Niobrara County Notes - FSA

Greetings Niobrara County Farmers and Ranchers!

We are wrapping up a General CRP signup, ending July 23, 2021- for producers interested in establishing resource-conserving plant species to control erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. We are now also accepting offers for Grasslands CRP, helping producers protect grassland, while maintaining these areas as grazing lands. This signup ends August 20, 2021, so please be sure to contact the office if you have interest or questions about this program.

If you have a NAP hay policy, and your production will be below normal due to the dry conditions or any other weather event, please be sure to contact the office to submit a notice of loss so that your loss level can be assessed, and potential payment determined.

We’ve had a myriad of weather conditions in Niobrara County this past month, and various impacts of that weather. There’s been some nasty hail storms in the past several weeks, if you will lose/have lost grazing due to hail damage on your pastures, please be sure to notify the office of these losses, as we have programs available for grazing losses due to many different causes of loss, including hail. If you experience any other weather events that cause grazing losses, please also let us know.

Also, please keep in mind the other impacts that FSA can assist with. If your current water sources reach a point of being unable to provide sufficient water for livestock, and you have to implement alternative solutions, please let the office know. There are many different programs and resources available for varying weather events and impacts.

The heat and wind have sure changed the conditions for Niobrara County. If you feel conditions are dire and not accurately reflected on the drought monitor, please visit droughtreporter.unl.edu/submitreport/ to report drought conditions and impacts in your area, as many FSA programs are reliant upon the drought monitor for eligibility, and these condition reports are extremely helpful. The folks who review these reports strongly encourage comparison photos of this year vs what a normal year looks like or photos of a post hole dug showing the moisture, or lack thereof.

Keep praying for rain!

-Niobrara County FSA Staff
Please note the following important dates and deadlines:
July 23, 2021 – Deadline to submit a General CRP Offer
August 20, 2021 – Deadline to submit a Grasslands CRP Offer
Within 15 days of noticing crop loss – File NAP Notice of Loss
Within 30 days of noticing livestock, pasture, or feed loss – File LIP/ELAP Notice of Loss

Introduction of New Niobrara Co CED - Lori Meier

Hello! I’m Lori Meier. I grew up in northwest Kansas and began my career as a Program Technician with the Sheridan County Farm Service Agency in Kansas in 1984 and worked there until 2009. My career path changed for 10 years until I went back to FSA in January 2020 as the County Executive Director for Montrose-Gunnison-Ouray and Delta Counties in Colorado. I’ve just become the CED in Niobrara County and I look forward to my new position and meeting the producers. Please stop in and say hello!

USDA Announces Dates for Conservation Reserve Program General and Grasslands Signups

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has set a July 23, 2021, deadline for agricultural producers and landowners to apply for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup 56. Additionally, USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications for CRP Grasslands from July 12 to August 20. This year, USDA updated both signup options to provide greater incentives for producers and increase its conservation benefits, including reducing the impacts of climate change.

Both signups are competitive and will provide for annual rental payments for land devoted to conservation purposes.

“Bottom line, CRP now makes more financial sense for producers while also providing a bigger return on investment in terms of natural resource benefits. The General and Grasslands signups are part of a broader suite of tools available through CRP to integrate key conservation practices on our nation’s working lands.”

General Signup

Through CRP, producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Lands enrolled in CRP also play a key role in mitigating impacts from climate change, and FSA has added a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for practices that sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FSA is also adding a one-time “inflationary” adjustment for payment rates, as well as having more flexibility on adjusting soil rental rates.

FSA opened the General Signup in January 2021 and extended the original deadline to July 23, 2021, to enable producers to consider FSA’s new improvements to the program.

Grasslands Signup

CRP Grasslands helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and improves environmental quality.
FSA has updated the Grasslands Signup to establish a minimum rental rate of $15 per acre, as well as new National Grassland Priority Zones.

