

In This Issue:

- [USDA Commits to Big Game Conservation Partnership with the State of Wyoming: Initial Investments Forthcoming](#)
- [Showcase Your Season with #Plant2022](#)
- [2022 Avian Influenza in the United States - What you need to know!](#)
- [New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices](#)
- [What's New and Improved for Specialty Crop Producers?](#)
- [USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming](#)

USDA Commits to Big Game Conservation Partnership with the State of Wyoming: Initial Investments Forthcoming

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Under Secretary Robert Bonnie announced a new partnership that uses diverse Farm Bill investments to support voluntary conservation of private working lands and migratory big game populations in Wyoming. Bonnie made the announcement at the University of Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park 150th Anniversary Symposium. Using lessons learned from this pilot, USDA seeks to scale up this model across the West as part of President Biden's commitment to support voluntary, locally-led conservation efforts to reach the administration's national conservation goals.

"Conserving America's most iconic wildlife and wildlife migration corridors depends on the conservation of private working lands and tribal lands through voluntary, collaborative incentives that reward farmers, ranchers and forest owners for stewardship of their lands," said Bonnie, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. "Today's announcement results from consultation with the State of Wyoming and local stakeholders to create new and enhanced opportunities through USDA's conservation programs to expand our work with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to conserve wildlife and migration corridors and to keep working lands working."

"Wyoming leads the nation in our approaches to conserving big game and their movements. We've done that with strong landowner partnerships and an acknowledgement that habitat conservation can be done on multi-use landscapes," said Brian Nesvik, Director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. "Private landowners provide key habitat for wildlife seen in Yellowstone National Park. Offering voluntary funding opportunities to landowners to maintain this valuable space for wildlife is a recognition of their role in conservation."

USDA participated in extensive engagement and listening sessions with stakeholders throughout Wyoming and developed this pilot in response to their feedback. Those listening sessions helped guide the project's concepts and principles: recognition of the large scale of this issue in key landscapes, coordination with state agencies, consistency with state policy and direction and support of existing partnerships wherever possible.

The pilot will take a systems approach to voluntary conservation and draw on several USDA programs, including the [Grassland Conservation Reserve Program](#) (Grassland CRP), [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP), the [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP) and the [Agricultural Conservation Easements Program](#) (ACEP) to provide financial and technical assistance for landowners who want to participate. USDA is committing an initial \$15 million in investment through EQIP and ACEP for Wyoming, in addition to the rental payments that will go to producers who enroll in Grasslands CRP. There are three distinct conservation areas that USDA will invest in using

these voluntary and incentive-based programs. All are designed to help willing landowners and their partners conserve private lands for the benefit of migratory big game populations. They include:

- **Agricultural Land Protection** – Preventing the conversion of private working lands that provide habitat and other values for migratory big game populations to alternative land uses not compatible with big game migrations. Specifically, this would include preventing actions like residential subdivision, mining and development of commercial wind and solar facilities on private lands. Additional resources will be provided to Wyoming for Agricultural Land Easements through the ACEP (ACEP-ALE) for this effort, as well as prioritization of big game conservation through RCPP.
- **Restoration, Enhancement and Management** – Restoring and managing working lands to provide a variety of healthy habitats migrating animals need to meet their life history requirements. Habitat quality can be improved in many ways including but not limited to the control of invasive species, restoration of degraded aspens, removal of encroached woodlands and restoration of wet meadows. Ensuring compatibility with fences used for managing working lands and migrating animals is also a top priority. Today, USDA is announcing an additional \$5 million in FY22 resources through the EQIP for Wyoming to specifically support these needs. These resources are a significant addition to the State's current FY22 EQIP allocation of over \$16 million.
- **Conservation Leases** - Managing working lands in a way that ensures the resiliency of the desired habitat conditions is extremely important to migrating big game as they rely upon healthy lands to meet their diverse seasonal habitat needs. Providing annual financial incentives to landowners through a conservation lease can help encourage the long-term management that results in resiliency. The 10- to 15-year contracts through the Grassland CRP are being used to fulfill this need. To date, USDA has committed \$32.3 million (\$2.3 million paid to landowners annually) to conserve over 170,000 acres through Grassland CRP in Wyoming with additional enrollments to be announced from this year's signup in the coming weeks. For this year's signup, USDA piloted policy changes to make it easier for producers to access multiple programs. USDA will continue to work with partners to tailor the program to meet the state's needs before next year's signup.

