

July 2014



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## Oklahoma FSA Program Updates and Reminders

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**Hours:**

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

**State Committee Members:**

Cletus Carter, Beaver  
(Chairman)  
Steve Nunley, Marlow  
Brenda Neufeld, Fairview  
Steve Butler, Wagoner  
Jo Jennings, Depew

**State Staff:**

Phil Estes,  
Farm Loan Programs

Tona Huggins,  
Production & Payment  
Eligibility

Rod Wanger,  
Conservation Programs

Danny Lee,  
Compliance & Price Support

Krey Reimer,  
Administration

Shelly Bilderback,  
Public Relations/Outreach

### In order for us to better serve you – Schedule an Appointment with FSA

To insure maximum use of your time and to insure that you are afforded our full attention to your important business needs, **please call our office ahead of your visit to set up an appointment** and to discuss any records or documentation that you may need to have with you when you arrive for your appointment. FSA Office contact information can be located online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/ok](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ok).

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### Acres Reporting Deadline – July 15

After spring planting, producers should certify their 2014 acreage. Filing an accurate acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planting acreage, can prevent the loss of benefits for a variety of programs.

Acres reports are required for many FSA programs. For crops enrolled in programs other than NAP (Noninsured Crop Disaster Program), acres reports are to be certified by the July 15 deadline on all spring-seeded crops.

Acres reports on crops covered by NAP are due in the county offices by the earlier of July 15 for spring-seeded crops, or 15 calendar days before the onset of harvest or grazing of the specific crop acres being reported.

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### Sign-up Continues for FSA Livestock Disaster Assistance Programs

Livestock producers are encouraged to schedule an appointment with their local FSA office in order to sign up for disaster assistance programs now underway. The programs cover losses that have occurred since the expiration of previous programs in 2011, including calendar years 2012, 2013, and 2014.

The Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) will provide payments to eligible livestock producers for grazing losses due to drought or fire.

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides compensation to eligible livestock producers that have suffered livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather.

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish that have losses due to disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, such as wildfires. **Producers with ELAP losses from 2012 and 2013 program years must submit a notice of loss and application for payment to their local FSA office by August 1, 2014.** For 2014 program year losses, the notice of loss and an application for payment must be submitted by November 1, 2014.

Another disaster program currently available is the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) which provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

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## **Participants Option to Hay or Graze CRP**

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres are available for "emergency" haying and grazing due to drought in the following Oklahoma counties: Alfalfa, Beaver, Beckham, Bryan, Caddo, Canadian, Cimarron, Comanche, Cotton, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Greer, Harmon, Harper, Jackson, Kay, Kingfisher, Kiowa, Major, Roger Mills, Texas, Tillman, Washita, Woods, and Woodward.

CRP participants must sign an agreement with the FSA County Office to hay or graze CRP and receive written approval prior to beginning the activity. The FSA County Office will assist CRP participants in identifying CRP acres on their individual contract(s) that may be hayed or grazed.

- In Oklahoma, producers may conduct grazing between July 2nd and September 30th. A minimum residual height of the grass must remain on the acreage according to specified grass species, which may shorten the allowed grazing period.
- Emergency Haying of 50% of a field may be conducted between July 2nd and August 31st. Only one cutting of hay may be taken from the acreage.
- **Emergency hay may not be sold.**
- All hay must be removed from the CRP acreage within 30 days after the applicable ending hay date above.
- There is no charge to emergency hay or graze CRP.

Haying and grazing of CRP is also available in counties affected by drought and those not affected by drought under the regular managed hay and managed/routine grazing CRP provisions. Producer may hay the entire field's acreage under managed hay provisions and sell the hay. Restrictions on haying do apply to certain CRP located in the current occupied range of the Lesser Prairie Chicken plus 10 miles area. Managed Haying of warm season grasses may be conducted July 2nd through August 10th. Managed/routine grazing may occur between July 2 and the earlier of when the minimum residual forage height required by the Conservation Plan is reached or September 30. Haying and grazing must be requested at the local FSA office and approval received prior to beginning any activity. The fee for managed haying and managed/routine grazing is 25 percent of the annual rental payment per acre utilized which may be paid up-front or reduced from the annual CRP rental payment. The fee for routine grazing of CRP is waived for Beginning Farms and Ranchers. Routine grazing is applicable to CRP contracts approved on and after July 28, 2010.

The hay and graze provisions will benefit producers by providing needed forage and benefit the CRP acreage by maintaining the grass and enhancing plant diversity for wildlife. Haying and grazing compliance will be randomly performed to ensure these benefits are not compromised.

### **WRITTEN APPROVAL MUST BE GRANTED BY FSA PRIOR TO ONSET OF HAYING OR GRAZING.**

Complete details concerning the haying and grazing of CRP acreage can be obtained at your local FSA office.

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## New Support for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

USDA has announced the implementation of new Farm Bill measures and other policy changes to improve the financial security of new and beginning farmers and ranchers. USDA also unveiled the [New Farmers Website](#) which has in depth information for new farmers and ranchers, including: how to increase access to land and capital; build new market opportunities; participate in conservation opportunities; select and use the right risk management tools; and access USDA education, and technical support programs. These issues have been identified as top priorities by new farmers. The website will also feature instructive case studies about beginning farmers who have successfully utilized USDA resources to start or expand their business operations.

