



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## Virginia July Newsletter Articles and Updates - July 2021

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## Acting State Director Message

### Virginia on the Move with Acreage Reporting and County Office Committee Elections

As we move into the last months of summer, much of Virginia is experiencing extremely dry conditions which have impacted some corn crops and pastureland. Our state and local service center personnel continue to monitor drought conditions and provide weekly drought monitor updates. Eligibility for Secretarial Disaster Designations is directly

impacted by efficient recordkeeping of drought conditions across our state. As a result, producers are eligible to apply for low interest emergency loans.

Our county office staff are very busy with acreage reporting, and preparing for the issuance of 100 percent of the calculated Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) payment and an additional 40 percent of 2019 WHIP+ payments. The additional 2019 WHIP+ payment results in a total overall disbursement of 90 percent.

Another hot topic is general and continuous CRP signup. Recent changes in the expansion and renewal of CRP with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation resulted in the need for producers to resubmit offers previously made for continuous CRP signup 55 or general CRP signup 56. Resubmitting offers ensures a producer's offer reflects the changes made to the program. I encourage you to contact your local FSA office to discuss details related to the recent changes and to schedule an appointment to resubmit or make a new offer. Additional details are included in succeeding articles in this newsletter.

A limited number of visitors is currently allowed in our Virginia service centers by appointment only. Appointments are limited to situations that are deemed critical and where producers cannot be served through phone, email, or other online tools. Staff continue to promote our electronic options for sharing and signing FSA forms. Visitors will be required to complete a COVID screening questionnaire prior to their appointment and wear a mask while in the service center if not fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated staff and visitors are not required to wear a mask.

The FSA county committee nomination period is currently underway. I encourage you to consider pursuing a seat on your local county committee. Contact your local FSA office to inquire if your Local Administrative Area (LAA) is scheduled for election this year. The nomination process runs through August 2, 2021.

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## **NRCS State Conservationist's Message**

No matter where you live in Virginia, you are part of a watershed. From the Chesapeake Bay on the coast to the Clinch-Powell in the southwestern part of the state, we are surrounded by water. Yet, our agricultural producers aren't immune to the impacts of drought. The excessive heat we're currently experiencing has led to abnormally dry conditions in most of the state. My previous experiences with NRCS in California, where water is limited, and Michigan, where water is abundant, have taught me the importance of conserving and managing this precious resource.

In conditions like these, the best offense truly is a good defense. Creating a healthy soil system can help ensure your operation is better prepared to handle extreme conditions now and in the future. Healthy soils provide increased water infiltration and moisture retention, allowing rain water to be absorbed by the soil during wet periods and used to sustain crops through dry stretches. Adopting a soil health system on your farm can save time and money in addition to providing a more resilient growing environment for future crops.

While the fireworks may be over this year, July is still a time to celebrate our freedoms as Americans. I invite you to contact your local NRCS office to learn more about how

voluntary conservation activities can work for you. Farming in concert with nature can reduce inputs and dependence on irrigation during the hot summer days, while adding some native plants in strategic areas of the operation (refer to the article below) can be a part of that plan.

Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez, State Conservationist

## USDA Offers Disaster Assistance for Producers Facing Inclement Weather

Severe weather events create significant challenges and often result in catastrophic loss for agricultural producers. Despite every attempt to mitigate risk, your operation may suffer losses. USDA offers several programs to help with recovery.

### Risk Management

For producers who have risk protection through [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP), we want to remind you to report crop damage to your crop insurance agent or the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

If you have crop insurance, contact your agency within 72 hours of discovering damage and be sure to follow up in writing within 15 days. If you have NAP coverage, file a Notice of Loss (also called Form CCC-576) within 15 days of loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

### Disaster Assistance

USDA also offers disaster assistance programs, which is especially important to livestock, fruit and vegetable, specialty and perennial crop producers who have fewer [risk management options](#).

First, the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP) and [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage. And, the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) (LFP) provides assistance to producers of grazed forage crop acres that have suffered crop loss due to a qualifying drought. Livestock producers suffering the impacts of drought can also request [Emergency Haying and Grazing](#) on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres.

Next, the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) provides cost share assistance to rehabilitate and replant tree, vines or shrubs loss experienced by orchards and nurseries. This complements NAP or crop insurance coverage, which cover the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases.

For LIP and ELAP, you will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For TAP, you will need to file a program application within 90 days.

## Documentation

It's critical to keep accurate records to document all losses following this devastating cold weather event. Livestock producers are advised to document beginning livestock numbers by taking time and date-stamped video or pictures prior to after the loss.

