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From Brenda's Desk

It's that time of year again to enroll in the Agricultural Risk Coverage/Price Loss Coverage ARC/PLC Program. With the one-year extension to the Farm Bill producers have until **March 15, 2024**, to make an election change and complete their contract signup for crop year 2024. After this deadline your election will be locked in at prior year elections. Please call or stop by the office before March 15 to complete your 2024 signup.



If you completed a Notice of Loss for the Livestock Indemnity Program for 2023 livestock losses and have not provided your documentation or your application for payment the deadline to complete these is **February 29, 2024**. If you are unsure of what is needed for documentation, please contact this office for assistance prior to the deadline.

If you received an Emergency Relief 2022 Track 1 application in the mail or are interested in applying for Track 2; we do not have a deadline yet, but applications are being taken and paid upon county committee approval.

Important Dates:

February 19 : Office Closures in observance of President's Day

February 29 : 2023 LIP Deadline for notice of loss and application for payment

March 15 : Deadline to Enroll in 2024 ARC/PLC

April 1 : Deadline to obtain NAP coverage on spring-seeded crops

Anytime: Update Farm Records

Annual Review of Payment Eligibility for New Crop Year

FSA and NRCS program applicants for benefits are required to submit a completed CCC-902 (Farming Operation Plan) and CCC-941 Average Gross Income (AGI) Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information for FSA to determine the applicant's payment eligibility and establish the maximum payment limitation applicable to the program applicant.

Participants are not required to annually submit new CCC-902s for payment eligibility and payment limitation purposes unless a change in the farming operation occurs that may affect the previous determination of record. A valid CCC-902 filed by the participant is considered to be a continuous certification used for all payment



eligibility and payment limitation determinations applicable for the program benefits requested.

Participants are responsible for ensuring that all CCC-902 and CCC-941 and related forms on file in the county office are updated, current, and correct. Participants are required to timely notify the county office of any changes in the farming operation that may affect the previous determination of record by filing a new or updated CCC-902 as applicable.

Changes that may require a NEW determination include, but are not limited to, a change of:

- Shares of a contract, which may reflect:
 - A land lease from cash rent to share rent
 - A land lease from share rent to cash rent (subject to the cash rent tenant rule)
 - A modification of a variable/fixed bushel-rent arrangement
- The size of the producer's farming operation by the addition or reduction of cropland that may affect the application of a cropland factor
- The structure of the farming operation, including any change to a member's share
- The contribution of farm inputs of capital, land, equipment, active personal labor, and/or active personal management
- Farming interests not previously disclosed on CCC-902 including the farming interests of a spouse or minor child
- Certifications of average AGI are required to be filed annually for participation in an annual USDA program. For multi-year conservation contracts and NRCS easements, a certification of AGI must be filed prior to approval of the contract or easement and is applicable for the duration of the contract period.

Participants are encouraged to file or review these forms within the deadlines established for each applicable program for which program benefits are being requested.

USDA Reminds Producers of Spring Application Deadlines for Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

USDA Big Horn County Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers of approaching application deadlines for purchasing risk coverage for some crops through the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops impacted by natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevented crop planting.

NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available, including forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass and more.

Upcoming application deadline for NAP coverage in Big Horn County is **April 1, 2024** which includes:

- All crops other than biennial and perennial forage and honey.

NAP basic coverage is available at 55% of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50% of expected production. Buy-up coverage is available in some cases. NAP offers higher levels of coverage, ranging from 50% to 65% of expected production in 5% increments, at 100% of the average market price. Producers of organic crops and crops marketed directly to consumers also may exercise the "buy-up" option to obtain NAP coverage of 100% of the average market price at coverage levels ranging between 50% and 65% of expected production. Buy-up coverage is not available for crops intended for grazing.

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Premiums apply for buy-up coverage.

If a producer has a Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification (form CCC-860) on file with FSA, it may serve as an application for basic coverage for all eligible crops beginning with crop year 2022. These producers will have all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage waived. These producers may also receive a 50% premium reduction if higher levels of coverage are elected on form CCC-471, prior to the application closing date for each crop.

