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Message from FSA CED, Peggy Livingston

With summer activities in full swing and knowing how busy you are, we appreciate you taking the time to open and peruse our monthly newsletter. We have several important business items to relay to our agricultural community.

First, I want to remind our producers the importance of contacting our office if you have the misfortune of experiencing ag-related damages due to wildfires, drought, hail, wind, flooding, or other conditions.

This importance is for a couple of reasons: (1) loss information is aggregated into a report that can be used to gain a Secretarial Disaster Designation for our county should the losses be widespread and severe enough; and (2) some FSA programs have an eligibility requirement that producers file a Notice of Loss within a certain time period of discovering the damage. This would include programs such as the Livestock Indemnity Program, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) or the Emergency Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program.

We hope you avoid the impact of severe weather this summer season, but if not, and you think you have a potential loss, please contact us immediately to make sure you timely file your Notice of Loss.

I would like to announce the opening of the Emergency Conservation Program and the Livestock Forage Program for our producers. We also have the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) to assist producers for specific types of losses. See below for additional information regarding these programs.

August 2 is the deadline to submit your nomination to serve on the County FSA Committee. This year Local Administrative Area (LAA) 2 is up for election in our county. LAA 2 includes the northwest area of the county. If you farm or ranch in this area, please consider representing your fellow farmers and ranchers by nomination yourself to serve. Contact our office if you would like to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of committee members.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Peggy Livingston
Weston County FSA is Accepting Emergency Conservation Program Applications

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting applications in Weston County for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) to address damages from two events: drought and flooding. ECP signup will begin on August 2, 2021 and run through the end of the month, ending on August 30, 2021.

The approved ECP practices include: EC1 Debris Removal; EC2 Grading, Shaping, Releveling; EC3 Fence; EC4 Restoring structures, wells, pipelines, tanks; and EC6 Drought Emergency Measures.

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. A 25 percent advance payment will be allowed for repair or replacement of fencing. The payment limitation for ECP is $500,000 per disaster, and the funds are limited to activities to return the land to the relative 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 completed 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 the type and extent of the damage. An on-site inspection does not guarantee that cost-share funding will be provided.

For those of you who expressed interest in the program and provided us information regarding your need, be aware you must complete the ECP application by August 31, 2021 to formally enroll in the program.

For more information on ECP, contact the Weston County USDA Service Center at 307-746-2701 extension 2 or visit farmers.gov/recover.

Disaster Assistance for 2021 Livestock Forage Losses

Producers grazing eligible livestock in Weston County can now apply for 2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on native pasture, improved pasture, and forage sorghum.

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 the required supporting documentation no later than January 30, 2022, for 2021 losses.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact the Weston County USDA Service Center at 307-746-2701 extension 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)
ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to disease, adverse weather or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible losses include:

- **Livestock** - grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, additional cost of transporting water because of an eligible drought and additional cost associated with gathering livestock to treat for cattle tick fever.

- **Honeybee** - loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, cost of additional feed purchased above normal quantities due to an eligible adverse weather condition, colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.

- **Farm-Raised Fish** - death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

If you’ve suffered eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses during calendar year 2021, you must file:

- A notice of loss within 30 calendar days after the loss is apparent (15 days for honeybee losses)
- An application for payment by January 30, 2022

For additional information about ELAP, contact the Weston County USDA Service Center at 307-746-2701 extension 2 or visit [fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov).

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**Principles for High Functioning Soils**

SOIL HEALTH DEFINED

Soil health is the continued capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Only living things can have “health,” so viewing soil as a living, breathing ecosystem reflects a shift in the way we view and manage our nation’s soils. Soil isn’t an inert growing medium, but rather is the home of billions of bacteria, fungi, and other organisms that together create an intricate symbiotic ecosystem. This ecosystem can be managed to support plants and animals, by cycling nutrients, absorbing, draining and retaining rainwater and snowmelt for use during dry periods, filtering and buffering water to remove potential pollutants, and providing habitat for the soil biological population to flourish and diversify to keep the ecosystem functioning well.

KEY SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

These principles are represented in the circular diagram to the left to emphasize their relationship as a continuum where each complements the others and also depends on the others.

1. Minimize disturbance
2. Maximize soil cover
3. Maximize biodiversity
4. Maximize presence of living roots

PROTECTING THE SOIL HABITAT

The first two principles, shown on the right side of the diagram above focus on protection of the soil habitat: minimize disturbance and maximize soil cover. Practices that use these principles maintain or increase stable soil aggregates and soil organic matter (SOM) and protect the surface of the soil that is most susceptible to the degrading forces of wind and water. Maximizing soil cover also buffers against temperature fluctuations that stress
plants and soil organisms, reduces evaporation rates, and increases the amount of water entering the soil profile from precipitation and irrigation.

SOM is highest at the soil surface and is critical for stabilizing soil aggregates.

Maintaining SOM helps support additional soil functions including water infiltration, drainage and storage, nutrient-holding capacity and release, and habitat for soil biota.

FEEDING THE SOIL ORGANISMS INHABITING SOIL

The second two principles, shown on the left side of the circular diagram, focus on feeding soil organisms. Maximizing the diversity of food (energy and carbon inputs) and aboveground biodiversity increases the diversity of soil animals and microorganisms. Diversity not only refers to food sources, but also aboveground diversification of plants and animals, and microbial diversification underground. Diversification stimulates a host of additional benefits including breaking disease cycles, providing habitat for pollinators, and stimulating plant growth.

Maximizing the presence of living roots in the soil can be accomplished through eliminating fallow, diverse crop rotation, inclusion of cover crops, and/or through dedicated grasslands (native or pasture). Mixing up which plants are grown during the year or over the course of multiple years may help to break disease/pest cycles.

When these two principles are properly applied as part of soil health management system, soils can maintain or even increase SOM content as well as enhance nutrient cycling.

HEALTHY, FUNCTIONING SOILS ARE ABLE TO:

- Cycle nutrients effectively
- Store carbon and nutrients in soil organic matter
- Provide good aeration to promote root growth
- Improve farm and ranch resiliency and profitability
- Improve yield stability
- Reduce runoff and erosion
- Improve water storage and plant available water while protecting water quality
- Be resilient to drought, heavy rainfall events, and temperature extremes
- Reduce disease and pest problems

Soil Health Management Systems Principles can be generally used in all production systems to achieve this. However, the specific practices chosen to implement the principles must be adapted to each production system, climate, ecosystem, and soil to effectively build and maintain healthy, functioning soil.

For more information about maintaining soil health on your operation, contact the Weston County USDA Service Center at 307-746-3264 or visit nrcs.usda.gov.

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 Rob Weppner, Farm Loan Manager at 307-682-8843 Ext 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

**UPCOMING DEADLINES & IMPORTANT DATES**

- **August 2, 2021**: FSA deadline to request farm transfers or reconstitutions for 2021
- **August 2, 2021**: FSA deadline to submit a candidate nomination for FSA County Committee election
- **August 2, 2021**: FSA opens ECP application enrollment
- **August 30, 2021**: FSA closes ECP application enrollment
- **September 17, 2021**: FSA deadline to submit applications for the 2021 Pandemic Livestock Indemnity Program

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 information below.

Please note that changes in policy for wearing masks within federal building and vehicles are forthcoming and you may be asked to wear a mask to visit our offices.
**County Executive Director:**
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**District Conservationist:**
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**County Committee:**
Chuck Grieves, Chairman
Randy Oleson, Vice Chairman
Harry Tavegia, Member
Robin Riesland, Minority Advisor

**WCNRD Board:**
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:**
August 10, 2021