Staci’s Corner

Hello Crook County producers! Our little corner of the state is dry…..but I am ever hopeful some moisture to find us!

As you know 2020 and 2021 were hard on the office staff in Crook County. Almost every disaster program that could be activated, was. We are working diligently on finishing up the Livestock Forage Program for 2021, the ELAP Water Hauling for 2021 and the ELAP Hay/Feed Freight Hauling for 2021. The deadline to have your signature on your application and your paperwork filed in the office is Tuesday, February 22, 2022.

I am coordinating with our terrific NRCS staff to get out to the completed ECP projects to inspect these as weather permits. This is not a simple program to administer, and I appreciate your patience as I navigate through each application. I will keep you updated as to the status of the SHPO and archeologist hiring as we know more.

We would like to welcome Matt Wood to the County Office Committee (COC). He was elected in December to represent LAA 3. Zach Steele will be the first alternate.

The Crook County Natural Resource District (CCNRD) is having their TREE SALE program. If you are interested tree or shrub, order forms can be emailed to you or picked up at the USDA Service Center in Sundance. Payment must accompany order forms. The last day to submit orders is April 13th, 2022. Unfortunately, CCNRD doesn’t have a holding facility, so orders must be picked up the day the truck delivers the orders. Trees are expected to be delivered the last week of April or the beginning of May. They will call you a minimum of 7 days prior to the delivery date to confirm pick-up. If you have questions, please call the Crook County Natural Resource District at 307-283-2870, extension 4 or email crookcountynrd@gmail.com

The office will be Closed Monday, February 21, 2022, for President’s Day.

If you have any questions about programs, or anything really, please contact our office. We are in the office Monday through Friday and available from 8am to 4:30pm, closed for lunch from 12pm-1pm.

Very sincerely,

Staci L. Green-Steiner, CED

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](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/livestockforagedisasterprogram) and [Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Conservation/programs/CP/HRG) 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 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.

For more information, read our [Ask the Expert blog with a NDMC climatologist](#) or visit [farmers.gov/protection-recovery](http://farmers.gov/protection-recovery).

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**USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022**

Agricultural producers and landowners can sign up soon for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a cornerstone conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris Administration effort to address climate change and achieve other natural resource benefits. The General CRP signup will run from Jan. 31 to March 11, and the Grassland CRP signup will run from April 4 to May 13.

Producers and landowners enrolled 4.6 million acres into CRP signups in 2021, including 2.5 million acres in the largest Grassland CRP signup in history. There are currently 22.1 million acres enrolled, and FSA is aiming to reach the 25.5-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2022.

**CRP Signups**

General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland.

Meanwhile, Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

Alongside these programs, producers and landowners can enroll acres in Continuous CRP under the ongoing sign up, which includes projects available through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

**Climate Benefits**

Last year, FSA enacted a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP General and Continuous signups, to better target CRP on addressing climate change. This incentive aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CRP’s climate-smart practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA invested $10 million last year in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will
enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

More Information on CRP

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to apply for the program -- for General CRP before the March 11 deadline, and for Grassland CRP before the May 13 deadline. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Additionally, fact sheets and other resources are available at fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

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. For more information on conservation practices to make your operation more resilient to drought in future years, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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**Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early**

The Farm Loan team 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.

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Crook County
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