



June 2008

Issue No. 1



# Branch County News

**Branch County FSA**  
387 N Willowbrook, Ste. F  
Coldwater, MI 49036  
517-278-2725 (phone)  
517-278-5176 (fax)  
[www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov)

**Hours**  
Monday - Friday  
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**County Committee**  
Curt Albright  
Neil Carpenter  
Kevin Miller  
Jill Bucklin

**Staff**  
**Farm Programs -**  
Kelly Gruner, PT  
Joyce Hook, PT  
Linda Snyder, PT  
Carri McCollough, PT  
Ernie Davenport, FA  
Hope R. Gentile, CED



### Dates to Remember:

July 4<sup>th</sup> – office closed for Independence Day  
July 9<sup>th</sup> – COC meeting  
July 18<sup>th</sup> – Signup deadline for LCP & LIP  
August 1<sup>st</sup> – final date to submit COC nominations  
August 15<sup>th</sup> – final reporting date all other crops  
September 30<sup>th</sup> – final date to purchase NAP coverage on Alfalfa

## REPORTING CROP ACREAGE

The annual, timely and accurate reporting of acres for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage, can prevent loss of benefits for a variety of Farm Service Agency programs. All cropland on the farm must be reported to receive benefits from the Direct and Counter-cyclical Program, marketing assistance loans and Loan Deficiency Payments.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) acreage must be reported to receive annual rental payments. And, crop acreage for Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) must also be reported no later than August 15, 2008. **NOTE: Only the Owner or Operator on the CRP-1 (CRP contract), or person authorized by a power of attorney (POA), may sign the acreage report for the CRP land.**

Crop reports, form FSA-578, Report of Acreage, must account for all cropland on a farm, whether idle or planted. Producers need to file their acreage reports by August 15<sup>th</sup> for all crops. **NOTE: If you do not have an interest in the land being reported, either as landowner, operator or person authorized by POA you cannot report the acreage.**

**Prevented Planting:** Prevented planting needs be reported no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date.

**Failed Acreage:** Reports of failed acreage must be filed before disposition of the crop, and producers must be able to establish to the satisfaction of the county committee that the crop failed and was prevented from being replanted through the normal planting period because of natural disaster conditions.



## Appointments

are encouraged for reporting your acres. Making appointments saves everyone's time.

**Please call today!!!**

## Continuous CRP

The Continuous Conservation Reserve Program is a private lands environmental improvement program that allows participants the opportunity to enroll environmentally sensitive acreages in conservation practices that will reduce soil erosion, improve water and soil quality and provide wildlife habitat and food sources.

The Continuous CRP program is a voluntary enrollment program. Eligible landowners enter into contracts that range from 10 to 15 years in length. In return, the landowners will receive annual rental and maintenance payments, incentive payments for certain activities, and cost share for establishment.

To be eligible for enrollment in the Continuous CRP, participants and acreage must meet certain requirements. Provided the eligibility requirements are met, FSA will automatically accept enrollments of acreage into Continuous CRP. Landowners may enroll in the program at any time during the year.

For more information on Continuous CRP enrollments or local Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) availability, please contact your local FSA office.

## Maintaining CRP Cover

CRP cover maintenance is the participant's responsibility and must be done according to the conservation plan. All CRP maintenance activity, such as mowing, burning and spraying, must be conducted outside the primary nesting season for wildlife and in accordance with the conservation plan.

Spot treatment of the acreage may be allowed during the primary nesting season if certain criteria are met. The ending date for the primary nesting season in Michigan is August 1st.

### What is Mid-Contract Management of CRP?

Mid-Contract Management of CRP are activities that must be performed on certain practices to ensure the original plant diversity, wildlife benefits, and protections of the soil and water resources are present for the life of the contract.

For CRP practices with grasses, legumes, & wildflowers, research has shown that typically 5-6 years after establishment the site becomes dominated by a thick growth of the grasses. To ensure wildlife habitat benefits in these sites, management is required to encourage legumes and wildflowers, and to ensure the grass is not too thick to limit small wildlife species from traveling through the cover to meet their needs.

This is your responsibility and must be followed according to your conservation plan.

If a variance is needed for the above stated policy, please contact the office. Variances can be pre-approved on a case-by-case basis.

### REPORT CHANGES TO YOUR BANK ACCOUNT

You need to notify this office if you close your account, change banks, or if another financial institution purchases your bank. Payments can be delayed if we are not aware of changes to your account and routing numbers. It is important that any changes be provided to our office promptly to avoid possible delay of payments.

## Preventing Fraud

The Farm Service Agency has joined with the Risk Management Agency to prevent fraud, waste and abuse in the Federal Crop Insurance Program. FSA has been, and will continue to, assist RMA and insurance providers by monitoring crop conditions throughout the growing season. In addition, FSA will refer all suspected cases of fraud, waste and abuse to RMA.

Producers can report suspected cases to the county office staff, RMA office, or the Office of the Inspector General.

