From Brenda’s Desk

Let it snow, let it snow? We sure need the moisture but not the cold. Big Horn County is still in the D2 & D3 status on the Drought monitor. This does make our county eligible for the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program and Livestock Forage Program. Software will not be open until April, but this is just a reminder to keep your records up to date and document, document, document.

This is the time of year that farm changes are happening, and it is very important to keep our office informed of any changes to your operation. This would include a new lease, dropped lease, changes to banking information, a new member added to your entity, purchased, or sold land, etc. By keeping us updated it makes your visits with our office more efficient. With that being said, it is also getting close to the deadline to enroll your farms in the 2022 ARC/PLC program. If you received a postcard from us, then you are still needing to make your election for the 2022. Please stop by our office prior to March 15, 2022, and complete your paperwork.

Also, a reminder to any producers that received a Quality Loss Assistance Program (QLA) or Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program (WHIP+) you will be required to meet your insurance linkage for 2022 and 2023. If you are unsure of the linkage requirements you will need to meet, please call our office for assistance.

Wishing you all a good calving and lambing season! We are always here to assist you on all your agricultural needs.

Five Facts About the United States Drought Monitor

This is likely no surprise to you, but drought persists across the western U.S. and is intensifying in some areas. No geographic area is immune to the potential of drought at any given time. The U.S. Drought Monitor provides a weekly drought assessment, and it plays an important role in USDA programs that help farmers and ranchers recover from drought.

Fact #1 - Numerous agencies use the Drought Monitor to inform drought-related decisions.

The map identifies areas of drought and labels them by intensity on a weekly basis. It categorizes the entire country as being in one of six levels of drought. The first two, None and Abnormally Dry (D0), are not considered to be drought. The next four describe increasing levels of drought: Moderate (D1), Severe (D2), Extreme (D3) and Exceptional (D4).

While many entities consult the Drought Monitor for drought information, drought declarations are made by federal, state and local agencies that may or may not use the Drought Monitor to inform their decisions. Some of the ways USDA uses it to determine a producer’s eligibility for certain drought assistance.
programs, like the Livestock Forage Disaster Program and Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres and to “fast-track” Secretarial drought disaster designations.

Fact #2 - U.S. Drought Monitor is made with more than precipitation data.

When you think about drought, you probably think about water, or the lack of it. Precipitation plays a major role in the creation of the Drought Monitor, but the map’s author considers numerous indicators, including drought impacts and local insight from over 450 expert observers around the country. Authors use several dozen indicators to assess drought, including precipitation, streamflow, reservoir levels, temperature and evaporative demand, soil moisture and vegetation health. Because the drought monitor depicts both short and long-term drought conditions, the authors must look at data for multiple timeframes. The final map produced each week represents a summary of the story being told by all the pieces of data. To help tell that story, authors don’t just look at data. They converse over the course of the map-making week with experts across the country and draw information about drought impacts from media reports and private citizens.

Fact #3 - A real person, using real data, updates the map.

Each week’s map author, not a computer, processes and analyzes data to update the drought monitor. The map authors are trained climatologists or meteorologists from the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (the academic partner and website host of the Drought Monitor), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and USDA. The author’s job is to do what a computer can’t – use their expertise to reconcile the sometimes-conflicting stories told by each stream of data into a single assessment.

Fact #4 - The Drought Monitor provides a current snapshot, not a forecast.

The Drought Monitor is a “snapshot” of conditions observed during the most recent week and builds off the previous week’s map. The map is released on Thursdays and depicts conditions based on data for the week that ended the preceding Tuesday. Rain that falls on the Wednesday just before the USDM’s release won’t be reflected until the next map is published. This provides a consistent, week-to-week product and gives the author a window to assess the data and come up with a final map.

Fact #5 – Your input can be part of the drought-monitoring process.

State climatologists and other trained observers in the drought monitoring network relay on-the-ground information from numerous sources to the US Drought monitor author each week. That can include information that you contribute.

The Drought Monitor serves as a trigger for multiple forms of federal disaster relief for agricultural producers, and sometimes producers contact the author to suggest that drought conditions in their area are worse than what the latest drought monitor shows. When the author gets a call like that, it prompts them to look closely at all available data for that area, to see whether measurements of precipitation, temperature, soil moisture and other indicators corroborate producer-submitted reports. This is the process that authors follow whether they receive one report or one hundred reports, although reports from more points may help state officials and others know where to look for impacts.

