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Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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FSA News - Lone Star State Edition

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From the State Executive Director

Greetings!

We know farmers are resilient and the Farm Service Agency in Texas will continue to deliver the disaster assistance, safety net, farm loan and conservation programs that keep American agriculture in business today and long into the future.

On April 17, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). This \$19 billion immediate relief program will provide critical support to farmers and ranchers and maintain the integrity of our food supply chain, and ensure every American continues to receive and have access to the food they need. CFAP will use the funding and authorities provided in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and other USDA existing authorities. The program includes two major elements to achieve these goals, including direct support to farmers and ranchers and USDA purchase and distribution. [Learn more.](#)

Further details regarding eligibility, rates, and other implementation will be released at a later date.

For the latest updates on the CFAP, and other Frequently Asked Questions, visit [usda.gov/coronavirus](https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus).

Our USDA Service Centers in Texas will continue to be open for business by phone appointment only and field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with our producers by phone and using online tools whenever possible. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the Farm

Service Agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment.

I also encourage you to visit farmers.gov/coronavirus to keep up-to-date on temporary program flexibilities available as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gary L. Six
State Executive Director
Farm Service Agency – Texas

USDA Reports Record Enrollment in Key Farm Safety-Net Programs

Producers signed a record 1.77 million contracts for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2019 crop year, which is more than 107 percent of the total contracts signed compared with a 5-year average. USDA also reminds producers that June 30 is the deadline to enroll in ARC and PLC for the 2020 crop year.

FSA attributes the significant participation in the 2019 crop year ARC and PLC programs to increased producer interest in the programs under the 2018 Farm Bill and to an increase in eligible farms because of the selling and buying of farms and new opportunities for beginning farmers and military veterans with farms having 10 or fewer base acres. Enrollment for 2019 ended March 16.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff here in Texas stand ready to help you obtain credit for spring farm operating needs, service loans or sign up for programs, including the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for 2020.

As of April 20, FSA records in Texas show 43,824 farms out of an expected 87,593 farms have completed ARC or PLC enrollment for the 2020 crop year. Although we are well on our way to another successful enrollment, we have many producers to assist between now and June 30.

Producers simply need to enroll in the ARC or PLC program – their 2019 crop year program election applies to 2020 – by the June 30 deadline. If you fail to enroll, you will be ineligible to receive a payment for the 2020 crop year should one trigger.

Give us a call today. We will send the ARC/PLC contract for signature via mail or email, depending on your preference. You can find the phone number for your local FSA county office at farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

USDA Service Centers, including FSA county offices, are open for business by phone only, and field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. While program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with producers by phone and using online tools whenever possible. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or any other Service Center agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

For more information on ARC and PLC, download the [program fact sheet](#) or the [2014-2018 farm bills comparison fact sheet](#). Online ARC and PLC election decision tools are available at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc. To locate the nearest USDA Service Center, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

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.

Conservation Tools Help Producers Make Positive Impacts on Changing Climate

America's farmers and ranchers are helping put the nation on track to a healthier and more resilient environment in the face of a changing climate. While agriculture only contributes 9 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, it offers a variety of opportunities to reduce emissions and cut carbon from the atmosphere. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to help producers become even better conservation stewards by providing the tools they need to do the job.

USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) and [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#) support Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue's Agriculture Innovation Agenda, which aims to better align USDA's resources, programs and research to give farmers the tools they need to become leaders in addressing climate challenges.

[Read More](#)

USDA's Conservation Reserve Program Grasslands Signup

Farmers and ranchers may apply to enroll grasslands in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands signup. The signup runs through May 15.

Through CRP Grasslands, participants retain the right to conduct common grazing practices, such as haying, mowing or harvesting seed from the enrolled land. Timing of some activities may be restricted by the primary nesting season of birds.

Participants will receive an annual rental payment and may receive up to 50 percent cost-share for establishing approved conservation practices. The duration of the CRP contract is either 10 or 15 years. FSA will rank applications using a number of factors including existence of expiring CRP land, threat of conversion or development, existing grassland, and predominance of native species cover, and cost.

The 2018 Farm Bill set aside 2 million acres for CRP Grassland enrollment. CRP is one of the largest conservation programs at USDA. CRP marks its 35-year anniversary in 2020 with 22 million acres currently enrolled.