Other common documentation options include:

- Purchase records
- Production records
- Vaccination records
- Bank or other loan documents
- Third-party certification

## Other Programs

The [Emergency Conservation Program](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

Additionally, FSA offers a variety of loans available including emergency loans that are triggered by disaster declarations and operating loans that can assist producers with credit needs. You can use these loans to replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, or refinance farm-related debts, and other needs.

Meanwhile, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial resources through its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes.

## Additional Resources

Additional details – including payment calculations – can be found on our [NAP](#), [ELAP](#), [LIP](#), and [TAP](#) fact sheets. On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help you determine program or loan options.

While we never want to have to implement disaster programs, we are here to help. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center. All [USDA Service Centers](#) are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments because of the pandemic.

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## USDA Opens Signup for CLEAR30, Expands Pilot to Be Nationwide

Landowners and agricultural producers currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) now have a wider opportunity to enroll in a 30-year contract through the

Clean Lakes, Estuaries, And Rivers initiative, called CLEAR30. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding CLEAR30 – a water-quality focused option available through CRP – to be nationwide now.

Interested producers with CRP contracts expiring September 30, 2021, should sign up by August 6, 2021. CLEAR30 provides an opportunity for producers to receive incentives for a 30-year commitment to water quality practices on their CRP land, building on their original 10- to 15-year CRP contracts.

These long-term contracts ensure that practices remain in place for 30 years, which improves water quality through reducing sediment and nutrient runoff and helping prevent algal blooms. **About CLEAR30**

CLEAR30 was created by the 2018 Farm Bill to better address water quality concerns. Originally, CLEAR30 was only available in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watersheds. Now, access is expanded to agricultural producers nationwide.

Eligible producers must have certain water quality benefitting practices currently enrolled under continuous CRP or through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), under contracts that are expiring on September 30, 2021.

These long-term contracts will help ensure that conservation impacts and benefits remain in place for 30 years, reducing sediment and nutrient runoff and, ultimately, algal blooms. Conservation in riparian areas also provides important carbon sequestration benefits. Traditional CRP contracts run from 10 to 15 years.

Annual rental payments for landowners who enroll in CLEAR30 will be equal to the current Continuous CRP annual payment rate plus a 20% water quality incentive and annual rate adjustment of 27.5%. **How to Sign Up**

To sign up for CLEAR30, contact your local USDA Service Center by August 6, 2021. While USDA offices may be closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. Contact information can be found at [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator). **More Information**

CLEAR30 is an option available through CRP, which is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

To enroll in CLEAR30, please contact your local USDA Service Center. For more information on CRP, visit the Conservation Reserve Program.

## **USDA Announces Dates for Conservation Reserve Program General and Grasslands Signups**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has set a July 23, 2021, deadline for agricultural producers and landowners to apply for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup 56. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications for CRP Grasslands from July 12 to August 20. This year, USDA updated both signup options to provide greater incentives for producers and increase its conservation benefits, including reducing the impacts of climate change.

Both signups are competitive and will provide for annual rental payments for land devoted to conservation purposes.

"Bottom line, CRP now makes more financial sense for producers while also providing a bigger return on investment in terms of natural resource benefits. The General and Grasslands signups are part of a broader suite of tools available through CRP to integrate key conservation practices on our nation's working lands."

### **General Signup**

Through CRP, producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Lands enrolled in CRP also play a key role in mitigating impacts from climate change, and FSA has added a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for practices that sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FSA is also adding a one-time "inflationary" adjustment for payment rates, as well as having more flexibility on adjusting soil rental rates.

FSA opened the [General Signup](#) in January 2021 and extended the original deadline to July 23, 2021, to enable producers to consider FSA's new improvements to the program.

### **Grasslands Signup**

[CRP Grasslands](#) helps landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and improves environmental quality.

FSA has updated the Grasslands Signup to establish a minimum rental rate of \$15 per acre, as well as new National Grassland Priority Zones.

### **How to Sign Up**

To enroll in the CRP General signup, producers and landowners should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) by the July 23 deadline. To enroll in the CRP Grasslands signup, they should contact USDA by the August 20 deadline. While USDA offices may have limited visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To work with FSA, producers and landowners should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Contact information can be found at [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

### **More Information on CRP**

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits. The program marked its 35-year anniversary this past December.

## **USDA to Begin Payments for Producers Impacted by 2018 and 2019 Natural Disasters**

More than \$1 billion in payments will be released over the next several weeks starting June 15 for agricultural producers with approved applications for the Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) Program and for producers who have already received payments through the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+). These U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs provide disaster assistance to producers who suffered losses to 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.