There are multiple ways to contribute your observations:

1. **Talk to your state climatologist** - Find the current list at the [American Association of State Climatologists](https://www.aasc-casc.org) website.
2. **Email** - Emails sent to [droughtmonitor@unl.edu](mailto:droughtmonitor@unl.edu) inform the USDM authors.
3. **Become a CoCoRaHS observer** - Submit drought reports along with daily precipitation observations to the [Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network](https://www.coconet.org). 
4. **Submit Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR)** - [go.unl.edu/CMOR](http://go.unl.edu/CMOR).

For more information, read our [Ask the Expert blog with a NDMC climatologist](https://farmers.gov/protection-recovery) or visit [farmers.gov/protection-recovery](http://farmers.gov/protection-recovery).
Linkage Requirements for Payments Received Under WHIP+ and/or QLA

If you received a payment under the Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program+ (WHIP+) or the Quality Loss Adjustment Program (QLA) for crop production and/or quality losses occurring in 2018, 2019, or 2020 crop years, you are required to meet linkage requirements by obtaining federal crop insurance or Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage at the 60/100 level, or higher, for both the 2022 and 2023 crop years.

When applying for WHIP+ or QLA, form FSA-895 (Crop Insurance and/or NAP Coverage Agreement) was submitted acknowledging the requirement to obtain federal crop insurance, if available, or NAP coverage if federal crop insurance is not available. The coverage requirement is applicable to the physical location county of the crop that received WHIP+ and/or QLA benefits.

Producers should not delay contacting their federal crop insurance agent or local county FSA Office to inquire about coverage options, as failure to obtain the applicable coverage by the sales/application closing date will result in the required refund of WHIP+ benefits received on the applicable crop, plus interest. You can determine if crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP by visiting the RMA website.

For more information, contact your Big Horn County USDA Service Center at (307)765-2689 Ext 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early

The Farm Loan team in Big Horn County is already working on operating loans for spring 2022 and asks potential borrowers to submit their requests early so they can be timely processed. The farm loan team can help determine which loan programs are best for applicants.

FSA offers a wide range of low-interest loans that can meet the financial needs of any farm operation for just about any purpose. The traditional farm operating, and farm ownership loans can help large and small farm operations take advantage of early purchasing discounts for spring inputs as well expenses throughout the year.

Microloans are a simplified loan program that will provide up to $50,000 for both Farm Ownership and Operating Microloans to eligible applicants. These loans, targeted for smaller and non-traditional operations, can be used for operating expenses, starting a new operation, purchasing equipment, and other needs associated with a farming operation. Loans to beginning farmers and members of underserved groups are a priority.

Other types of loans available include:

Marketing Assistance Loans allow producers to use eligible commodities as loan collateral and obtain a 9-month loan while the crop is in storage. These loans provide cash flow to the producer and allow them to market the crop when prices may be more advantageous.

Farm Storage Facility Loans can be used to build permanent structures used to store eligible commodities, for storage and handling trucks, or portable or permanent handling equipment. A variety of structures are eligible under this loan, including bunker silos, grain bins, hay storage structures, and refrigerated structures for vegetables and fruit. A producer may borrow up to $500,000 per loan.

NRCS NEWS Input Sought at Community Natural Resource Conservation Meetings
The Conservation Districts in Big Horn, Park and Washakie Counties would like to invite the public and any agencies with an interest in conservation issues to participate in a Local Work Group meeting to be held on Thursday, March 3, 2022, at the NWC complex located at 1397 Fort Drum Drive, Powell, Wyoming. The meeting will be held from 9:00 AM through 12:30 PM.

The purpose of this meeting is to receive input from a broad range of local stakeholders -- individuals, organizations, businesses, and agencies --- that have an interest in natural resource conditions and needs in Big Horn, Park and Washakie Counties and to provide that information to the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Farm Bill stipulates that conservation programs must continue to be locally led. Through these local meetings, the public is given an opportunity to help local conservation leaders set priorities such as helping prioritize resource concerns and priority watersheds and identify other local concerns.

If you would like to participate via go-to-meeting please use the following link or call in number! Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone. https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/688748341
You can also dial in using your phone. United States: +1 (571) 317-3122 Access Code: 688-748-341
Join from a video-conferencing room or system. Dial in or type: 67.217.95.2 or inroomlink.goto.com
Meeting ID: 688 748 341 Or dial directly: 688748341@67.217.95.2 or 67.217.95.2##688748341

For More information, contact your local conservation district at (307)765-2689 or (307)548-7422.