For more information or to enroll in CRP Grasslands, contact your local FSA county office or visit fsa.usda.gov/crp. To locate your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator.

CRP Continuous Enrollment Period

The Farm Service Agency is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Continuous Signup](#).

CRP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”), to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Continuous signup enrollment contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

Unlike CRP enrollments under general CRP signups or CRP Grasslands, offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods.

For more information, including a list of acceptable practices, visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Transitioning Expiring CRP Land to Beginning, Veteran or Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

CRP contract holders are encouraged to transition their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to beginning, veteran or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers through the Transition Incentives Program (TIP). TIP provides annual rental payments to the landowner or operator for up to two additional years after the CRP contract expires, provided the transition is not to a family member.

Enrollment in TIP is on a continuous basis through 2023 or until the new statutory limit of \$50 million under the 2018 Farm Bill is reached.

CRP contract holders no longer need to be a retired or retiring owner or operator to transition their land. TIP participants must agree to sell, have a contract to sell, or agree to lease long term (at least five years) land enrolled in an expiring CRP contract to a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who is not a family member.

Beginning, veteran or social disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and CRP participants may enroll in TIP beginning two years before the expiration date of the CRP contract. For example, if a CRP contract is scheduled to expire on Sept. 30, 2022, the land may be offered for enrollment in TIP from October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2022. The TIP application must be submitted prior to completing the lease or sale of the affected lands.

New landowners or renters that return the land to production must use sustainable grazing or farming methods.

For more information on TIP, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation>.

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

A new online tool can help farmers and ranchers find information on U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) farm loans that may best fit their operations. USDA has launched the new *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* as the newest feature on farmers.gov, the Department’s self-service website for farmers.

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. Compared to this time last year, FSA has seen an 18 percent increase in the amount it has obligated for direct farm ownership loans, and through the 2018 Farm Bill, has [increased the limits](#) for several loan products.

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 be provided 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 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, 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 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 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 to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

With feedback from customers and field employees who serve those customers, farmers.gov delivers farmer-focused features through an agile, iterative process to deliver the greatest immediate value to America's agricultural producers – helping farmers and ranchers do right, and feed everyone.

For more information or to locate your USDA Service Center, visit farmers.gov.

2017, 2018 and 2019 Average Adjusted Gross Income Compliance Reviews

The AGI verification and compliance reviews for 2017, 2018 and 2019 are conducted on producers who the IRS indicated may have exceeded the adjusted gross income limitations described in [7 CFR 1400.500]. Based on this review, producers will receive determinations of eligibility or ineligibility.

If the producer is determined to have exceeded the average AGI limitation of \$900,000, receivables will be established for payments earned directly or indirectly by the producer subject to the \$900,000 limitation. The State FSA Office has begun notifying producers selected for review. If you have any questions about the review process or determinations, please contact the Texas FSA Office at 979-680-5192. Producers who receive initial debt notification letters may only appeal the amount of the debt to their local FSA office. Payment eligibility adverse determinations become administratively final 30 days from the date of the payment eligibility adverse determination letter and can only be reopened if exceptional circumstances exist that prevented the producer from timely filing the appeal.

Update Your Records

FSA is cleaning up our producer record database. If you have any unreported changes of address, zip code, phone number, email address or an incorrect name or business name on file they need to be reported to our office. Changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase, need to be reported to our office as well. Producers participating in FSA and NRCS programs are required to timely report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and update their CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan.

If you have any updates or corrections, please call your local FSA office to update your records.

MAL and LDP Policy

The 2018 Farm Bill extends loan authority through 2023 for Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs).

MALs and LDPs provide financing and marketing assistance for wheat, feed grains, soybeans, and other oilseeds, pulse crops, rice, peanuts, cotton, wool and honey. MALs provide producers interim financing after harvest to help them meet cash flow needs without having to sell their commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows. A producer who is eligible to obtain a loan, but agrees to forgo the loan, may obtain an LDP if such a payment is available. Marketing loan provisions and LDPs are not available for sugar and extra-long staple cotton.