This pilot leverages ongoing conservation efforts on working lands, which prioritizes action to further the conservation of wildlife and habitats through the importance of partnerships and local leadership. The work emphasizes a commitment to voluntary, incentive-based approaches; identifies a critical role of private, working lands; and stresses the importance of supporting state, tribal, and landowners to advance their conservation priorities.

Working Lands and Wildlife

This effort builds on USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) approach, which has enabled more than 8400 producers across the United States to conserve 12 million acres of prime wildlife habitat since 2010. This approach has had ample success in the West, where it has focused on removing invasive weeds and invading conifers, reducing wildfire risk, and protecting wetlands as well as agricultural lands from exurban development. Resulting conservation actions played a key role in the no-list decisions for the greater sage-grouse, Bi-State sage-grouse, and New England cottontail as well as the delisting of the Louisiana black bear. These efforts have recently been expanded through the first biome-scale frameworks for wildlife conservation in the [Great Plains grasslands, western sagebrush country](#), and for the [Central and Eastern grasslands and savannas within 25 states in the northern bobwhite range](#). This big game special project similarly strategically focuses Farm Bill resources to conserve working lands that benefit both wildlife and people.

More Information

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and

committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

Showcase Your Season with #Plant2022

This planting season let's highlight the innovation and leadership demonstrated by conservation-minded farmers in our #Plant2022 campaign. We'll share your photos and stories on social media, blogs, and a nationwide storymap.

Learn more (<https://go.usa.gov/xuTqj>)



2022 Avian Influenza in the United States - What you need to know!



To date, USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in commercial and backyard flocks in several states including Wyoming. Avian influenza viruses are classified as either "low pathogenic (LPAI)" or "highly pathogenic (HPAI)" based on their genetic features and the severity of the disease they cause in poultry. Caused by an influenza type A virus, HPAI can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and wild birds (especially waterfowl).

The clinical signs of birds affected with all forms of Avian Influenza may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Decreased water consumption up to 72 hours before other clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

In addition to the disease infecting domestic birds, it is important to know that wild birds can also be infected and show no signs of illness. They can carry the disease to new areas when migrating, potentially exposing domestic poultry to the virus. The [APHIS' wild bird surveillance program](#) provides an early warning system for the introduction and distribution of avian influenza viruses of concern in the United States, allowing APHIS and the poultry industry to take timely and rapid action.

With the recent detections of avian influenza in wild birds and domestic poultry in the United States, bird owners should review their biosecurity practices and stay vigilant to protect poultry and pet birds from transmission of this disease. The following bio-safety guidelines are effective methods for safeguarding commercial operations and smaller flocks:

- Backyard flock owners should practice strict biosecurity, including preventing birds from exposure and/or co-mingling with wild birds and other types of poultry.
- Shower, change clothes, and clean and disinfect footwear before entering your poultry housing areas.

- Respiratory protection such as a medical facemask would also be important and remember to always wear clean clothes when encountering healthy domestic birds.
- Carefully follow safe entry and exit procedures into your flock's clean area.
- Reduce the attractiveness for wild birds to stop at your place by cleaning up litter and spilled feed around poultry housing areas.
- If you have free range guinea fowl and waterfowl, consider bringing them into coops or flight pens under nets to prevent interaction of domesticated poultry with wild birds and their droppings.
- It is best to restrict visitors from interacting with your birds currently.
- Do not touch sick or dead wildlife and keep them away from domestic poultry
- Try not to handle sick or deceased domestic birds (if you must, use proper personal protective equipment to minimize direct contact and cautiously disinfect anything that comes into contact with the deceased and or sick bird).

