

August 2018



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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## Minnesota FSA Newsletter: August 2018

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### Minnesota Farm Service Agency Reminders from the MN State FSA Office

375 Jackson St., Ste 400  
Saint Paul, MN 55101

Phone: 651-602-7700  
Fax: 855-719-9917

[www.fsa.usda.gov/mn](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mn)

**State Executive Director:**  
Joe Martin

**Executive Officer:**  
Michelle Page

#### CRP Maintenance

In Minnesota, Aug. 1, marked the end of the primary nesting and brood rearing season for wildlife. CRP maintenance activities such as mowing, burning, disking and spraying may now be conducted statewide.

The Minnesota Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds landowners enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to manage their lands according to the contract to ensure program integrity. FSA is broadening its quality assurance measures to ensure that participants maintain approved vegetative cover, control weeds and follow all contract requirements.

**Division Chiefs:**

Angela Hanson  
Stuart Shelstad  
Laurie Moss  
Cassie Buck

**State Committee:**

Scott Winslow, Chair  
Kurt Blomgren, Member  
Jay Nord, Member  
Mike Yost, Member  
Karolyn Zurn, Member

To find contact information for your local office go to [www.fsa.usda.gov/mn](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mn)

**Elections for the 2018 County Committee**

Elections for USDA's Farm Service Agency's (FSA) County Committees are underway.

It is important that every eligible producer participate in these elections because FSA county committees are a link between the agricultural community and the USDA. The 2018 election for each County will be conducted for the eligible representative Local Administrative Area (LAA). County committee members are a critical component of FSA operations. Committees should be comprised of members who reflect the diversity of producers involved in production agriculture in each County. This means that producers representing underserved groups or communities should be on the committee to speak on behalf of their constituency.

County committee election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters on Nov. 5, 2018. The last day to return completed ballots to the County USDA service center is Dec. 3, 2018. Please contact your local FSA Office for election information for your County.

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## Organic Certification Cost Share Program

The Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) provides cost share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). Certified operations may receive up to 75 percent of their certification costs paid from Oct. 1, 2017, through Sept. 30, 2018, not to exceed \$750 per certification scope.

Eligible costs include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage.

Ineligible costs include equipment, materials, supplies, transitional certification fees, late fees and inspections necessary to address National Organic Program regulatory violations.

Producers and handlers may submit OCCSP applications to FSA county offices or they may apply through participating State Agencies, which will be listed at <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index> as their agreements to administer the program are finalized.

The FSA OCCSP application form is available at [USDA's eForms site](#), by selecting "Browse forms" and entering "OCCSP" in the "title or keywords" field on the search page.

To learn more about organic certification cost share, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/organic](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/organic) or contact a local FSA office by visiting <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## ARC/PLC Acreage Maintenance

Producers enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs must protect all cropland and noncropland acres on the farm from wind and water erosion and noxious weeds. Producers who sign ARC county or individual contracts and PLC contracts agree to

effectively control noxious weeds on the farm according to sound agricultural practices. If a producer fails to take necessary actions to correct a maintenance problem on a farm that is enrolled in ARC or PLC, the County Committee may elect to terminate the contract for the program year.

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## Livestock Inventory Records

Producers are reminded to keep updated livestock inventory records. These records are necessary in the event of a natural disaster.

When disasters strike, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) can assist producers who suffered excessive livestock death losses and grazing or feed losses due to eligible natural disasters.

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

Producers 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, contact your local FSA office.

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

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur 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.

Eligible producers must have purchased NAP coverage for 2018 crops. A notice of loss must be filed the earlier of 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 days of the final harvest date.

Producers of hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops 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, contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/nap](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap).

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## USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators

*Options Help More Beginning, Small and Urban Producers Gain Access to Credit*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the availability of a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. The program, called EZ Guarantee Loans, uses a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to \$100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations.

A new category of lenders will join traditional lenders, such as banks and credit unions, in offering USDA EZ Guarantee Loans. Microlenders, which include Community Development Financial Institutions and Rural Rehabilitation Corporations, will be able to offer their customers up to \$50,000 of EZ Guaranteed Loans, helping to reach urban areas and underserved producers. Banks, credit unions and other traditional USDA-approved lenders, can offer customers up to \$100,000 to help with agricultural operation costs.

EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent.

More information about the available types of FSA farm loans can be found at [www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans) or by contacting your local FSA office.

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## USDA to Provide Agricultural Credit Training, Expand Opportunities for Farmer Veterans and Beginning Farmers

USDA is partnering with the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) to conduct agricultural credit training sessions in the Midwest for military veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers. States under consideration to host the workshops include Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska.

These workshops will provide individuals interested in farming as a career, including military veterans, with methods to improve business planning and financial skills, and improve understanding of the risk management tools that can help small farm operations.

