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From Darla’s Desk…

Happy spring to the Park County farmers and ranchers! We received a little bit of moisture, but definitely not enough to get us out of this ongoing drought! I hope you are all doing your rain dance! With that being said, Park County has once again qualified for the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program and Livestock Forage Program. Software will not be open until April, but please remember to keep your records up to date and document everything! (Please see related articles.)

With lambing and calving in full swing, please remember the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides benefits for eligible livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by eligible loss conditions, including eligible adverse weather, eligible disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law. You must file a notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.

With planting starting for a lot of our producers, I’d like to remind everyone to keep track of their planting dates. These dates are needed at both the FSA office and your insurance office. If you do not plan on seeding or re-seeding anything for crop year 2022, please call the office and set up an appointment to report your acreage/crops. The deadline to report acreage for crop year 2022 is July 15th.

If you have made changes to your banking information, address, phone number, land that you own, operate and/or lease, please report those changes to the office as soon as possible so that we may update that information and keep your records current.

Also, just a friendly reminder to the producers that received a Quality Loss Assistance Program (QLA) and/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 need to meet, please call our office for assistance.

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 United States 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:

- **Talk to your state climatologist** - Find the current list at the American Association of State Climatologists website.
- **Email** - Emails sent to droughtmonitor@unl.edu inform the USDM authors.
- **Become a CoCoRaHS observer** - Submit drought reports along with daily precipitation observations to the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network.
- **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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**Grassland CRP Signup**
The Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is part of the CRP program, a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is 10 or 15 years.

Grassland CRP helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands.

The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. Grassland CRP is reauthorized by the 2018 Farm Bill.

The Grassland CRP signup runs from April 4, 2022 to May 13, 2022.

**Maintaining Good Credit History**

Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans require applicants to have a satisfactory credit history. A credit report is requested for all FSA direct farm loan applicants. These reports are reviewed to verify outstanding debts, see if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash flow.

Information on your credit report is strictly confidential and is used only as an aid in conducting FSA business.

Our farm loan staff will discuss options with you if you have an unfavorable credit report and will provide a copy of your report. If you dispute the accuracy of the information on the credit report, it is up to you to contact the issuing credit report company to resolve any errors or inaccuracies.

There are multiple ways to remedy an unfavorable credit score:

- Make sure to pay bills on time
  - Setting up automatic payments or automated reminders can be an effective way to remember payment due dates.
- Pay down existing debt
- Keep your credit card balances low
- Avoid suddenly opening or closing existing credit accounts

FSA’s farm loan staff will guide you through the process, which may require you to reapply for a loan after improving or correcting your credit report.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your Farm Loan Program USDA Service Center at (307) 754-9411 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

**New Technology Helps Ranchers Maximize Grass Production**

One out of every three acres in the U.S. is rangeland. Two-thirds of these are privately owned, mainly by ranchers who graze their livestock in the open country of the American West. Our rangelands produce premium beef, wool, and dairy. But it’s the plants that feed these livestock that are the foundation for profitable agriculture in the West. But ranchers haven’t had a good way to measure how their grass is faring — until now.

The Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP), developed in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the University of Montana, allows producers to track changes in the amount and types of plants growing on their property.
RAP is a free online resource that provides data on vegetation trends across the West from the mid-1980s to the present; and it calculates how productive those plants are. A combination of long-term datasets shows landowners how their lands have changed over time, which translates directly into their operation’s profitability.

Farmers in the central and eastern U.S. have been using technology to track changes in crop production for decades. As soon as they see that their plant productivity is declining — and revenues following suit — they can take steps to address the limitations and boost productivity again.

RAP provides the same power to ranchers. RAP can show ranchers the gap between their potential production and the actual production they realize in terms of pounds-per-acre of grass. It helps landowners understand how much they can potentially gain by changing management practices to boost available forage and close the gap.

Landowners can see how their plant production has changed in a single month or over the span of several years. The technology can be used to visualize plant productivity in an area as small as a baseball diamond or as large as several states. New technology like RAP helps us “help the land” in order to sustain wildlife, provide food and fiber, and support agricultural families long into the future.

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Next County Committee Meeting: April 13, 2022