Park County FSA Accepting Emergency Conservation Program Applications

Farm Service Agency (FSA) will be holding a signup for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) to address damages from the drought. ECP signup will begin on October 1, 2021 and end on October 31, 2021.

The approved ECP practices include spring development, drilling livestock water wells, installing watering pipelines, water tanks, storage tanks, and pumping systems.

ECP helps you with the cost to restore the farmland to pre-disaster conditions. You may receive up to 75 percent of the cost of approved restoration activity. Limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and beginning farmers and ranchers may receive up to 90 percent cost-share. The payment limitation for ECP is $500,000 per disaster, and the funds are limited to activities to return the land to the pre-disaster condition.

You must apply for assistance prior to beginning reconstructive work. FSA’s National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and environmental compliance review process is required to be completed before any actions are taken. Submitting an application after reconstructive work has been started may not qualify for ECP. Conservation concerns that were present on the land prior to the disaster are not eligible for ECP assistance.

FSA County Committees will evaluate applications based on an on-site inspection of the damaged land, taking into consideration that type and extent of the damage. An on-site inspection does not guarantee that cost-share funding will be provided.

For more information on ECP, contact the Park County USDA Service Center at (307) 754-9411, Ext. 2.

Disaster Assistance for 2021 Livestock Forage Losses

Producers in Park County are eligible to apply for 2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on native pasture.

LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land, or fire on federally managed land.

County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire. You must complete a CCC-853 and submit the required supporting documentation no later than January 20, 2022, for 2021 losses.
For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact the Park County USDA Service Center at (307) 754-9411, Ext. 2.

**Applying for Beginning Farmer Loans**

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county’s average size farm.

For more information contact, contact the Platte County USDA Service Center at 307-322-4050 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

**High Tunnels Provide More Locally Grown Fresh Fruits, Veggies**

It’s hard to beat produce grown in the local area. It’s often fresher and tastier, uses less energy for transport, and helps farmers in your community. But the off-season presents a big challenge for farmers who grow fruits and vegetables and for consumers who want to find local produce throughout the year.

When farmers can lengthen the growing season, even by several weeks, their options change. That’s why the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service promotes seasonal high tunnel as such a powerful tool. High tunnels are plastic-wrapped, metal-framed structures that are fairly easy and inexpensive to build. They are designed to extend the growing season into the colder months, helping to increase the availability of local produce, keep plants at a steady temperature and even conserve water and energy.

High tunnels are similar to greenhouses, except they are considered “passively heated.” That means they do not require electricity to heat – only sunlight. The plastic on the frame actually provides enough insulation to add several weeks to the growing season, depending on location. The inside of a high tunnel boasts its own microclimate, often producing crops of higher quality and quantity that those in traditional farm fields. High tunnels are also different than greenhouses in that the plants are actually in the ground, not in pots or on tables. You can think of it as a plastic covering over a field.

High tunnels can cut costs for the producer by conserving water and requiring fewer inputs, like fertilizers or pesticides. In high tunnels, these inputs are often applied through tubes that run along the base of the plants, allowing water and fertilizer to be delivered directly above the soil. Outside of high tunnels, these inputs are often dispersed on a larger scale and require more to ensure the plants receive an adequate amount.

NRCS helps farmers build high tunnels, providing technical expertise and funding. Local and regional markets often provide farmers with a higher share of the food dollar, and money spent at a local business often continues to circulate within community, creating a multiplier effect and providing greater economic benefits to the area.

For more information, contact your Park County USDA Service Center at 307-271-3135 or visit nrcs.usda.gov.
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County Committee
Emily Karst - Chairperson
Tim Acord - Vice-Chairperson
Lynn George - Regular Member

Next County Committee Meeting: TBD