New actions of support for beginning farmers and ranchers include:

- Waiving service fees for new and beginning farmers or ranchers to enroll in the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for the 2014 crop year. NAP provides risk management tools to farmers who grow crops for which there is no crop insurance product. Under this waiver, announced via an [official notice](#) to Farm Service Agency offices, farmers and ranchers whom already enrolled in NAP for the 2014 crop year are eligible for a service fee refund.
- Eliminating payment reductions under the [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP) for new and beginning farmers which will allow routine, prescribed, and emergency grazing outside the primary nesting season on enrolled land consistent with approved conservation plans. Previously, farmers and ranchers grazing on CRP land were subject to a reduction in CRP payments of up to 25 percent. Waiving these reductions for new and beginning farmers will provide extra financial support during times of emergency like drought and other natural disasters.
- Increasing payment rates to beginning farmers and ranchers under Emergency Assistance for [Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP). Under this provision, beginning farmers and ranchers can claim up to 90 percent of losses for lost livestock, such as bees, under ELAP. This is a fifty percent increase over previously available payment amounts to new and beginning farmers.

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## Micro Loan Program Offers Unique Financing Opportunity

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) developed the Microloan (ML) program to better serve the unique financial operating needs of beginning, niche and small family farm operations.

FSA offers applicants a Microloan designed to help farmers with credit needs of \$35,000 or less. The loan features a streamlined application process built to fit the needs of new and smaller producers. This loan program will also be useful to specialty crop producers and operators of community supported agriculture (CSA).

Eligible applicants can apply for a maximum amount of \$35,000 to pay for initial start-up expenses such as hoop houses to extend the growing season, essential tools, irrigation and annual expenses such as seed, fertilizer, utilities, land rents, marketing, and distribution expenses. As financing needs increase, applicants can apply for a regular operating loan up to the maximum amount of \$300,000 or obtain financing from a commercial lender under FSA's Guaranteed Loan Program.

Individuals who are interested in applying for a microloan or would like to discuss other farm loan programs available should contact their local FSA office to set up an appointment with a loan official. Additionally, you can visit our [Farm Loan Website](#) for more information and to access applications.

### July Farm Loan Interest Rates:

- Farm Operating Loans = 2.125%
  - Farm Ownership Loans = 3.875%
  - Farm Ownership Down Payment Loans = 1.5%
  - Micro Loans = 2.125%
  - Youth Loans = 2.125%
  - Emergency Loans = 3.125%
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## FSA County Committee Nomination Period Ends August 1

Nominations are now being accepted for individual to serve on the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees. The nomination period will close on August 1, 2014.

To be eligible to serve on an FSA county committee, a person must participate or cooperate in a program administered by FSA, be eligible to vote in a county committee election and reside in the local administrative area where the person is nominated.

Farmers and ranchers may nominate themselves or others. Organizations representing minorities and women also may nominate candidates. To become a candidate, an eligible individual must sign the nomination form, FSA-669A. The form and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at [www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections). Nomination forms for the 2014 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by close of business on Aug. 1, 2014. Elections will take place this fall.

While FSA county committees do not approve or deny farm ownership or operating loans, they make decisions on disaster and conservation programs, emergency programs, commodity price support loan programs and other agricultural issues. Members serve three-year terms.

FSA will mail ballots to eligible voters beginning Nov. 3, 2014. Ballots are due back to the local county office either via mail or in person by Dec. 1, 2014. Newly elected committee members and alternates take office on Jan. 1, 2015.

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## USDA Offers Programs to Conserve Sensitive Land and Help Beginning Farmers

Farmers, ranchers and landowners committed to protecting and conserving environmentally sensitive land may now sign up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Additionally, retiring farmers enrolled in CRP could receive incentives to transfer a portion of their land to beginning, disadvantaged or veteran farmers through the Transition Incentives Program (TIP).

CRP provides incentives to producers who utilize conservation methods on environmentally-sensitive lands. For example, farmers are monetarily compensated for establishing long-term vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat.

CRP consists of a "continuous" and "general" sign-up period. Continuous sign up for the voluntary program began on June 9. Under continuous sign-up authority, eligible land can be enrolled in CRP at any time with contracts of up to 10 to 15 years in duration. **In lieu of a general sign-up this year, USDA will allow producers with eligible general CRP contracts expiring this September to have the option of a one-year contract extension.** USDA will also implement the 2014 Farm Bill's requirement that producers enrolled through general sign-up for more than five years can exercise the option to opt-out of the program if certain other conditions are met.

The Transition Incentives Program provides two additional years of payments for retired farmers and ranchers who transition expiring CRP acres to socially disadvantaged, military veteran, or beginning producers who return the land to sustainable grazing or crop production. Sign up is now underway. TIP funding was increased by more than 30 percent in the 2014 Farm Bill, providing up to \$33 million through 2018.

As part of the 2014 Farm Bill, participants meeting specific qualifications may have the opportunity to terminate their CRP contract during fiscal year 2015 if the contract has been in effect for a minimum of five years and if other conditions are also met.

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## **Foreign Buyers Notification**

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. The Farm Service Agency administers this program for USDA.

All individuals who are not U.S. citizens, and have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the AFIDA form (FSA-153) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements.

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## **Appeal Process**

After an FSA official makes a decision on a request for USDA services or application, the producer will be sent a letter informing him/her of the decision and options that can be pursued.

Generally, program participants have four choices — an informal review with the original agency decision-maker, an opportunity for mediation, an appeal to the next level of authority within the agency and finally, an appeal to the National Appeals Division.

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USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).