USDA to Provide Payments to Livestock Producers Impacted by Drought or Wildfire

The U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that ranchers who have approved applications through the 2021 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) for forage losses due to severe drought or wildfire in 2021 will soon begin receiving emergency relief payments for increases in supplemental feed costs in 2021 through the Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) new Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP).

Background

On September 30, 2021, President Biden signed into law the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act (P.L. 117-43). This Act includes $10 billion in assistance to agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms and other eligible disasters experienced during calendar years 2020 and 2021. Additionally, the Act specifically targets $750 million to provide assistance to livestock producers for losses incurred due to drought or wildfires in calendar year 2021. ELRP is part of FSA’s implementation of the Act.

For impacted producers, USDA will leverage LFP data to deliver immediate relief for increases in supplemental feed costs in 2021. LFP is an important tool that provides up to 60% of the estimated replacement feed cost when an eligible drought adversely impacts grazing lands or 50% of the monthly feed cost for the number of days the producer is prohibited from grazing the managed rangeland because of a qualifying wildfire.

FSA received more than 100,000 applications totaling nearly $670 million in payments to livestock producers under LFP for the 2021 program year.

Congress recognized requests for assistance beyond this existing program and provided specific funding for disaster-impacted livestock producers in 2021.

ELRP Eligibility – Phase One

To be eligible for an ELRP payment under phase one of program delivery, livestock producers must have suffered grazing losses in a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks or a D3 (extreme drought) or higher level of drought intensity during the 2021 calendar year, and have applied and been approved for 2021 LFP. Additionally, producers whose permitted grazing on federally managed lands was disallowed due to wildfire are also eligible for ELRP payments, if they applied and were approved for 2021 LFP.
As part of FSA’s efforts to streamline and simplify the delivery of ELRP phase one benefits, producers are not required to submit an application for payment; however, they must have the following forms on file with FSA within a subsequently announced deadline as determined by the Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs:

- CCC-853, Livestock Forage Disaster Program Application
- Form AD-2047, Customer Data Worksheet.
- Form CCC-902, Farm Operating Plan for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-901, Member Information for Legal Entities (if applicable).
- Form FSA-510, Request for an Exception to the $125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs (if applicable).
- Form CCC-860, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification, if applicable, for the 2021 program year.
- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification) for the ELRP producer and applicable affiliates.

**ELRP Payment Calculation – Phase One**

To further expedite payments to eligible livestock producers, determine eligibility, and calculate an ELRP phase one payment, FSA will utilize livestock inventories and drought-affected forage acreage or restricted animal units and grazing days due to wildfire already reported by the producer when they submitted a 2021 CCC-853, Livestock Forage Disaster Program Application form.

Phase one ELRP payments will be equal to the eligible livestock producer’s gross 2021 LFP calculated payment multiplied by a payment percentage, to reach a reasonable approximation of increased supplemental feed costs for eligible livestock producers in 2021.

The ELRP payment percentage will be 90% for historically underserved producers, including beginning, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers, and 75% for all other producers. These payments will be subject to a payment limitation.

To qualify for the higher payment percentage, eligible producers must have a CCC-860, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification, form on file with FSA for the 2021 program year.

Payments to eligible producers through phase one of ELRP are estimated to total more than $577 million.

**ELRP - Phase Two**

Today’s announcement is only Phase One of relief for livestock producers. FSA continues to evaluate and identify impacts of 2021 drought and wildfire on livestock producers to ensure equitable and inclusive distribution of much-needed emergency relief program benefits.

**Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Assistance for Crop Producers**

FSA is developing a two-phased process to provide assistance to diversified, row crop and specialty crop operations that were impacted by an eligible natural disaster event in calendar years 2020 or 2021.

This program will provide assistance to crop producers and will follow a two-phased process similar to that of the livestock assistance with implementation of the first phase in the coming weeks. Phase one of the crop assistance program delivery will leverage existing Federal Crop Insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program data as the basis for calculating initial payments.
Making the initial payments using existing safety net and risk management data will both speed implementation and further encourage participation in these permanent programs, including the Pasture, Rangeland, Forage Rainfall Index Crop Insurance Program, as Congress intended.

The second phase of the crop program will be intended to fill additional assistance gaps and cover eligible producers who did not participate in existing risk management programs.

Through proactive communication and outreach, USDA will keep producers and stakeholders informed as ERP implementation details are made available.

Additional Livestock Drought Assistance

Due to the persistent drought conditions in the Great Plains and West, FSA will be offering additional relief through the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) to help ranchers cover above normal costs of hauling livestock to forage. This policy enhancement complements previously announced ELAP compensation for hauling feed to livestock. Soon after FSA announced the assistance for hauling feed to livestock, stakeholders were quick to point out that producers also were hauling the livestock to the feed source as well and encouraged this additional flexibility.

It is important to note that, unlike ELRP emergency relief benefits which are only applicable for eligible losses incurred in the 2021 calendar year, this ELAP livestock and feed hauling compensation will not only be retroactive for 2021 but will also be available for losses in 2022 and subsequent years.