Producers weathered some significant natural disasters in 2018 and 2019, and USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provided support for crop value and production losses through QLA and crop quantity losses through WHIP+.

### **QLA Payments**

QLA provides assistance to crop and forage producers who suffered a quality loss due to qualifying natural disasters occurring in 2018 or 2019. FSA will begin issuing payments to producers on June 15. FSA accepted applications from Jan. 6 to April 9, 2021. Based on these QLA applications, producers will receive 100% of the calculated assistance under QLA.

For each crop year, 2018, 2019 and 2020, the maximum amount that a person or legal entity may receive, directly or indirectly, is \$125,000. Payments made to a joint operation (including a general partnership or joint venture) will not exceed \$125,000, multiplied by the number of persons and legal entities that comprise the ownership of the joint operation. A person or legal entity is ineligible for QLA payment if the person's or legal entity's average Adjusted Gross Income exceeds \$900,000, unless at least 75% is derived from farming, ranching or forestry-related activities.

**Second WHIP+ Payments** WHIP+ provides payments to producers to offset production losses due to hurricanes, wildfires, and other qualifying natural disasters that occurred in 2018 and 2019. WHIP+ covered losses of crops, trees, bushes and vines that occurred as a result of those disaster events.

Producers who applied for and have received their first WHIP+ payment can expect to receive the second payment beginning in mid-June for eligible crop losses. Due to budget constraints, producers received an initial WHIP+ payment for 2019 crop losses equal to 50% of the calculated payment. This second payment will be equal to 40% of the calculated payment for a total 90% WHIP+ program payment. This second round of WHIP+ payments are expected to exceed \$700 million. A third round of payments may be

issued if sufficient funds become available. Producers with 2018 crop losses have already been compensated at 100%.

### **Future Insurance Coverage Requirements**

All producers receiving QLA Program and WHIP+ payments are required to purchase [federal crop insurance](#) or [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) coverage for the next two available crop years at the 60% coverage level or higher. If eligible, QLA participants may meet the insurance purchase requirement by purchasing [Whole-Farm Revenue Protection](#) coverage offered through USDA's Risk Management Agency.

### **More Information**

USDA offers a comprehensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs. 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 all program or loan options available for disaster recovery assistance. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

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## **Cover Crop Guidelines**

The Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) worked together to develop consistent, simple and a flexible policy for cover crop practices.

Cover crops, such as grasses, legumes and forbs, can be planted: with no subsequent crop planted, before a subsequent crop, after prevented planting acreage, after a planted crop, or into a standing crop.

### **Termination:**

The cover crop termination guidelines provide the timeline for terminating cover crops, are based on zones and apply to non-irrigated cropland. To view the zones and additional guidelines visit [nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/crops/](https://nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/crops/) and click "Cover Crop Termination Guidelines."

The cover crop may be terminated by natural causes, such as frost, or intentionally terminated through chemical application, crimping, rolling, tillage or cutting. A cover crop managed and terminated according to NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines is **not** considered a crop for crop insurance purposes.

### **Reporting:**

The intended use of cover only will be used to report cover crops. This includes crops

that were terminated by tillage and reported with an intended use code of green manure. An FSA policy change will allow cover crops to be hayed and grazed. Program eligibility

for the cover crop that is being hayed or grazed will be determined by each specific program.

If the crop reported as cover only is harvested for any use other than forage or grazing and is not terminated properly, then that crop will no longer be considered a cover crop.

Crops reported with an intended use of cover only will not count toward the total cropland on the farm. In these situations, a subsequent crop will be reported to account for all cropland on the farm.

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## Know your Final Planting Dates

All producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for more information on the final planting date for specific crops. The final planting dates vary by crop, planting period and county so please contact your local FSA office for a list of county-specific planting deadlines. The timely planting of a crop, by the final planting date, may prevent loss of program benefits.

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## Keeping Livestock Inventory Records

Livestock inventory records are necessary in the event of a natural disaster, so remember to keep them updated.

When disasters strike, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) can help you if you've suffered excessive livestock death losses and grazing or feed losses due to eligible natural disasters.

To participate in livestock disaster assistance programs, you'll be required to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to your local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent. For grazing or feed losses, you must submit a notice of loss to your local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent and should maintain documentation and receipts.

You should record all pertinent information regarding livestock inventory records including:

- Documentation of the number, kind, type, and weight range of livestock
- Beginning inventory supported by birth recordings or purchase receipts.

For more information on documentation requirements visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

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## Report Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Losses

NAP provides financial assistance to you for crops that aren't eligible for crop insurance to protect against lower yields or crops unable to be planted due to natural disasters

including freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, flood, excessive heat and qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing), among others.

