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USDA Announces Historic Investment in Wildlife Conservation, Expands Partnership to Include Additional Programs

USDA is expanding its work on wildlife conservation by investing at least \$500 million over the next five years and by leveraging all available conservation programs, including the [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP), through its [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW) effort. These commitments will ramp up the conservation assistance for farmers, ranchers, private forest owners and tribes with a focus on working lands in key geographies across the country as well as hiring for key conservation positions.



The funding will help deliver a series of cohesive [Frameworks for Conservation Action](#), which establish a common vision across the partnership of public and private interests and goals for delivering conservation resources in a given ecosystem, combining cutting-edge science with local knowledge.

The new funding includes \$250 million from the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and \$250 million from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This announcement builds off more than a decade of growing Farm Bill investments in wildlife habitat, and serves as a roadmap to leveraging both Farm Bill funding and the historic investments from the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) to guide conservation efforts. USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) and [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) will coordinate this work through WLFW, which focuses on voluntary, locally-led efforts that benefit wildlife and agricultural communities.

This funding will immediately benefit two of WLFW's newest priorities. In the western U.S., at least \$40 million of EQIP and ACEP funding will go toward USDA's ongoing efforts to help conserve migratory big game habitat, allowing a continuation of an existing partnership with the state of Wyoming and an expansion to the neighboring states of Idaho and Montana. In 25 central and eastern U.S. states, an additional \$14 million in new EQIP funding will be dedicated to conservation of bobwhite quail and associated species in the grasslands and savannas of the central and eastern U.S. Additionally, Inflation Reduction Act funding will also build outcomes for northern bobwhite recovery as over 3.5 million acres will help mitigate greenhouse gases.

About USDA's Working Lands for Wildlife

WLFW is USDA's premier approach for conserving American working lands to benefit people, wildlife and rural communities. While NRCS and FSA work every day at all levels to assist producers, states, tribes and

other conservation partners with their conservation priorities, WLFW steps in to facilitate their work on cross-cutting, national priorities that can only be addressed through coordination at an ecosystem scale.

Established in 2010, WLFW has teamed up with leading scientists and conservation partners as well as more than 8,400 producers to conserve or restore nearly 12 million acres of working lands, with tremendous benefits. WLFW has helped many sensitive species in their recovery, including the greater sage-grouse in the West, New England cottontail in the Northeast, golden-winged warbler in Appalachia and gopher tortoise in the Southeast. In large part because of the voluntary conservation efforts on private lands through WLFW, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has in some cases determined that species listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was no longer warranted thanks to recoveries made possible by these WLFW efforts.

To learn more about NRCS and FSA programs, landowners and operators can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Accepts More Than 1 Million Acres in Offers Through Conservation Reserve Program General Signup



USDA is accepting more than 1 million acres in this year's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup. This is one of several signups that USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is holding for the program. The results for CRP General signup reflect the continued importance of CRP as a tool to help producers invest in the long-term health, sustainability, and profitability of their land and resources. Offers for new land in this General CRP signup totaled about 295,000 acres nationwide. Producers submitted re-enrollment offers for 891,000 expiring acres, reflecting the successes of participating in CRP longer term. The total number of CRP acres will continue to climb in the coming weeks

once FSA accepts acres from the Grassland CRP signup, which closed May 26. Additionally, so far this year, FSA has received 761,000 offered acres for the Continuous CRP signup, for which FSA accepts applications year-round. The number of accepted acres that are enrolled in General CRP will be confirmed later this year. Participating producers and landowners should also remember that submitting and accepting a CRP offer is the first step, and producers still need to develop a conservation plan before contracts become effective on October 1, 2023. Each year, during the window between offer acceptance and land enrollment, some producers ultimately decide not to enroll some accepted acres, without penalty.

General CRP Signup

The General CRP Signup 60 ran from February 27 through April 7, 2023. Through CRP, producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve soil health and water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat on agricultural land. In addition to the other well-documented benefits, lands enrolled in CRP are playing a key role in climate change mitigation efforts across the country. In 2021, FSA introduced improvements to the program, which included a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This incentive provides an annual 3, 5, or 10 percent incentive payment based on the predominant vegetation type for the practices enrolled – from grasses to trees to wetland restoration.

Other CRP Signups

[Grassland CRP](#) is a working lands program that helps producers and landowners protect grassland from conversion while enabling haying and grazing activities to continue. Lands enrolled support haying and grazing operations and promotes plant and animal biodiversity. Lands are also protected from being converted to uses other than grassland. This year's signup for Grassland CRP ran from April 17 through May 26. [Continuous CRP](#), in which producers and landowners can enroll throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. Continuous CRP includes the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement ([SAFE](#)) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program ([FWP](#)), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). In CREP, which is available in certain geographies, partnerships with States, Tribes, and other entities are leveraged for participants to receive a variety of added incentives and flexibilities. Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) initiative. [CLEAR30](#), a signup opportunity under

that initiative available nationwide, gives producers and landowners across the country the opportunity to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by [logging into their farmers.gov account](#). If you don't have an account, [sign up today](#).

Farm Service Agency Now Accepting Nominations for Farmers and Ranchers to Serve on Local County

USDA is now accepting nominations for county committee members for elections that will occur later this year. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is unveiling a new GIS tool to make it easier for producers to participate in the nomination and election processes for county committee members, who make important decisions on how federal farm programs are administered locally. All nomination forms for the 2023 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2023.



Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for members. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction and they may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area. Customers can locate their LAA through a new GIS locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Agricultural producers may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee if they:

- Participate or cooperate in a USDA program; and
- Reside in the LAA that is up for election this year.

A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority producers, women and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote and hold office.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 dedicated members of the agricultural community serve on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment and other agricultural issues.

More Information

Producers should contact their local FSA office today to register and find out how to get involved in their county's election, including if their LAA is up for election this year. To be considered, a producer must be registered and sign an [FSA-669A](#) nomination form. Urban farmers should use an

Nomination forms and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at fsa.usda.gov/elections. Election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters beginning Nov. 6, 2023.

Report Banking Changes to FSA

Farm Service Agency (FSA) program payments are issued electronically into your bank account. In order to receive timely payments, you need to notify your FSA servicing office if you close your account or if your bank information is changed for any reason (such as your financial institution merging or being purchased). Payments can be delayed if FSA is not notified of changes to account and bank routing numbers.



For some programs, payments are not made until the following year. For example, payments for crop year 2019 through the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage program aren't paid until 2020. If the bank account was closed due to the death of an individual or dissolution of an entity or partnership before the payment was issued, please notify your local FSA office as soon as possible to claim your payment.



Sheridan/Johnson County FSA

1949 Sugarland Dr
Ste 126
Sheridan, WY 82801

Phone: 307-672-5820