How to Sign Up

To enroll in the CRP General signup, producers and landowners should contact their local USDA Service Center by the July 23 deadline. To enroll in the CRP Grasslands signup, they should contact USDA by the August 20 deadline. While USDA offices may have limited visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To work with FSA, producers and landowners should contact their local USDA Service Center. Contact information can be found at farmers.gov/service-locator.

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 Niobrara 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 three to 11 elected members from local administrative areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term.

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.

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.

USDA Announces Changes to Emergency Haying and Grazing Provisions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced changes for emergency haying and grazing use of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This includes changes outlined in the 2018 Farm Bill that streamlines the authorization process for farmers and ranchers.

Drought conditions are tough for our livestock producers, but emergency haying and grazing use of Conservation Reserve Program acres provides temporary relief to these producers. Thanks to a streamlined authorization process, Wyoming producers will be able to more quickly obtain emergency use approval to begin emergency haying or grazing of CRP acres.

Program Changes

Previously emergency haying and grazing requests originated with FSA at the county level and required state and national level approval. Now approval will be based on drought severity as determined by the U.S. Drought Monitor.
Producers located in a county that is designated as severe drought (D2) or greater on or after the last day of the primary nesting season are eligible for emergency haying and grazing on all eligible acres. Additionally, producers located in counties that were in a severe drought (D2) status any single week during the last eight weeks of the primary nesting season may also be eligible for emergency haying and grazing unless the FSA County Committee determines that forage conditions no longer warrant emergency haying and grazing.

Niobrara County and other surrounding counties are eligible for emergency haying and grazing on CRP acres. Please visit with the office if you have CRP acres that you are interested in haying or grazing.

### Understanding the U.S. Drought Monitor

Are drought conditions affecting your agricultural operation? The [U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM)](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/) is a resource producers can use to help determine how to best respond and react to a drought as it develops or lingers.

The USDM is an online, weekly map showing the location, extent, and severity of drought across the United States. It categorizes the entire country as being in one of six levels of drought. The map is released on Thursdays and depicts conditions for the week.

The USDM provides producers with the latest information about drought conditions where they live, enabling producers to best respond and react to a drought as it develops or lingers. In some cases, the USDM may help a producer make specific decisions about their operation, such as reducing the stocking rate because forage is not growing. For others, it may provide a convenient big-picture snapshot of broader environmental conditions.

The USDM incorporates varying data – rain, snow, temperature, streamflow, reservoir levels, soil moisture, and more – as well as first-hand information submitted from on-the-ground sources such as photos, descriptions, and experiences. The levels of drought are connected to the frequency of occurrence across several different drought indicators. What makes the USDM unique is that it is not a strictly numeric product. The mapmakers rely on their judgment and a nationwide network of 450-plus experts to interpret conditions for each region. They synthesize their discussion and analysis into a single depiction of drought for the entire country.

USDA uses the Drought Monitor to determine a producer’s eligibility for certain drought assistance programs, like the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/livestockforage/) and [Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/landowner/land-programs/crpn/ehg/).

Additionally, the Farm Service Agency uses the Drought Monitor to trigger and “fast track” Secretarial Disaster Designations which then provides producers impacted by drought access to emergency loans that can assist with credit needs.

[Learn more about the U.S. Drought Monitor.](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/)

### Applying for Youth Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes loans to youth to establish and operate agricultural income-producing projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA and other agricultural groups. Projects must be planned and operated with the help of the organization advisor, produce sufficient income to repay the loan and provide the youth with practical business and educational experience. The maximum loan amount is $5,000.

**Youth Loan Eligibility Requirements**

1. Be a citizen of the United States (which includes Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) or a legal resident alien
2. Be 10 years to 20 years of age
3. Comply with FSA’s general eligibility requirements
4. Be unable to get a loan from other sources
5. Conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program of work as outlined above
6. Demonstrate capability of planning, managing and operating the project under guidance and assistance from a project advisor. The project supervisor must recommend the youth loan applicant, along with providing adequate supervision.

For help preparing the application forms, contact your Platte County USDA Service Center at 307-322-4050 or visit fsa.usda.gov.