From Sheryl’s Desk

Greetings Carbon and Albany County agricultural producers!

I am about to wrap up processing applications and payments for the 2021 Livestock Forage Program (LFP) and 2021 Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) program for water hauling and extra feed transportation. Processing Non-Insurable Assistance Program (NAP) applications and payments are next on my list. This will be followed by finalizing Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) applications and contracts.

For the few of you that have historical crop base acres, the deadline to complete 2022 election and contracts for Agricultural Risk Contract/Price Loss Contract is March 15, 2022.

A reminder for anyone that may experience livestock losses due to adverse weather, please remember the Livestock Indemnity Program. This program pays on livestock losses that exceed normal threshold and are the result of eligible adverse weather conditions. The program requires a lot of documentation, which means noting the weather conditions, for instance what happened to the calves, lambs, adult cattle, adult sheep or goats. You need to call the office to notify us of the losses within 30 days of when the losses become apparent to file your notice of loss.

Important Date:

- January 31 – March 11: General CRP Signup 58
- March 2: County Committee Meeting, in Saratoga at 10 AM
- March 15: ARCPLC deadline
- April 4 – May 13: Grassland CRP signup will take place
- July 15: Acreage Reporting deadline. Alfalfa and CRP are required to be recertified each year!

As we round out winter and head into spring, I hope that everyone has a successful calving and lambing season!

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Direct Farm Ownership loans can help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

There are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a Direct Farm Ownership Microloan option for smaller financial needs up to $50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being
purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a joint financing loan is $600,000, and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

The operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about farm loans, contact your Platte County USDA Service Center at 307-322-4050 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Making Your Land More Resilient to Drought

Now that the 2021 crop year has ended, it's time to start planning for 2022 and beyond. Many farmers and ranchers west of the Mississippi River have had a very difficult year in 2021 due to drought. Those in other areas of the country were spared from the worst of the drought this time but may not be as lucky in future years. So, as you're planning for 2022 production, you may want to consider some conservation practices that can help make your land and livestock more resilient to drought and help your bottom line.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service can help you conserve water and build resilience to drought, through conservation practices that improve irrigation efficiency, boost soil health, and manage grazing lands.

**Irrigation Efficiency** USDA helps you improve your irrigation efficiency to ensure each drop of water is used wisely. Saving water on your farm can help during drought and can offset rising water costs; reduce expenditures for energy, chemicals, and labor; and enhance revenues through higher crop yields and improved crop quality. Funded conservation practices include conversion to more efficient irrigation systems, such as micro-irrigation or subsurface drip irrigation, installation of irrigation pipeline, irrigation water management, structures for water control, and flow meters. Tools like drip irrigation, which provides water precisely where and when it’s needed, can achieve greater precision with flow meters and soil moisture sensors.

**Soil Health** In addition, soil health conservation practices, such as reduced- or no-till, cover crops, mulching and residue management can help to make your soil, and the plants you grow or animals you raise, healthier. Healthier soil can absorb and retain more water for longer periods of time, making your farm or ranch more resilient to drought. Using soil health practices, you can conserve water by increasing your soil’s water-holding capacity and use conservation tillage to keep the ground covered, reducing water loss through transpiration and evaporation.

And soil health practices increase organic matter, and each pound of organic matter can hold up to 20 pounds of water. Every 1% increase in organic matter results in as much as 25,000 gallons of soil water per acre. Each 1% increase in organic matter can also provide up to 30 pounds of more available nitrogen per acre. That means less money and time spent on inputs like water and fertilizer, which make your operation more profitable.

**Rotational/Prescribed Grazing, Water Sources for Livestock** Drought also impacts grazing lands, and NRCS works with you to increase the resilience of your livestock operation. Ranchers can adapt to dry conditions in two main ways: increasing the availability and suitability of forage and ensuring that cattle have an adequate and reliable source of water. For forage, rotational or prescribed grazing (rotating cattle among pastures) can relieve pressure on stressed vegetation and ensure a more consistent supply of forage for animals. NRCS conservationists can also work with you to plant more drought-tolerant forage species, plants best suited to local soils and conditions. For reliable sources of water, NRCS can help you with installing watering facilities, water wells, or water pipeline for livestock. Having available forage and water for livestock can make a big difference in difficult drought conditions.

USDA and NRCS are here for you, helping you recover from drought and prepare for the next one. For more information on drought recovery assistance at [https://www.farmers.gov/protection-recovery/drought#recovery](https://www.farmers.gov/protection-recovery/drought#recovery). For more information on conservation practices to make your operation more resilient to drought in future years, go to [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).
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.csc.ncsu.edu) website.
2. **Email** - Emails sent to 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.
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://www.farmers.gov/ask-the-expert) or visit [farmers.gov/protection-recovery](https://farmers.gov/protection-recovery).

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**USDA to Invest $1 Billion in Climate Smart Commodities, Expanding Markets, Strengthening Rural America**

**Funding Opportunity Opens to Pilot New Revenue Streams for America’s Climate-Smart Farmers, Ranchers and Forest Landowners**

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on February 7 that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is delivering on its promise to expand markets by investing $1 billion in partnerships to support America’s climate-smart farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The new [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](https://www.farmers.gov/ask-the-expert) opportunity will finance pilot projects that create market opportunities for U.S. agricultural and forestry products that use climate-smart practices and include innovative, cost-effective ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas benefits. USDA is now accepting project applications for fiscal year 2022.

For the purposes of this funding opportunity, a climate-smart commodity is defined as an agricultural commodity that is produced using agricultural (farming, ranching or forestry) practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon.

Funding will be provided to partners through the USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation for pilot projects to provide incentives to producers and landowners to:

- implement climate-smart production practices, activities, and systems on working lands,
- measure/quantify, monitor and verify the carbon and greenhouse gas (GHG) benefits associated with those practices, and
- develop markets and promote the resulting climate-smart commodities.

Funding will be provided in two funding pools, and applicants must submit their applications via Grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on:

- April 8, 2022, for the first funding pool (proposals from $5 million to $100 million), and
- May 27, 2022, for the second funding pool (proposals from $250,000 to $4,999,999).

A wide range of organizations may apply, but the primary applicant must be an entity, not an individual.

USDA is committed to equity in program delivery and is specifically seeking proposals from entities serving all types of producers, including small or historically underserved producers.
Visit [usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov) for additional information including Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities and resources to support your application.

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