To calculate ELAP program benefits, an online tool is currently available to help producers document and estimate payments to cover feed transportation cost increases caused by drought and will soon be updated to assist producers with calculations associated with drought related costs incurred for hauling livestock to forage.

More Information

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on farmers.gov, including USDA resources specifically for producer impacted by drought and wildfire and the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool. For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, producers should contact their local USDA Service Center. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their crop insurance agent.

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.

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 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.

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**No-till Leads to Healthier Soil, Cleaner Water**
In the minds of many, a freshly tilled field is picturesque – cleaned and ordered for the next planting. But we’ve learned from studying soil that heavy tillage isn’t good. When soil is heavily tilled, the stalks and leaves remaining from the previous crop are chopped, disturbing the top several inches of soil. This “fluffing” action allows for better seed placement according to some, but soil scientists say not tilling leads to healthier, more drought-resistant soil.

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and other groups recommend producers to not till and leave the stalks and leaves, called residue, in place. By not tilling, soil organic matter is enhanced, increasing water infiltration and reducing erosion. No-till is a conservation practice that leaves the crop residue undisturbed from harvest.

Any tillage causes a flush of organic matter decomposition, resulting in loss of soil carbon. Tillage also breaks up soil aggregates, which are important for water infiltration, providing oxygen to plant roots, and reducing erosion.

Healthy soils cycle water and nutrients more efficiently. And they function better, enabling them to buffer against extreme drought and flooding. Plus, they reduce soil loss into waterways, which can cause problems for water quality.

Good management of field residue can increase efficiency of irrigation and control erosion. No-till can be used for many crops in almost any soil and can save producers labor costs and fuel. It’s a sound investment for the environment and the farm.

For more information, contact your Lincoln County USDA Service Center at 307-226-3037 or visit nrcs.usda.gov.

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**Ask the Expert: A Farm Operating Loan Q&A with Jack Carlile**

In this Ask the Expert, Jack Carlile, Farm Loan Manager for the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), answers questions about farm operating loans and when producers should apply in order to secure funds for the current crop year.

As the Farm Loan Manager for the Cherokee County Service Center, Jack is responsible for managing the loan making and loan servicing activities for five counties in northeast Oklahoma. His office provides services for over 650 farm loan customers.

Jack was raised on a cross bred cow/calf operation that his grandparents started. Over the years, each generation has added to the operation by purchasing additional pasture. The operation also grows and bales their own hay. Jack’s agriculture background and degree in agriculture economics from Oklahoma State University help him better understand the financing needs of his producers.

**Who can apply for FSA Farm Loans?**

Anyone can apply for FSA’s loan programs. Applications will be considered on basic eligibility requirements. To apply for a loan, you must meet the following general eligibility requirements including:

- Be a U.S. citizen or qualified alien.
- Operator of a family farm or ranch.
- Have a satisfactory credit history.
- Unable to obtain credit elsewhere at reasonable rates and terms to meet actual needs.
- Not be delinquent on any federal debts.

**What can I purchase with operating loans?**

[Farm Operating Loans](#) are traditionally used for purchasing capital items such as farm machinery, equipment, or livestock. Loan funds can also be used to help pay typical operating expenses for farming and ranching.
operations. For example, a rancher may use an operating loan to purchase forage for his cattle to feed them through the winter or a row crop producer may use an operating loan for paying for inputs like seed or fertilizer.

What is the maximum loan amount and terms?
The maximum loan amount for a Direct Farm Operating Loan is $400,000. Direct loans are made and serviced by FSA.

Producers can also apply for Guaranteed Operating Loans that are made by your commercial lender, and guaranteed against loss by FSA. The maximum loan amount for a Guaranteed Farm Operating Loan is $1,825,000. Loan terms for operating loans range from one to seven years.

How do I apply?
If you’re interested in applying for a farm loan, you can pick up an application by visiting your local FSA office. Visit farmers.gov to find the USDA Service Center nearest you.

When applying for a loan, you will need a business plan, which must include:

- Your mission, vision, and goals for your farm or ranch.
- Your current assets and liabilities.
- Marketing Plan (what your operation will produce and where you will market and sell your products.)
- Whether the amount of income your operation generates will be enough to pay your business and family living expenses.

When should I apply for an operating loan?
I would recommend beginning the application process a few months in advance of needing the funds to allow time for the request to be processed, and for any necessary security checks and searches to be completed. That allows time for the funds to be available for your use when most needed.

Where can I find more information?
To learn more about FSA loans visit farmers.gov/loans or fsa.usda.gov/farmloans. Fact sheets and application packages are also available at your USDA Service Center. To learn more about other types of FSA loans or to find the right loan for your operation, use the Farm Loan Discovery Tool by visiting farmers.gov/loans/farm-loan-discovery-tool.
Kresta Hedges 307-226-3034 kresta.hedges@usda.gov Janessa Julson 307-226-3038 janessa.julson@usda.gov

Farm Loan Manager
Brian Harrell 307-240-3199 brian.harrell@usda.gov

Next County Committee Meeting: TBD

County Committee
Kelly Johnson
Kim Clark
Deanna Clark