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Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance

The term “sodbusting” is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you’re proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.



Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification,” with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

Ask the Expert: Customer Farm Records Mapping Q&A with Gwen Uecker



In this Ask the Expert, Gwen Uecker answers a few questions about USDA's farmers.gov customer portal. Gwen serves as the Team Lead for the Program Delivery Division (PDD), Common Processes Branch for the Deputy Administrator of Farm Program within Farm Service Agency (FSA). She helps lead PDD's effort to provide personalized customer information via farmers.gov.

A farmers.gov account provides self-service opportunities to FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) customers via a secure authenticated access process.

What is the value of Customer Farm Records Mapping and why should producers use farmers.gov?

Customer Farm Records Mapping (cFRM) provides you with self-help options and access to FSA data from home 24/7. For example, you do not have to wait for FSA to mail out maps for acreage reporting or make a special trip to the office to pick up your maps. You can print farm tract maps directly from farmers.gov.

New features include the ability to import precision agriculture planting boundaries and create labels containing crop information that can be printed on-farm tract maps. The maps can then be provided to FSA at the local USDA Service Center for completing the annual crop acreage report. You can use the draw tools to determine acres in a drawn area. The drawn area can be printed on a map and provided to the Service Center, a third party such as a chemical applicator, or exported as a feature file for use in other geospatial applications.

In addition, you can "Switch Profile" to view cFRM data for individuals or entities you are authorized to act on behalf of. This means you can view and print maps for your entity's farms. Producers can also view and print farm records details, including base and yield information (FSA-156EZ).

The FSA Farm Records Mapping page is accessed by clicking the blue "View Farm Records" button from the farmers.gov LAND tab.

To read the full blog visit [Ask the Expert: Customer Farm Records Mapping Q&A with Gwen Uecker | Farmers.gov](#).

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 tips 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.

Cover Crops Play a Starring Role in Climate Change Mitigation



On your own land, you've probably seen evidence that climate change is happening – things like extreme weather events or changes in growing seasons over the years. America's rural communities are on the frontlines of climate change, and now is the time for agriculture, forestry, and rural communities to act.

There are various ways to help mitigate the effects of climate change on your land and improve your bottom line at the same time. One very effective way is by planting cover crops.

Cover crops offer agricultural producers a natural and inexpensive climate solution through their ability to capture atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) into soils. But cover crops don't just remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, they also help make your soil healthier and your crops more resilient to a changing climate.

Healthy soil has better water infiltration and water holding capacity and is less susceptible to erosion from wind and water.

Cover crops also trap excess nitrogen – keeping it from leaching into groundwater or running off into surface water – releasing it later to feed growing crops. This saves you money on inputs like water and fertilizer and makes your crops more able to survive in harsh conditions.

USDA's Cover Crop Support

During the past year, USDA has made a number of strides to encourage use of cover crops. Earlier this month, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) formed a [new partnership with Farmers For Soil Health](#). We also launched a new Cover Crop Initiative in 11 states through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), targeted \$38 million to help producers mitigate climate change through adoption of cover crops.

In fiscal 2021, NRCS provided technical and financial assistance to help producers plant 2.3 million acres of cover crops through EQIP.

We've also recognized the importance of supporting cover crops through crop insurance. USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) recently provided \$59.5 million in premium support for producers who planted cover crops on 12.2 million acres through the new [Pandemic Cover Crop Program](#). Additionally, RMA recently updated policy to allow producers with crop insurance to [hay, graze or chop cover crops](#) at any time and still receive 100% of the prevented planting payment. This policy change supports use of cover crops, which can help producers build resilience to drought. [Visit RMA's Conservation webpage to learn more](#).

Working together, we can lead the way through climate-smart solutions that will improve the profitability and resilience of producers and foresters, open new market opportunities, and build wealth that stays in rural communities. Our support for cover crops are part of a much broader effort at USDA to address climate change. To learn more, read [USDA's January 18, 2022 news release](#).

Cover crops are not only good for rural communities, but also for urban areas. Late last year, the [NRCS National Plant Materials Center planted cover crops](#) in the urban garden in front of USDA's Washington, D.C. Headquarters. See how cover crops are also great for the urban farmer or backyard gardener.

To learn more, visit [farmers.gov/conserve/soil-health](#), watch our Conservation at Work video on cover crops, or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

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