, you must submit a notice of loss to your local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent and should maintain documentation and receipts.

You should record all pertinent information regarding livestock inventory records including:

- Documentation of the number, kind, type, and weight range of livestock
- Beginning inventory supported by birth recordings or purchase receipts.

For more information on documentation requirements, contact your Fremont County USDA Service Center at 307-856-7524 ext 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Nominations Open for the 2021 County Committee Elections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages all farmers, ranchers, and FSA program participants to take part in the Fremont County Committee election nomination process.

FSA’s county committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs. Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision making and farm program delivery process.
A county committee is composed of 3 to 11 elected members from local administrative areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. One-third of the seats on these committees are open for election each year. County committees may have an appointed advisor to further represent the local interests of underserved farmers and ranchers. Underserved producers are beginning, women and other minority farmers and ranchers and landowners and/or operators who have limited resources.

In Fremont County, LAA #1, the area of Fremont County that includes the Wind River Indian Reservation, is up for election in 2021. Committee Member, Will O'Neal has served for the maximum three, three year consecutive terms and is ineligible for the upcoming election. We are grateful to Will for his years of service to Farm Service Agency and the producers of Fremont County.

All nomination forms for the 2021 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA service center by Aug. 2, 2021. For more information on FSA county committee elections and appointments, refer to the FSA fact sheet: Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a COC Member available online at: fsa.usda.gov/elections.