May 2021 Newsletter from the Weston County USDA Service Center

In this newsletter:

- **CRP Continuous Enrollment Period**
- **Conservation Compliance on Highly Erodible Land and Wetlands**
- **New Rule Makes Enhancements to Environmental Quality Incentives Program**
- **Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting**
- **USDA Offers Targeted Farm Loan Funding for Underserved Groups and Beginning Farmers**
- **Farmers Help America Keep Soil Healthy**

**CRP Continuous Enrollment Period**

The Farm Service Agency is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Continuous Signup.

CRP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers"), to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Continuous signup enrollment contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.
Unlike CRP enrollments under general CRP signups or CRP Grasslands, offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods.

For more information, including a list of acceptable practices, visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

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**Conservation Compliance on Highly Erodible Land and Wetlands**

Highly erodible land (HEL) and wetland conservation (WC) provisions aim to reduce soil loss on erosion-prone lands and to protect wetlands for the multiple benefits they provide. HEL and WC provisions apply to all land that is considered highly erodible or a wetland, and that is owned or farmed by persons voluntarily participating in USDA programs.

To comply with HEL and WC provisions, agricultural producers and affiliated persons must fill out and sign form AD-1026 certifying they will not:

- Plant or produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land without following an NRCS-approved conservation plan or system;
- Plant or produce an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland; or
- Convert a wetland that makes the production of an agricultural commodity possible.

In addition, producers planning to conduct activities that may affect their HEL or WC compliance; for example land clearing, conducting drainage activities, land leveling, filling, dredging, or excavation, including the clearing of woody vegetation; must notify FSA by filing form AD-1026. FSA will notify NRCS, and they will then provide highly erodible land or wetland technical evaluations and issue determinations if needed.

It is extremely important that producers comply with the HEL and WC provisions to continue receiving USDA Program benefits. Please contact your local USDA Service Center for more information.

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**New Rule Makes Enhancements to Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

USDA released the final rule for its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS provides producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement conservation practices through EQIP. Popular EQIP practices include cover crops, nutrient management, forest stand improvement, prescribed grazing, irrigation efficiency improvement, and water quality improvement practices. Implementing conservation practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil, and better wildlife habitat while improving agricultural operations.
Based on feedback from 600 comments on the interim rule, NRCS made the following changes in the final rule include:

- Revise its purpose statement to expressly include addressing resource concerns for organic producers, avoiding the need for more regulatory programs, and helping producers transition from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- Authorize reduced matching requirements for Conservation Innovation Grant projects aimed at helping historically underserved producers.
- Creating incentive contracts and payments for incentive practices to better support locally led conservation needs.
- Requiring NRCS to offer an advance payment option for historically underserved producers.
- Raising the payment cap for producers participating in the Organic Initiative to $140,000 for contracts entered into for fiscal years 2019 through 2023. Previously, it was $20,000 per year and $80,000 for any six-year period.
- Expanding the Conservation Innovation Grant program, which is funded through EQIP, to include opportunities for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials and Soil Health Demonstration Trials.

For a full list of updates, view the [final rule on the Federal Register](https://www.federalregister.gov). Visit your state website from [nrcs.usda.gov](https://nrcs.usda.gov) or contact your local NRCS field office to learn how to apply for EQIP.

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**Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting**

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently made several policy updates for acreage reporting for revising intended use, late-filed provisions, and grazing allotments.

**Permitted Revision of Intended use After Acreage Reporting Date:**
New operators or owners who pick up a farm after the acreage reporting deadline has passed and the crop has already been reported on the farm, have 30 calendar days from the date when the new operator or owner acquired the lease on land, control of the land or ownership and new producer crop share interest in the previously reported crop acreage. Under this policy, appropriate documentation must be provided to the County Committee’s satisfaction to determine that a legitimate operator or ownership and producer crop share interest change occurred to permit the revision.

**Late-File Provisions:**
In order to maintain program eligibility and benefits, you must timely file acreage reports. Failure to file an acreage report by the crop acreage reporting deadline may result in ineligibility for future program benefits. FSA will not accept acreage reports provided more than a year after the acreage reporting deadline.

