USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Montana Farmers and Livestock Producers Impacted by Drought

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Montana

BOZEMAN, Mont., July 15, 2021 - Montana agricultural operations have been significantly impacted by the ongoing, severe drought. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover. As agricultural producers move into recovery mode and assess damages, they should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about program options available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure and livestock losses and damages.

"Unfortunately, conditions continue to deteriorate across Montana with more than half of the state experiencing severe to extreme drought," said Gloria Montaño Greene as Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). "I am thankful that USDA can step in with disaster assistance programs designed to alleviate some of the financial impact experienced by agricultural producers suffering drought losses."

USDA Disaster Assistance for Drought Recovery

Producers who experience livestock deaths and feed losses due to natural disasters may be eligible for the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP). This program also provides eligible producers with compensation for expenses associated with transporting water to livestock physically located in a county that is designated as level "D3 Drought - Extreme" according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. For ELAP, producers will need to file a notice of livestock loss within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent.

Livestock producers may also be eligible for the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) for 2021 grazing losses due to drought. LFP benefits may be available for grazing acres losses due to wildfires on federally managed lands on which a producer is prohibited, by a federal agency, from grazing normally permitted livestock.

Additionally, emergency haying and grazing of CRP acres may be authorized (outside of the primary nesting season) to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disaster. Emergency haying and grazing status is reviewed and authorized each Thursday using the U.S. Drought monitor. Counties are approved for emergency haying and grazing due to drought conditions on a county by county basis, when a county is designated as level "D2 Drought -

Severe" according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines lost during the drought. This complements Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days.

"As soon as you can evaluate drought impact on your operation, be sure to contact your local FSA office to timely report all crop, livestock and farm infrastructure damages and losses," said Les Rispens, acting state executive director for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Montana. "To expedite FSA disaster assistance, you will likely need to provide documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses"

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed loans, including operating and emergency loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low-interest emergency loans to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs.

Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through Federal Crop Insurance or FSA's NAP should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office, respectively. If they have crop insurance, producers should report crop damage to their agent within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days. For NAP covered crops, a Notice of Loss (CCC-576) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

"Crop insurance and other USDA risk management options are there to help producers manage risk because we never know what nature has in store for the future," said Eric Bashore, director of RMA's Regional Office that covers Montana. "The Approved Insurance Providers, loss adjusters and agents are experienced and well trained in handling these types of events."

Additionally, RMA authorized emergency procedures earlier this month to help agricultural producers impacted by extreme drought conditions. Emergency procedures allow insurance companies to accept delayed notices of loss in certain situations, streamline paperwork, and reduce the number of required representative samples when damage is consistent. Read more in RMA's July 13, 2021 news release.

Conservation

FSA offers the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program to assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, damaged farmland or forests.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is always available to provide technical assistance in the recovery process by assisting producers to plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches and working forests impacted by natural disasters.

Long-term damage from drought includes forage production loss in pastures and fields and increased wind erosion on crop fields not protected with soil health practices. Visit your local USDA Service Center to learn more about these impacts, potential recovery tactics, and how to take steps to make your land more resilient to drought in the future.

"Our staff will work one-on-one with landowners to make assessments of the damages and develop approaches that focus on effective recovery of the land to keep working lands working and help to maintain the economic sustainability of many of our rural communities," said Tom Watson, NRCS state conservationist in Montana.

More Information

On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their crop insurance agent. For FSA and NRCS assistance, they should contact their local USDA Service Center.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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