December FSA/NRCS Updates - December 1, 2021

FSA CED Updates, Upcoming Deadlines, and a few Jokes

December has arrived! We hope you are all enjoying the unusually warm temperatures we have been experiencing lately. We have all commented within the office that it certainly doesn't feel like December yet. Please see some updates below.

COVID/Locked Doors - This is a constantly updating situation. Having our doors open or closed is tied to the weekly trend in county COVID cases. If you have questions about the doors being open during your visit, please call ahead and we will let you know the current regulations set by Homeland Security for our Service Center. As of today, the service center is open to visitors. This could change in the coming weeks with the new variant.

New Software Available to Electronically Sign Documents - We have new software allowing producers to sign documents electronically from anywhere, eliminating a trip to town. Please contact the office for more information & request it for your next documents!

ARC/PLC - It is again time to think about ARC/PLC enrollment. With Goshen's 600-plus contracts to complete annually, this program is a massive undertaking. Please contact us if you have questions about your program election or would like to change your election for 2022. All contracts are due back on March 15, 2022 with all signatures.

ELAP - You may have heard about the recent update to ELAP. We are now able to pay for trucking of hay/forages/other feedstuffs (including salt and minerals). We recently received the regulations & application for ELAP. Payment rates are 60% of $6.60 per mile, with no payment earned on freight for the first 25 miles or over 1,000 miles. Please contact Kate for more details on ELAP and for an application. Additionally, please gather any documentation you have for any trucking/hauling for forage purchased in your operation.

Farm Records/Acreage Reporting - We are editing farm records and maps in preparation for spring/summer acreage reporting. If you have maps needing edits (a pivot has been put in, land has been bought or sold, fields drawn out incorrectly…) please contact the office. We will make every effort to get these updated before acreage reporting this summer. This is an opportunity to update maps within your operation and make everything easier on everyone. Let us know what needs done!

Upcoming Dates/Deadlines
Dec. 1- NAP Purchase Deadline- Forage and Grazing Crops (Late File Provisions Apply)
Dec. 24- Christmas Eve- Office Closed
Dec. 31- New Years Eve- Office Closed
Jan 30- LFP & ELAP Application Deadline (Livestock Producers)

Jokes
Why do mummies like Christmas so much? They're into all the wrapping.
What do snowmen eat for breakfast? Ice Crispies
What did one snowman say to another snowman? You're cool.
What is the most popular Christmas Carol in the desert? Oh camel ye faithful.
USDA Expands Assistance to Cover Feed Transportation Costs for Drought-Impacted Ranchers

In response to the severe drought conditions in the West and Great Plains, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today its plans to help cover the cost of transporting feed for livestock that rely on grazing. USDA is updating the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) to immediately cover feed transportation costs for drought impacted ranchers. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide more details and tools to help ranchers get ready to apply at their local USDA Service Center later this month at fsa.usda.gov/elap.

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees, and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or loss conditions as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture. ELAP already covers the cost of hauling water during drought, and this change will expand the program beginning in 2021 to cover feed transportation costs where grazing and hay resources have been depleted. This includes places where:

- Drought intensity is D2 for eight consecutive weeks as indicated by the S. Drought Monitor;
- Drought intensity is D3 or greater; or
- USDA has determined a shortage of local or regional feed availability.

Cost share assistance will also be made available to cover eligible cost of treating hay or feed to prevent the spread of invasive pests like fire ants.

Under the revised policy for feed transportation cost assistance, eligible ranchers will be reimbursed 60% of feed transportation costs above what would have been incurred in a normal year. Producers qualifying as underserved (socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning or military veteran) will be reimbursed for 90% of the feed transportation cost above what would have been incurred in a normal year.

A national cost formula, as established by USDA, will be used to determine reimbursement costs which will not include the first 25 miles and distances exceeding 1,000 transportation miles. The calculation will also exclude the normal cost to transport hay or feed if the producer normally purchases some feed. For 2021, the initial cost formula of $6.60 per mile will be used (before the percentage is applied), but may be adjusted on a state or regional basis.

