From Darla’s Desk

Hello Park County farmers and ranchers! It seems like this summer is flying by... hay is getting baled and the barley is almost ready! With that being said, we all know this year has been extremely dry. We will soon be accepting applications for the Livestock Forage Program (LFP). Also, a reminder, we have a cost-share program for water hauling. If you end up hauling water because of the drought, please call the office within 30 days of when it is apparent to file a Notice of Loss under the ELAP program. When you have finished water hauling, we will need your daily log of how many gallons and trips, along with the number of head you are watering.

The heat and wind have sure changed the conditions for Park 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.

USDA Announces Dates for Conservation Reserve Program Grasslands Signups

Agricultural producers and landowners in Wyoming can apply for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands signup from today until August 20. This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated signup options to provide greater incentives for producers and increased the program’s conservation and climate benefits, including setting a minimum rental rate and identifying two national priority zones.

The CRP Grassland signup is competitive, and USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide for annual rental payments for land devoted to conservation purposes.

Grasslands Signup

CRP Grasslands helps Wyoming landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits.

FSA has updated the Grasslands Signup to establish a minimum rental rate of $15 per acre, which will benefit 1,300 counties.
To focus on important wildlife corridors, FSA also identified National Grassland Priority Zones, providing extra incentives to producers for enrolling grasslands in important migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas – the Greater Yellowstone Elk Migration Corridor and the Severe Wind Erosion – Dust Bowl Zone. Counties within these two zones get extra ranking points as well as $5 added to their rental rate. The CRP Grasslands Ranking Factors fact sheet has additional information.

How to Sign Up

To enroll in the CRP Grasslands signup, producers and landowners should contact USDA by the August 20 deadline. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Contact your Service Center to set up an in-person or phone appointment. Additionally, more information related to USDA’s response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Understanding the U.S. Drought Monitor

Are drought conditions affecting your agricultural operation? The U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM) 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 and Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres.

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.

Applying for FSA Guaranteed Loans

FSA guaranteed loans allow lenders to provide agricultural credit to farmers who do not meet the lender’s normal underwriting criteria. Farmers and ranchers apply for a guaranteed loan through a lender, and the lender arranges for the guarantee. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of principal and interest on a loan. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.
Guaranteed farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, construct or repair buildings, develop farmland to promote soil and water conservation or to refinance debt.

Guaranteed operating loans can be used to purchase livestock, farm equipment, feed, seed, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance and other operating expenses.

FSA can guarantee farm ownership and operating loans up to $1,776,000. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.

For more information on guaranteed loans, contact Tom Schambow at 307-754-9411 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

**USDA Announces 2021 Priority Watersheds for Water Quality**

USDA has named 379 priority watersheds to help agricultural producers improve water quality across the country, **including one in Park County, Wyoming** (Lower Sage Creek, east of Cody, Wy). Producers in these targeted watersheds will receive focused financial and technical resources through USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) successful landscape-level water-quality effort, the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

The technical and financial assistance from NRCS assists you with implementing practices that avoid, control, and trap nutrients and sediment, which can negatively impact water quality. Practices include irrigation improvements, streambank stabilization, filter strips, cover crops, and manure management, which promote soil health, reduce erosion, and lessen nutrient runoff.

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but applications are ranked and funded by enrollment periods that are set locally. If you’re interested in technical and financial assistance, contact your local NRCS field office. Visit the NRCS website for a complete list of the watersheds for NWQI.
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Next County Committee Meeting: TBD