## Farm Record Changes

Report any farming operation changes so that we can keep your records current. Failure to notify FSA of changes in your farming operation may adversely impact your eligibility for USDA benefits. You should also be aware of Highly Erodible Land Conservation, Wetland Conservation, Payment Eligibility, and Payment Limitation provisions, which impact your eligibility for Direct and Counter Cyclical Program (DCP) payments as well as other USDA program benefits.

Changes to your farming operation may include, but are not limited to, change in the structure of your farming operation.



## 2008 COC Election Information

One of FSA's responsibilities is to conduct County Committee elections in an open manner that ensures accountability. FSA will provide local organizations representing socially disadvantaged groups with detailed information about the COC election process. The agency is reaching out to agricultural communities to get equitable representation on their county committees.

Groups representing socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, will be actively solicited for COC election candidates, and encouraged to fill out a nomination form (FSA-669A). Under represented farmers and ranchers are encouraged to step up and participate in their county's COC election process. Producers will notice posters and announcements displayed in businesses, churches, and other public places. COC election fact sheets can be found online at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA> under the News & Events tab on the FSA homepage.

---

#### FARM BILL UPDATE

We currently do not have many details on the new farm program. What we do know is that most changes will not be implemented until crop year 2009. No dates have been set for signup but we will keep you posted as information becomes available.

#### Critical Feed Use on CRP Land

CRP participants may request to voluntarily modify CRP contracts for critical feed use, such as haying and grazing. This would only be allowed after the ending of the primary nesting season (August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008) and remove hay or livestock by November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008. An Administrative fee of \$75 will be required, but no payment reduction will be accessed. If you think you might be interested, contact the office.

#### SIGNUP DEADLINE –

#### LIVESTOCK COMPENSATION PROGRAM (LCP) AND LIVESTOCK INDEMNITY PROGRAM (LIP)

All interested producers must apply by close of business July 18, 2008. LCP provides payments to eligible livestock owners and cash lessees who suffered feed losses or increased feed costs because of a natural disaster. LIP provides payments to eligible livestock owners and contract growers who incurred the death of livestock because of a natural disaster.

Losses must have been between January 1, 2005, and December 31, 2007, because of a natural disaster.

#### Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL) – STORAGE LIMITATIONS????

Did you have enough room to store your commodities at harvest last fall?? If not you might be interested in knowing that FSA offers low cost government loans for storage facilities.

The 7-year loans are available for the purchase and installation of eligible storage facilities, permanently affixed drying or handling equipment or remodeling existing facilities. All farm storage facility loans are secured by a promissory note and security agreement. For loans exceeding \$50,000 or where a borrower's aggregate outstanding loan balance exceeds this amount, a lien on real estate will be required. The maximum amount that may be borrowed is 85 percent of the net cost of the storage or handling equipment, up to \$100,000 for each borrower. A minimum down payment is also required.

#### Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holding to the Secretary of Agriculture. Foreign persons who have purchased or sold land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the AFIDA form could result in civil penalties of up to 25% of the fair market value of the property.

#### Sodbuster Regulations

The term "sodbusting" is used to identify the plowing up of erosion-prone grasslands for use as cropland. Sodbuster violations are unauthorized tillage practices on highly erodible lands that converted native vegetation such as rangeland or woodland, to crop production after Dec. 23, 1985.

Farmers and ranchers should be aware that if they use highly erodible land for crop production without proper conservation measures, they risk losing eligibility to participate in Farm Service Agency programs.

Before producers clear, plow or otherwise prepare areas not presently under crop production for planting, they are required to file an AD-1026, indicating the area to be brought into production.

If Natural Resources Conservation Service indicates on a CPA-026 that the area will be highly erodible land, the producer will be required to develop and implement a conservation plan on the affected acreage, before bringing land into production.

In addition, producers and the producer's affiliates have to file an AD-1026 with the staff in the administrative or control county office before any farm program payments can be made. The AD-1026 is the producer's signed certification that HELC, as well as wetland conservation, provisions will not be violated.

We ask that you end your cell phone conversation when you reach the counter.  
NO cell phone = Faster Service!!!

**LOOK WHO IS BACK !!!**

Branch County wants to welcome back Carri Duncan-McCollough, Program Technician. Carri accepted a permanent Program Technician positions after Connie Wilkinson ventured to the State Office. Carri will be handling CRP and Price Support Loans for Commodities and Bins.



**NEW FACE!!!**

I want to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Hope Gentile. I am the new County Executive Director, here in Branch County. I have 26 years of experience with FSA.

Some of you may remember me from the St. Joseph County office.

I live in Sturgis and I'm married to Chris Gentile and have two sons, Derrick and Zach.



I look forward to meeting all of you so, please stop by and introduce yourself.

*My door is always open!*

**USDA Nondiscrimination Statement** – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC, 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Special accommodations** will be made for the physically handicapped, visually impaired or hearing impaired upon request. If accommodations are required, contact Hope Gentile, County Executive Director, at (269) 471-9111 ext. 2.