Other partners include Niman Ranch a community network of more than 700 independent family farmers and ranchers, and the Farm Credit Council and the Farm Credit System, which provides loans, leases and financial services to farmers, ranchers and rural businesses across the United States. The workshops will also include assistance with credit applications and introductions to local or regional food markets.

To learn more about veterans in agriculture, visit [www.usda.gov/veterans](http://www.usda.gov/veterans). Visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans) or your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to learn more about FSA's farm loan programs. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. More information also is available from the Farmer Veteran Coalition at [www.farmvetco.org](http://www.farmvetco.org).

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## Unauthorized Disposition of Grain

If loan grain has been disposed of through feeding, selling or any other form of disposal without prior written authorization from the county office staff, it is considered unauthorized disposition. The financial penalties for unauthorized dispositions are severe and a producer's name will be placed on a loan violation list for a two-year period. Always call before you haul any grain under loan.

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## USDA Resumes Continuous Conservation Reserve Program Enrollment

### *One-Year Extension Available to Holders of Many Expiring Contracts through Continuous Signup*

As part of a 33-year effort to protect sensitive lands and improve water quality and wildlife habitat on private lands, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will resume accepting applications for the voluntary [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP). Eligible farmers, ranchers, and private landowners can sign up at their local [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#) office between June 4 and Aug. 17, 2018.

FSA stopped accepting applications last fall for the CRP continuous signup (excluding applications for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and CRP grasslands). This pause allowed USDA to review available acres and avoid exceeding the 24 million-acre CRP cap set by the 2014 Farm Bill. New limited practice availability and short sign up period helps ensure that landowners with the most sensitive acreage will enroll in the program and avoid unintended competition with new and beginning farmers seeking leases. CRP enrollment currently is about 22.7 million acres.

### *2018 Signup for CRP*

For this year's signup, limited priority practices are available for continuous enrollment. They include grassed waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetland restoration and others. [View a full list of practices.](#)

FSA will use updated soil rental rates to make annual rental payments, reflecting current values. It will not offer incentive payments as part of the new signup.

USDA will not open a general signup this year, however, a one-year extension will be offered to existing CRP participants with expiring CRP contracts of 14 years or less. Producers eligible for an extension will receive a letter with more information.

### *CRP Grasslands*

Additionally, FSA established new [ranking criteria](#) for [CRP Grasslands](#). To guarantee all CRP grasslands offers are treated equally, applicants who previously applied will be asked to reapply using the new ranking criteria. Producers with pending applications will receive a letter providing the options.

### *About CRP*

In return for enrolling land in CRP, USDA, through FSA on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Landowners enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP pays producers who remove sensitive lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and increase wildlife habitat.

The new changes to CRP do not impact the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a related program offered by CCC and state partners.

Producers wanting to apply for the CRP continuous signup or CRP grasslands should contact their USDA service center. To locate your local FSA office, visit <https://www.farmers.gov>. More information on CRP can be found at [www.fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp).

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## Breaking New Ground

Agricultural producers are reminded to consult with FSA and NRCS before breaking out new ground for production purposes as doing so without prior authorization may put a producer's federal farm program benefits in jeopardy. This is especially true for land that must meet Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions.

Producers with HEL determined soils are required to apply tillage, crop residue and rotational requirements as specified in their conservation plan.

Producers should notify FSA as a first point of contact prior to conducting land clearing or drainage type projects to ensure the proposed actions meet compliance criteria such as clearing any trees to create new cropland, then these areas will need to be reviewed to ensure such work will not risk your eligibility for benefits.

Landowners and operators complete the form AD-1026 - Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification to identify the proposed action and allow FSA to determine whether a referral to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for further review is necessary.

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## Payments to Deceased Producers

In order to claim a Farm Service Agency (FSA) payment on behalf of a deceased producer, all program conditions for the payment must have been met before the applicable producer's date of death.

If a producer earned a FSA payment prior to becoming deceased, the following is the order of precedence of the representatives of the producer:

- administrator or executor of the estate
- the surviving spouse
- surviving sons and daughters, including adopted children
- surviving father and mother
- surviving brothers and sisters
- heirs of the deceased person who would be entitled to payment according to the State law

In order for FSA to release the payment, the legal representative of the deceased producer must file a form FSA-325, to claim the payment for themselves or an estate. The county office will verify and determine that the application, contract, loan agreement, or other similar form requesting payment issuance, was signed by the applicable deadline for such form, by the deceased or a person legally authorized to act on their behalf at that time of application.

If the application, contract or loan agreement form was signed by someone other than the participant who is deceased, FSA will determine whether the person submitting the form has the legal authority to submit the form to compel FSA to pay the deceased participant.

Payments will be issued to the respective representative's name using the deceased program participant's tax identification number. Payments made to representatives are subject to offset regulations for debts owed by the deceased.

FSA is not responsible for advising persons in obtaining legal advice on how to obtain program benefits that may be due to a participant who has died, disappeared or who has been declared incompetent.

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