Park County Farm Service Agency Announces County Committee Election Results

Park County U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced that Emily Karst was elected to represent local administrative area (LAA) 1. County committee members are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA. They help deliver programs at the county level and work to serve the needs of local producers. All recently elected county committee members will take office in January 2022 and will be joining the existing committee. Every FSA office is required to have a county committee, which are made up of local farmers, ranchers and foresters elected by local producers.

County committee members impact the administration of FSA within a community by applying their knowledge and judgment to help FSA make important decisions on commodity support programs, conservation programs, indemnity and disaster programs, emergency programs and eligibility.

County committee members serve local producers through their decision making and help shape the culture of a local FSA office. They also ensure the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties and are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. Members conduct hearings and reviews as requested by the state committee, ensure that underserved farmers, ranchers, and foresters are fairly represented, make recommendations to the state committee on existing programs, monitor changes in farm programs and inform farmers of the purpose and provisions of FSA programs. They also assist with outreach and inform underserved producers, such as beginning farmers, ranchers, and foresters about FSA opportunities.

For more information, visit the FSA website at fsa.usda.gov/elections or contact the Park County FSA office at (307)754-9411 Ext. 2.

USDA Provides $1.8 Billion to Offset Market Fluctuations

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is in the process of issuing $1.8 billion in payments to agricultural producers who enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2020 crop year. These payments provide critical support to help mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. These two USDA safety-net programs help producers of certain crops build back better after facing the impacts of COVID-19 and other challenges.

In addition, USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) is encouraging producers to contact their local USDA Service Centers to make or change elections and to enroll for 2022 ARC or PLC, providing future protections against
market fluctuations. The election and enrollment period opened on Oct. 18, 2021 and runs through March 15, 2022.

2020 Payments and Contracts

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. This month, FSA processed payments to producers enrolled in 2020 ARC-County (ARC-CO), ARC-Individual (ARC-IC) and PLC for covered commodities that triggered for the crop year.

For ARC-CO, view the 2020 ARC-CO Benchmark Yields and Revenues online database for payment rates applicable to their county and each covered commodity.

For PLC, payments have triggered for barley, canola, chickpeas (large and small), dry peas, flaxseed, lentils, peanuts, seed cotton and wheat. More information on rice payments will be announced later this fall and in early 2022.

For ARC-IC, producers should contact their local FSA office for additional information pertaining to 2020 payment information, which relies on producer-specific yields for the crop and farm to determine benchmark yields and actual year yields when calculating revenues.

By the Numbers

More than 1.7 million contracts were signed in 2019. In 2020, producers signed nearly 1.8 million ARC or PLC contracts, and 251 million out of 273 million base acres were enrolled in the programs. In 2021, signed contracts surpassed 1.8 million.

Since the ARC and PLC were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and reauthorized by the 2018 Farm Bill, these safety-net programs have paid out more than $32.5 billion to producers of covered commodities.

2022 Elections and Enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-CO or PLC, which are both crop-by-crop, or ARC-IC, which is for the entire farm. Although election changes for 2022 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2022, it will be necessary to sign a new contract.

If an election is not submitted by the deadline of March 15, 2022, the election remains the same as the 2021 election for crops on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the farm.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed, and wheat.

Web-Based Decision Tools

In partnership with USDA, the University of Illinois and Texas A&M University offer web-based decision tools to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Tools include:

- Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator, a tool available through the University of Illinois allows producers to estimate payments for farms and counties for ARC-CO and PLC.
- ARC and PLC Decision Tool, a tool available through Texas A&M allows producers to estimate payments and yield updates and expected payments for 2022.

Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader safety net provided by USDA, which also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.
Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

More Information
For more information on ARC and PLC, visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](https://www.usda.gov/arc-and-plc) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services-center/).
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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**New River Forecast Model Integrates Artificial Intelligence for Better Water Management in the West**

Water supply forecasts are important for any crop year. But for farmers, ranchers, foresters, and water managers in the West facing extreme and debilitating drought conditions, those forecasts have never been more critical to their operations and livelihoods.

Since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, NRCS has helped America’s producers plan for their operations through the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecast program. The program runs a massive network of mountain climate and snow monitoring sites across the western U.S. called SNOTEL. This is coupled with other data and computer models to predict the amount of river runoff in the upcoming spring and summer. These water supply forecasts are used by America’s producers to plan their operations for the year, by helping guide choices like crop selection, water rights rentals, and whether to leave land fallow.

Over the decades, that information has grown to be used by many other groups for many purposes – from optimizing hydroelectric power generation, to assessing seasonal flood risk, to complying with legal decisions around endangered species and international treaties governing transboundary rivers. The value of water managed using these forecasts is easily in the billions of dollars, and even modest increases in accuracy can create over $100 million a year in public benefit for just one river basin.

However, major forecasting improvements are needed because of narrowing margins between water supply and water demand in the ever-more-thirsty American West. Those tighter margins reflect a combination of climate change and population growth, and they mean there’s less room for error than ever before in water management, requiring improved efficiency and accuracy in everything we do.

NRCS has unveiled a new computer application to address this pressing need: the multi-model machine learning metasystem, or M4. This first-of-its-kind model will be the largest migration of artificial intelligence, also known as AI, into real-world river prediction programs.

Researchers first experimented with machine learning, a branch of AI, for hydrologic forecasting a quarter-century ago. But they couldn’t jump the research-to-applications gap – the needed step of getting from what works in the lab to what works in the field. Ironically, scientists and engineers working outside the tech sector have often been the last to adopt AI into their everyday practices. Unlike some other areas, STEM fields have long used sophisticated math and computer models. AI had to successfully compete with those existing methods to gain widespread acceptance, which in many fields, including earth and environmental science, is only starting to happen now. The average hydrologist is still more likely to use AI – in a smartphone app, for example – to find the quickest route to the office in the morning, than to apply it in their work when they get there!
We aimed to change that. Applied scientists at NRCS took a pragmatic approach: they looked in detail at what they needed in the next generation of their operational river forecast system, and then created a new tailor-made solution from existing building blocks. That included adopting automated machine learning, which makes it easier and faster to use, and radically improving the explainability of the results, putting to bed a long-standing worry about so-called ‘black box’ AI technologies. Testing proves the system is more accurate, robust, and simple-to-use than ever before, while keeping features that worked in the older models.

Our hope is that M4 will help farmers, ranchers, and foresters – our customers – better plan for their operations and continue to have the means to provide for people in the U.S. and around the world who depend on American agriculture. And given how many other water users and government agencies also rely on NRCS forecasts, we’re also looking forward to seeing how the migration of AI into real-world, high-stakes environmental information systems like M4 will help everyone in the American West use increasingly pressured water resources more effectively while protecting our shared natural environment.

To read more about this new system, see the recent paper published in the Journal of Hydrology, the top-ranked, peer-reviewed scientific journal in water resources. For more information about the Snow Survey and Water Supply program, visit our website.
Next County Committee Meeting: TBD