FSA is now accepting requests for 2019 MALs and LDPs for all eligible commodities after harvest. Requests for loans and LDPs shall be made on or before the final availability date for the respective commodities.

Commodity certificates are available to loan holders who have outstanding nonrecourse loans for wheat, upland cotton, rice, feed grains, pulse crops (dry peas, lentils, large and small chickpeas), peanuts, wool, soybeans and designated minor oilseeds. These certificates can be purchased at the posted county price (or adjusted world price or national posted price) for the quantity of commodity under loan, and must be immediately exchanged for the collateral, satisfying the loan. MALs redeemed with commodity certificates are not subject to Adjusted Gross Income provisions.

To be considered eligible for an LDP, producers must have form [CCC-633EZ, Page 1](#) on file at their local FSA Office before losing beneficial interest in the crop. Pages 2, 3 or 4 of the form must be submitted when payment is requested.

Marketing loan gains (MLGs) and loan deficiency payments (LDPs) are no longer subject to payment limitations, actively engaged in farming and cash-rent tenant rules.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provisions state that a producer whose total applicable three-year average AGI exceeds \$900,000 is not eligible to receive an MLG or LDP. Producers must have a valid CCC-941 on file to earn a market gain of LDP. The AGI does not apply to MALs redeemed with commodity certificate exchange.

For more information and additional eligibility requirements, please visit a nearby USDA Service Center or FSA's website fsa.usda.gov.

NRCS Invests More Than \$1.1 million in Partner-Driven Comanche Springs Project in West Texas

USDA's Natural Resources Service (NRCS) announced that it is investing \$1.1 million in Texas for a partner-driven conservation project through its Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). NRCS will leverage nearly \$1.6 million in partner contributions over the next five years.

RCPP uses a partner-driven approach to fund innovative solutions to natural resource challenges. Through RCPP, NRCS and partners work together with private landowners and producers to implement a variety of conservation activities, including land management practices and systems, short-term land rentals, conservation easements and watershed structures. The mix of conservation activities carried out under each project is dependent on a project's goals, objectives and conservation benefits.

These projects offer impactful and measurable outcomes. They will support diverse agricultural and natural resource objectives, from helping farmers and ranchers improve water quality, soil health and drought resiliency to protecting drinking water supplies and enhancing wildlife habitat.

With NRCS contributions of \$1.1 million and Texas Water Trade contributions of \$1.5 million, Texas Water Trades goal is to increase spring flow to year-round flow of Comanche Springs near Fort Stockton which was historically one of the five largest springs of Texas.

View a multimedia story for a full list of projects at <https://arcg.is/4HeWX> .

Webinar to Assist Potential Applicants for Urban, Rural Garden Funding

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will host a webinar, Navigating the Process for Applying for a Texas NRCS Urban and Rural Conservation Grant, on the Texas Urban and Rural Conservation Project and Project G.R.E.E.N. grants to help those interested prepare applications for available funding.

Through this funding opportunity, NRCS in Texas will invest up to \$475,000 to assist entities and schools in providing fresh fruits and vegetables to their local communities.

NRCS will host the webinar, open to both conservation partners and the general public, on Monday, April 27, 2020, from 2 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST). To join the webinar,

visit: <http://nracs.adobeconnect.com/tx-nracs-grants/> . Log in to Adobe Connect using the guest option and enter your name. To join by teleconference, call 1-888-844-9904 and enter access code: 1946147.

These grant opportunities are efforts to challenge community organizations, educational institutions and Native American tribes to establish community and school gardens across Texas. Pollinator habitat planted with gardens can provide an increase in harvest potential while providing food and habitat for declining insect communities in Texas.

Grants are available for up to \$4,000 for a vegetable garden, \$3,000 for a pollinator garden, \$5,000 for a rainwater harvesting system, and \$6,500 for a seasonal high tunnel.

Review the Notice of Funding Opportunity before the webinar to be prepared to ask questions.

The notice of funding opportunity for both grants is available at <https://www.grants.gov> . Applications for Project G.R.E.E.N. (opportunity number [USDA-NRCS-TX-PG-20-GEN0010731](#)) and applications for the Texas Urban and Rural Conservation Project (opportunity number [USDA-NRCS-TX-URCP-20-GEN0010730](#)) are due May 29, 2020.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. 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).