To receive payment, you had to purchase NAP coverage for 2021 crops and file a notice of loss the earlier of 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 days of the final harvest date.

For hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops, you must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes apparent.

Eligible crops must be commercially produced agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops.

For more information on NAP visit [fsa.usda.gov/nap](https://fsa.usda.gov/nap).

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## **“Go Native” for Production, Environmental Benefits**

The bountiful native wildflowers, trees and plants of the commonwealth aren't just visually appealing. These typically low maintenance and pest resistant varieties can offer numerous benefits if planted in a location similar to their optimal natural surroundings.

Milkweed, wild sunflowers and bee balm are all excellent habitat for butterflies and the caterpillars that produce them. Columbine and wild bergamot are known to attract hummingbirds while blackberries, viburnums and American plum trees do the same for bobwhite quail. Beyond flowers, the roster of beneficial native plants includes edible mushrooms (morels, chanterelles, black trumpets) and other small trees such as redbuds and dogwoods.

Many Virginia farmers are incorporating natives on working lands through a practice commonly called “farmscaping.” Planting these species into field borders, hedgerows and buffer strips support agricultural production by helping:

- Reduce the need for pesticides by attracting beneficial insects and birds
- Protect farmsteads, crops and livestock from wind and dust
- Keep soil in place, enabling it to become healthier and preventing erosion
- Provide wildlife habitat while reducing associated crop damage

Contact your local USDA Service Center or visit [nrcs.usda.gov](https://nrcs.usda.gov) to learn more about how to put native plants to work for you and beautify your landscape in the process.

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## **Farmers.gov Feature Helps Producers Find Farm Loans that Fit Their Operation**

Farmers and ranchers can use the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* on [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov) to find information on USDA farm loans that may best fit their operations.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of loan options to help farmers finance their operations. From buying land to financing the purchase of equipment, FSA loans can help.

USDA conducted field research in eight states, gathering input from farmers and FSA farm loan staff to better understand their needs and challenges.

### **How the Tool Works**

Farmers who are looking for financing options to operate a farm or buy land can answer a few simple questions about what they are looking to fund and how much money they need to borrow. After submitting their answers, farmers will receive information on farm loans that best fit their specific needs. The loan application and additional resources also will be provided.

Farmers can download application quick guides that outline what to expect from preparing an application to receiving a loan decision. There are four guides that cover loans to individuals, entities, and youth, as well as information on microloans. The guides include general eligibility requirements and a list of required forms and documentation for each type of loan. These guides can help farmers prepare before their first USDA service center visit with a loan officer.

Farmers can access the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* by visiting [farmers.gov/fund](http://farmers.gov/fund) and clicking the "Start" button. Follow the prompts and answer five simple questions to receive loan information that is applicable to your agricultural operation. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

### **About Farmers.gov**

In 2018, USDA unveiled [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov), a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where farmers will be able to apply for programs, process transactions, and manage accounts.

The *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* is one of many resources on [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov) to help connect farmers to information that can help their operations. Earlier this year, USDA launched the *My Financial Information* feature, which enables farmers to view their loan information, history, payments, and alerts by logging into the website.

USDA is building [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov) for farmers, by farmers. In addition to the interactive farm loan features, the site also offers a Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool. Farmers can visit [farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1](http://farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1) to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

For more information, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov).

# Applying for Youth Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes loans to youth to establish and operate agricultural income-producing projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA and other agricultural groups. Projects must be planned and operated with the help of the organization advisor, produce sufficient income to repay the loan and provide the youth with practical business and educational experience. The maximum loan amount is \$5,000.

## Youth Loan Eligibility Requirements:

- Be a citizen of the United States (which includes Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) or a legal resident alien
- Be 10 years to 20 years of age
- Comply with FSA's general eligibility requirements
- Be unable to get a loan from other sources
- Conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program of work as outlined above
- Demonstrate capability of planning, managing and operating the project under guidance and assistance from a project advisor. The project supervisor must recommend the youth loan applicant, along with providing adequate supervision.

For help preparing the application forms, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

## Selected Interest Rates for July 2021

90-Day Treasury Bill	0.125%
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	1.875%
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	3.25%
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.50%
Emergency Loans	2.875%
Farm Storage Facility Loans - (7 years)	1.25%
Commodity Loans 1996-Present	1.125%

## Dates to Remember

7/15 Acreage Reporting Deadline (ARD) for beans (planted 5/26-7/10), tomatoes (planted 5/16-7/5, all other crops without a specified ARD, and perennial forage

8/15 ARD for cabbage (planted 4/16-7/10)

9/15 ARD for beans (planted 7/15-9/5)



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