To learn more about NAP visit fsa.usda.gov/nap or contact your local USDA Service Center at (307)765-2689 Ext 2.

Reminder: Insurance Linkage Requirements for Payments Received Through the Emergency Relief Program

Producers who received an Emergency Relief Program (ERP) payment need to meet ERP insurance linkage requirements by purchasing crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage at the 60/100 level or higher for the next two available crop years, which will be determined from the date you received an ERP payment and may vary depending on the timing and availability of coverage. The insurance coverage requirement applies to the physical location of the county where the crop was located and for which an ERP payment was issued.

Contact your crop insurance agent or local FSA county office as soon as possible to ask about coverage options. Producers who do not obtain the applicable coverage by the sales/application closing date will be required to refund the ERP benefits received on the applicable crop, plus interest. To determine which crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP, visit the [RMA website](#).

For more information, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched an [online application for Direct Loan customers](#). More than 26,000 customers who submit a Direct Loan application each year can now use an online, interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan. This tool is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, improve customers service, and expand credit access.



The online farm loan application replicates the support an applicant would receive when completing a loan application in person with an FSA Farm Loan Officer, while continuing to provide customers with one-on-one assistance as needed. This tool and other process improvements allow farmers and ranchers to submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete and withdrawn applications.

Through a personalized dashboard, borrowers can track the progress of their loan application. It can be accessed on farmers.gov or by completing FSA's Loan Assistance Tool at farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool. To use the online loan application tool, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). For the initial stage, the online application tool is only available for producers who will be, or are currently, operating their farm as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

Farm Loan Improvement Efforts

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate Farm Loan Program customer-facing business processes. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a Direct Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool on farmers.gov](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the Direct Loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.

More Information

FSA continues to accept and review individual requests for assistance from borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans or those who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit [farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance](#).

The Inflation Reduction Act, a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for agricultural communities, provided \$3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with certain FSA direct and guaranteed loans and to expedite assistance for those whose agricultural operations are at financial risk. Since October 2022, USDA has provided approximately \$1.6 billion in immediate assistance to more than 27,000 financially distressed direct and guaranteed FSA loan borrowers.

Farmers, Homeowners Can Help Pollinators Prosper

Why are pollinators so important? That's easy - Food. One out of three bites of food can be attributed to these important creatures – such as bees, butterflies, moths, birds, beetles, bats, and a few other small mammals. Pollinators provide crucial assistance to fruit, vegetable and seed crops as well as other plants that produce fiber, medicine and fuel. For many plants, without the help of pollinators, they would be unable to reproduce.

But as you may know, pollinators are in trouble. Many are seeing decreasing populations because of habitat loss, disease, parasites and pesticide use. But there's good news. There are simple ways you can help. It can be as easy as selecting high-quality pollinator plants for your garden. To find the best plants for your area, visit the websites of NRCS partners at the Xerces Society Pollinator Conservation Program or [Pollinator Partnership](#).



If you operate a farm or ranch, NRCS can help you create habitat for pollinators. This not only benefits pollinators, but also provides ample perks for the farmers and ranchers, too. More pollinators can increase crop yields. Pollinators can be increased by planting wildflowers in and around fields and choosing the right cover crops. NRCS offers more than three dozen conservation practices that assist in building healthier landscapes for pollinators. NRCS can also help fund the implementation of these practices.

Habitats used by pollinators attract beneficial insects (insects that eat crop pests), and they may provide habitat for other wildlife, reduce soil erosion, and improve water quality. As you can see, pollinators and healthy habitat for pollinators help keep the ecosystem healthy. In fact, if you are putting in conservation practices to prevent soil erosion or protect stream banks, consider including wildflowers, shrubs and trees that support pollinators.

For more information, contact your Big Horn County USDA Service Center at 307-765-2483 or visit [nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators](#).



Big Horn County USDA Service Center

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COC Meeting: TBD

South Big Horn Conservation District

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