As part of the existing USDA Avian Influenza response plans, Federal and State partners as well as industry are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps:

- **Quarantine** – restricting movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- **Eradicate** – depopulate the affected flock(s);
- **Monitor region** – testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine area;
- **Disinfect** – kills the virus in the affected flock locations; and
- **Test** – confirming that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

Sick or deceased domestic birds should be reported to your local veterinarian. Positive domestic cases are handled by APHIS and its partners. States that have confirmed cases of Avian Influenza should work closely with USDA-APHIS on surveillance, reporting and control efforts. Disposal methods will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis depending on a variety of factors, including the size of the flock, space requirements, associated costs, local conditions, and applicable laws/regulations.

The United States has the strongest Avian Influenza surveillance program in the world, where we actively look for the disease and provide fair market value compensation to affected producers to encourage reporting.

If you do not raise domestic birds or have a poultry operation but you encounter sick or dead wild birds, please use bio-safety measures, and report your findings through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, this strain of Avian Influenza is a low risk to the public. While the transmission rate from animals to humans is low, it is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be shared between species. To learn more about Avian Influenza and to remain up to date on the latest related news and information, you can visit the [USDAAPHIS webpage](#).

New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers now have a one-stop shop to help ensure they are treated fairly. The new farmerfairness.gov portal developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) allows you to report potential violations of livestock and poultry antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently expressed concern that producers across the country have for too long faced a marketplace that benefits a few large companies over the farmers and ranchers who grow and raise our food.

For example, ranchers received more than 60 cents of every dollar a consumer spent on beef 50 years ago, compared to approximately 39 cents today. Hog farmers fared worse over the past 50 years, as their share of the consumer dollar fell from between 40 to 60 cents 50 years ago to approximately 19 cents today.

In order to assure economic opportunity and fairness for all, this portal makes it easy for farmers and ranchers to register a complaint or tip and provide details that would aid an investigation.

Who may submit a complaint or tip?

Anyone who suspects a violation of Federal law governing fair and competitive marketing and contract growing of livestock and poultry, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

What information should I provide?

Those reporting potential violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act and other competition laws via the online portal are asked to submit the following information:

- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that are involved,
- A description of any possible violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act or other [federal antitrust laws](#),
- Examples of the conduct that may violate one or more of these laws,
- Any other relevant details about the violation, and
- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that may be harmed by the alleged violation and how they are harmed.

What is the process following submission of a complaint or tip?

Complaints and tips will go through a preliminary review by USDA Packers and Stockyards Division staff and Department of Justice staff. If a complaint raises sufficient concern under the Packers and Stockyards Act or antitrust laws, it will be selected for further investigation by the appropriate agency. This action may lead to the opening of a formal investigation.

USDA or DOJ staff will only contact complainants if additional information is needed.

Will my confidentiality be protected?

Both USDA and DOJ will protect the confidentiality of the complainants to the fullest extent possible under the law. For any information provided, DOJ and USDA will follow their respective Privacy and Confidentiality Policies found at: [DOJ Confidentiality](#) and [USDA Privacy](#). Packers and Stockyards regulations regarding confidentiality also apply: [PSD Confidentiality](#). DOJ and USDA commit to supporting relevant whistleblower protections, including newly applicable protections [for criminal antitrust complainants against unlawful retaliation](#).

To submit an anonymous complaint or tip, complainants or tippers should provide appropriate details but not enter their names or contact information. Neither USDA nor DOJ will be able to contact anonymous complainants or tippers to obtain additional information that might be needed to evaluate your complaint tip, or to engage in future correspondence regarding your complaint or tip.

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers deserve the benefits of fair and competitive markets for their products and services. This portal is an additional tool to support and protect these individuals who are vital to agriculture and our food supply.

