In this newsletter:

- A Message from FSA Acting County Executive Director
- Producers with Crop Insurance to Receive Premium Benefit for Cover Crops
- Making Your Land More Resilient to Drought
- USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022
- Filing CCC-941 Adjusted Gross Income Certifications
- Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early
- New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices

A Message from FSA Acting County Executive Director

We hope you are staying warm and getting some snow this month.

We are watching for changes in drought conditions as reported by the US Drought Monitor, which plays an important role in triggering USDA programs that help farmers and ranchers recover from drought. 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. You can contribute by:

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. If you are already a CoCoRaHS observer, do not neglect reporting zero values. Zero values are just as important as reporting observed moisture.
4. Submit Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR) - go.unl.edu/CMOR.

For more information, read the Ask the Expert blog with a NDMC climatologist or visit farmers.gov/protection-recovery.

FSA staff have finished sign-ups for our eligible 2021 disaster programs, but will continue accepting Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) applications for payment on grazing losses through April 2022.

Please remember, the election and enrollment period for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) commodity crop safety net programs is open for the 2022 production season and closes March 15, 2022. If you have a multi-year contract, your elections and enrollment roll over and no action is necessary unless you want to make an election change or have a change in your farm, such as a change in farm ownership or shares. Contact us for more information and to start the process.
I want to remind everyone who have leases renewing this year to please provide these new leases to our office as soon as possible. Leases may impact your acreage reports and any changes need to be made by July 15, 2022 to avoid late-file fees and to maintain program eligibility.

As a reminder, please call the FSA office at 307-746-2701 ext. 2 or NRCS office at 307-746-3264 for service. Depending on your needs and the statuses of our offices due to the ongoing pandemic response, we have several options to provide you with assistance. We can conduct a great deal of business by phone, virtual appointment, email, or using our office drop box. We may be limited on in-person appointments, so it is important that you always call first.

Take care,

Sherie Hilgenkamp

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Producers with Crop Insurance to Receive Premium Benefit for Cover Crops

File acreage report by March 15, 2022 to receive the benefit.

Agricultural producers who have coverage under most crop insurance policies are eligible for a premium benefit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) if they planted cover crops during the 2022 crop year. To receive the benefit from this year’s Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP), producers must report cover crop acreage to FSA by March 15, 2022.

PCCP, offered by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA), helps farmers maintain their cover crop systems, despite the financial challenges posed by the pandemic and is part of USDA’s Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative, a bundle of programs to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions.

PCCP provides premium support to producers who insured their crop with most insurance policies and planted a qualifying cover crop during the 2022 crop year. Qualifying cover crops include all that are reportable to FSA, including cereals and other grasses, legumes, brassicas and other non-legume broadleaves, and mixtures of two or more cover crop species planted at the same time. This program does not change the Nebraska FSA normal acreage reporting deadline for spring-seeded crops, but to receive the premium benefit, cover crops must be reported by the March 15 deadline. Producers will need to report cover crop type or variety; number of acres of the cover crop; map with boundaries for the cover crop; planting dates; planting pattern where applicable; producer shares; and irrigation practice.

The premium support is $5 per acre, but no more than the full premium amount owed.

For more information on this program, visit farmers.gov/cover-crops or talk to your crop insurance provider.

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Making Your Land More Resilient to Drought

Now that the 2021 growing season 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.

USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022

General Signup to open Jan. 31

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.

Filing CCC-941 Adjusted Gross Income Certifications

If you have experienced delays in receiving Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) payments, Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs) and Market Gains on Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs), it may be because you have not filed form CCC-941, Adjusted Gross Income Certification.

If you don’t have a valid CCC-941 on file for the applicable crop year you will not receive payments. All farm operator/tenants/owners who have not filed a CCC-941 and have pending payments should IMMEDIATELY file the form with their recording county FSA office. Farm operators and tenants are encouraged to ensure that their landowners have filed the form.

FSA can accept the CCC-941 for 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Unlike the past, you must have the CCC-941 certifying your AGI compliance before any payments can be issued.
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.

For more information, contact your USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov).

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New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers now have a one-stop shop to help ensure they are treated fairly. The new [farmerfairness.gov](http://farmerfairness.gov) portal developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) allows you to report potential violations of livestock and poultry antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

[Read More](#)

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**UPCOMING DEADLINES & IMPORTANT DATES**

- **March 11, 2022**: FSA signup deadline for General CRP
- **March 11, 2022**: RMA project submission deadline for risk management education and training programs to support historically underserved producers, small-scale farmers, and conservation practices.
- **March 15, 2022**: FSA deadline for election and enrollment period for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) commodity crop safety net programs
- **April 1, 2022**: FSA deadline to signup for 2022 NAP coverage for Spring planted crops
- **April 4, 2022**: FSA opens signup period for Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract offers
- **April 13, 2022**: FSA deadline to timely submit a 2021 NAP application for payment for grazing losses
- **May 13, 2022**: FSA deadline for contract offers for 2022 Grassland CRP signup
Also remember the following:

**NAP Notice of Loss** must be filed the earlier of 15 days of the disaster occurrence or when losses become apparent, or 15 days of the final harvest date.

**LIP Notice of Loss** must be filed 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.

**Leases and/or Land Ownership changes including operational changes** must be reported within 30 calendar days of change to avoid late fees, repayment of funds issued and/or ineligibility for program participation. The deadline to submit changes for 2022 program year is August 1, 2022.

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**Save Time - Make an Appointment with NRCS and FSA Offices**

The Weston County USDA Service Center is now open to limited visitors by appointment only. Producers are encouraged to call ahead to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of your time and to ensure staff is available to tend to your important business needs. To contact your agency, use the information below.

Also, remember, visitors must wear masks in all USDA buildings regardless of vaccination status.
Next County Committee Meeting:
TBD

WCNRD Board Meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month at 3pm. The meetings will be held at the Pinnacle Bank in Newcastle until further notice.