**Reporting Grazing Allotments:**
Starting the 2021 crop year, the Weston County FSA office is now required to use animal unit months (AUMs) to report grazing allotments on form "FSA-578" instead of acres. We will need
a copy of your permit showing the most current AUMs per allotment/pasture as well as the
grazing period start and end dates. This includes US Forest Service permits, Thunder Basin
Grazing Association permits, and Inyan Kara Grazing Association permits.

For more information regarding these changes, please contact the Weston County USDA
Service Center at 307-746-2701 extension 1 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

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**USDA Offers Targeted Farm Loan Funding for Underserved Groups and Beginning Farmers**

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers that FSA offers targeted farm
ownership and farm operating loans to assist underserved applicants and beginning farmers
and ranchers.

USDA defines underserved applicants as a group whose members have been subjected to
racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of the group without
regard to their individual qualities. For farm loan program purposes, targeted underserved
groups are women, African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Hispanics and
Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Underserved or beginning farmers and ranchers who cannot obtain commercial credit from a
bank can apply for either FSA direct loans or guaranteed loans. Direct loans are made to
applicants by FSA. Guaranteed loans are made by lending institutions who arrange for FSA to
guarantee the loan. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of principal and interest
on a loan. The FSA guarantee allows lenders to make agricultural credit available to
producers who do not meet the lender's normal underwriting criteria.

The direct and guaranteed loan program provides for two types of loans: farm ownership
loans and farm operating loans. In addition to customary farm operating and ownership loans,
FSA offers Microloans through the direct loan program. Microloans focus on the financing
needs of small, beginning farmer, niche, and non-traditional farm operations. Microloans are
available for both ownership and operating finance needs. To learn more about microloans,
visit fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

To qualify as a beginning producer, the individual or entity must meet the eligibility
requirements outlined for direct or guaranteed loans. Individuals and all entity members must
have operated a farm for less than 10 years. Applicants must materially or substantially
participate in the operation.

For more information on FSA’s farm loan programs and targeted underserved and beginning
farmer guidelines, contact your USDA Service Center at (307) 682-8843 Ext 2 or
visit fsa.usda.gov/farmloans.
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 Weston County USDA Service Center at 307-746-3264, Paul.Eitel@usda.gov or visit nrcs.usda.gov.

UPCOMING DEADLINES & IMPORTANT DATES

- **May 31, 2021**: Service Center closed for Memorial Day
- **June 8, 2021**: WCNRD Board meeting at 3PM
- **June 11, 2021**: Pre-Registration deadline for Well Water Testing (WCNRD)
- **June 21 - June 25, 2021**: Registrants can pick up Well Water Testing sample kits (WCNRD)
- **July 15, 2021**: Acreage Reports due for spring-planted crops, summer fallow, CRP, Hemp, perennial hay and grazing and other crops (FSA)
Also remember the following:

**NAP Notice of Loss** must be filed the earlier of 15 days of the disaster occurrence or when losses become apparent, or 15 days of the final harvest date.  
**LIP Notice of Loss** must be filed 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.  
**Leases and/or Land Ownership changes including operational changes** must be reported within 30 calendar days of change to avoid late fees, repayment of funds issued and/or ineligibility for program participation.

The Weston County USDA Service Center is now open to limited visitors by appointment only. Producers are encouraged to call ahead to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of your time and to ensure staff is available to tend to your important business needs. To contact your agency, use the contact information below.

### USDA Weston County Service Center

**FSA Office**
1225 Washington Blvd., Ste. 2  
Newcastle, WY 82701  
Phone: 307-746-2701 ext. 2  
Fax: 855-415-3437

**NRCS Office**
1225 Washington Blvd., Ste. 3  
Newcastle, WY 82701  
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**WCNRD Manager:**
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| Chuck Grieves, Chairman  
Randy Oleson, Vice Chairman  
Harry Tavegia, Member  
Robin Riesland, Minority Advisor | David Tysdal, Chairman, Rural Supervisor  
Tucker Hamilton, Vice Chairman, Rural Supervisor  
Emily Hartinger, Secretary/Treasurer, Rural Supervisor  
Gene Norman, Urban Supervisor  
Tom Streeter, At-Large Supervisor |

**Next County Committee Meeting:**  
TBD

**Next WCNRD Board Meeting:**  
June 8, 2021