What's New and Improved for Specialty Crop Producers?



Does your operation include specialty crops? Whether you grow fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, or nursery crops - USDA is here for you.

Over the past year, USDA has stepped up our support of specialty crop producers and local and regional food systems. USDA believes specialty crop producers are integral to the food system of the future, and we are working to improve available options for specialty crop producers as well as ensure equity in program delivery.

What's New?

The Risk Management Agency (RMA) rolled out a new insurance option for small-scale producers who sell locally, which is named **Micro Farm**. This new insurance coverage option simplifies record keeping and covers post-production costs, such as washing and value-added products. It is available now, and you can learn more from an Approved Insurance Provider or your [RMA specialty crop liaison](#).

In addition to Micro Farm, RMA rolled out other new insurance options in the past year, including: **California Citrus Trees, Florida Citrus, Production and Revenue History option for Florida strawberries, and Hurricane Insurance Protection-Wind Index (HIP-WI)**. These new options either fill gaps in coverage or offer advantages over other policies. Since 2020, producers weathered several major hurricanes. The new HIP-WI played a crucial role in recovery with more than \$250 million in indemnities paid so far with most payments issued in a matter of weeks following a hurricane.

[Interest in growing and insuring specialty crops](#) has grown significantly with \$1 billion in liabilities for 1990 to \$22 billion in liabilities for 2021. ([For more details, check out reports on our Specialty Crops webpage.](#))

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) also offered pandemic assistance for organic producers. The new [Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program](#) (OTECP) provided assistance to help cover loss of markets, increased costs, labor shortages and expenses related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification.

What's Improved?

In the past year, RMA made improvements to existing policies -- including [Whole-Farm Revenue Protection](#), a key insurance option for specialty crop producers. Beginning in the 2021 crop year, direct market producers could report two or more commodities using a new combined direct marketing code.

This reduced a tremendous burden for diversified producers and allowed them to receive a premium rate discount for diversification. For 2022, RMA increased coverage for organic and aquaculture producers and enabled organic producers to report certified organic acreage as long as the request for certification had been made by the reporting date, which provides additional flexibility to producers.

Want to Learn More?

These new and improved options for specialty crop producers are but a few of USDA's strides over the past year to build a fairer, more transparent food system rooted in local and regional production. To learn more, please read [USDA's January 19, 2022, news release](#).

For crop insurance, visit [RMA's Specialty Crops webpage](#) or [contact your specialty crop liaison](#).

Also, if there is not a standard offer for the crop you would like insured, you may still be able to get a written agreement for coverage. RMA Regional Offices review these requests to help provide coverage. These requests also provide Regional Offices the opportunity to review the possible expansion of the policy to your county.

Lastly, you can read our [Specialty Crops webpage on farmers.gov](#) and [question-and-answer with two specialty crop liaisons](#), Adrienne Steinacher and Matt Wilkin.

USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming

Are you a military veteran interested in farming? USDA offers resources to help you:

- **Fund Your Operation:** USDA's Farm Service Agency offers a variety of [funding opportunities](#) to help agricultural producers finance their businesses. Certain funds are targeted for veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Conserve Natural Resources:** USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers [conservation programs and expert one-on-one technical assistance](#) to strengthen agricultural operations now and into the future. Veterans may be eligible for a cost share of up to 90 percent and advance payments of up to 50 percent to cover certain conservation practices.

- **Manage Risks:** USDA is here to help you prepare for and recover from the unexpected. Veterans who are beginning farmers may be eligible for reduced premiums, application fee waivers, increased insurance coverage, and other incentives for multiple [USDA programs that support risk management](#).

USDA wants to ensure that veterans transitioning to agriculture have the resources needed to succeed. While USDA offices are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus. If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to your [state Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator](#).

Wyoming State Office

951 Werner Ct Ste 130
Casper, WY 82601

Phone: 307-261-5231
Fax: 855-415-3427

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).