To be eligible for ELAP assistance, livestock must be intended for grazing and producers must have incurred feed transportation costs on or after Jan. 1, 2021. Although producers will self-certify losses and expenses to FSA, producers are encouraged to maintain good records and retain receipts and related documentation in the event these documents are requested for review by the local FSA County Committee. The deadline to file an application for payment for the 2021 program year is Jan. 31, 2022.

USDA offers a comprehensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs. On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool can help producers and landowners determine all program or loan options available for disaster recovery assistance.

More information on this expansion to ELAP is forthcoming. In the meantime, more information is available at fsa.usda.gov/elap or by contacting a local USDA Service Center.

Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. Foreign persons who have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the AFIDA form could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate
transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements. The data gained from these disclosures is used in the preparation of periodic reports to the President and Congress concerning the effect of such holdings upon family farms and rural communities. Click here for more information on AFIDA.

**Maintaining Good Credit History**

Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans require applicants to 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, see if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash flow.

Information on your 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.

**New River Forecast Model Integrates Artificial Intelligence for Better Water Management in the West**

Water supply forecasts are important for any crop year. But for farmers, ranchers, foresters, and water managers in the West facing extreme and debilitating drought conditions, those forecasts have never been more critical to their operations and livelihoods.

Since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, NRCS has helped America’s producers plan for their operations through the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecast program. The program runs a massive network of mountain climate and snow monitoring sites across the western U.S. called SNOTEL. This is coupled with other data and computer models to predict the amount of river runoff in the upcoming spring and summer. These water supply forecasts are used by America’s producers to plan their operations for the year, by helping guide choices like crop selection, water rights rentals, and whether to leave land fallow.

Over the decades, that information has grown to be used by many other groups for many purposes – from optimizing hydroelectric power generation, to assessing seasonal flood risk, to complying with legal decisions around endangered species and international treaties governing transboundary rivers. The value of water managed using these forecasts is easily in the billions of dollars, and even modest increases in accuracy can create over $100 million a year in public benefit for just one river basin.

However, major forecasting improvements are needed because of narrowing margins between water supply and water demand in the ever-more-thirsty American West. Those tighter margins reflect a combination of climate change and population growth, and they mean there’s less room for error than ever before in water management, requiring improved efficiency and accuracy in everything we do.
NRCS has unveiled a new computer application to address this pressing need: the multi-model machine learning metasystem, or M⁴. This first-of-its-kind model will be the largest migration of artificial intelligence, also known as AI, into real-world river prediction programs.

Researchers first experimented with machine learning, a branch of AI, for hydrologic forecasting a quarter-century ago. But they couldn’t jump the research-to-applications gap – the needed step of getting from what works in the lab to what works in the field. Ironically, scientists and engineers working outside the tech sector have often been the last to adopt AI into their everyday practices. Unlike some other areas, STEM fields have long used sophisticated math and computer models. AI had to successfully compete with those existing methods to gain widespread acceptance, which in many fields, including earth and environmental science, is only starting to happen now. The average hydrologist is still more likely to use AI – in a smartphone app, for example – to find the quickest route to the office in the morning, than to apply it in their work when they get there!

We aimed to change that. Applied scientists at NRCS took a pragmatic approach: they looked in detail at what they needed in the next generation of their operational river forecast system, and then created a new tailor-made solution from existing building blocks. That included adopting automated machine learning, which makes it easier and faster to use, and radically improving the explainability of the results, putting to bed a long-standing worry about so-called ‘black box’ AI technologies. Testing proves the system is more accurate, robust, and simple-to-use than ever before, while keeping features that worked in the older models.

Our hope is that M⁴ will help farmers, ranchers, and foresters – our customers – better plan for their operations and continue to have the means to provide for people in the U.S. and around the world who depend on American agriculture. And given how many other water users and government agencies also rely on NRCS forecasts, we’re also looking forward to seeing how the migration of AI into real-world, high-stakes environmental information systems like M⁴ will help everyone in the American West use increasingly pressured water resources more effectively while protecting our shared natural environment.

To read more about this new system, see the recent paper published in the Journal of Hydrology, the top-ranked, peer-reviewed scientific journal in water resources. For more information about the Snow Survey and Water Supply program, visit our website.