



Van Buren/Kalamazoo Farm Service Agency NEWSLETTER

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Issue No. 1

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

FSA Website
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>



CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM GENERAL SIGNUP ANNOUNCED!

Landowners and Producers Will Have 4-Week Window Beginning in March to Enroll

USDA will conduct a four-week Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general signup, beginning on March 12 and ending on April 6. CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

CRP is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them use environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. Producers with expiring contracts and producers with environmentally sensitive land are encouraged to evaluate their options under CRP. Producers also are encouraged to look into CRP's other enrollment opportunities offered on a continuous, non-competitive, signup basis.

Currently, about 30 million acres are enrolled in CRP; and contracts on an estimated 6.5 million acres will expire on Sept. 30, 2012.

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking.

FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered: wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage; water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching; on-farm

benefits from reduced erosion; benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period; air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and cost.

Over the past 25 years, farmers, ranchers, conservationists, hunters, fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts have made CRP the largest and one of the most important in USDA's conservation portfolio. CRP continues to make major contributions to national efforts to improve water and air quality, prevent soil erosion by protecting the most sensitive areas including those prone to flash flooding and runoff. At the same time, CRP has helped increase populations of pheasants, quail, ducks, and other rare species, like the sage grouse, the lesser prairie chicken, and others. Highlights of CRP include:

- CRP has restored more than two million acres of wetlands and two million acres of riparian buffers;
- Each year, CRP keeps more than 600 million pounds of nitrogen and more than 100 million pounds of phosphorous from flowing into our nation's streams, rivers, and lakes.
- CRP provides \$1.8 billion annually to landowners—dollars that make their way into local economies, supporting small businesses and creating jobs; and
- CRP is the largest private lands carbon sequestration program in the country. By placing vulnerable cropland into conservation, CRP sequesters carbon in plants and soil, and reduces both fuel and fertilizer usage. In 2010, CRP resulted in carbon sequestration equal to taking almost 10 million cars off the road.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, visit YOUR local FSA service center or www.fsa.usda.gov.

THINKING OF CLEARING A FENCE ROW?

Most USDA programs require compliance with sodbuster and swampbuster provisions. These provisions require producers to follow an approved conservation system on all highly erodible land planted to an annual crop (sodbuster), as determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Further, USDA participants are prohibited from converting wetlands for agricultural production purposes (swampbuster) and planting an agricultural commodity on converted wetlands, as determined by NRCS. Be sure to have determinations made on any new land you plan to plant to annual crops.

Swampbuster provisions state that converting a wetland to make possible the planting of a crop will result in the loss of all USDA benefits. To avoid this possibility it is strongly recommended that producers come into the FSA office ahead of time to file an AD 1026 for referral to NRCS.



It is necessary for NRCS to review *any* actions which could result in the modification of an area determined wet. This includes any clearing of trees or brush (including fence rows), draining, dredging, filling, or plans to install, maintain or improve tile.

COUNTY COMMITTEE MEETINGS



Due to budgetary constraints, County Committee Meetings will be held quarterly throughout calendar year 2012. Meetings will be held in March, June, September, and December. The Van Buren COC meets on the 3rd Tuesday and the Kalamazoo COC meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the month.

2012 DCP AND ACRE SIGNUP UNDERWAY

Signup for the 2012 Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment (DCP) and the 2012 Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) programs has begun. ***The deadline for 2012 DCP/ACRE enrollment is June 1, 2012.*** There are no advance payments authorized for 2012; the full payment will be issued after October 1st.

We remind producers that planting fruits and/or vegetables (green beans, dry beans, sweet corn, etc.) on base acres without an authorized Fruits and Vegetable (FAV) history established will be considered a contract violation. If your intentions are to plant an FAV commodity on a specific farm, visit with your local FSA Office in advance to remain in compliance with farm bill provisions.

If you do not have an appointment scheduled yet, please contact your local County Office to schedule one soon.

CASH LEASE REQUIREMENTS

Each producer must provide a copy of their written lease to the county committee and, in the absence of a written lease, must provide to the county committee a complete written description of the terms and conditions of any oral agreement or lease. An owner's or landlord's signature affirming a zero share on a contract may be accepted as evidence of a cash lease between the owner or landlord and tenant, as applicable.

Leases must include at a minimum:

- The type of lease (cash, share, etc)
- Landowner name, signature, and date
- Farm operator name, signature and date
- Length of lease



SUPPLEMENTAL REVENUE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SURE) SIGNUP CONTINUES

The sign-up for 2010 SURE losses continues through **June 1, 2012**.

The SURE program covers the 2010 crop year for disaster. If you had Federal Crop Insurance or NAP coverage on all crops in all counties that contribute at least 5 percent of the expected revenue for your farming operation, then you may be entitled to a SURE payment. The following are the conditions that trigger SURE payments:

- at least one crop of economic significance must suffer a 10% production loss due to an eligible disaster condition
- crop of economic significance is a crop that has contributed or would have contributed at least 5% or more of the total expected revenue from all crops on the farm
- producers in counties declared disaster counties by the Secretary of Agriculture, or in contiguous counties, or those who show proof of an individual loss of at least 50% are eligible to receive SURE payments for crop producer or crop quality losses. Losses are measured with consideration to the whole-farm revenue, which includes crop insurance indemnities and commodity program payments, so that producers are not paid more than once for the same loss.

Please contact your local County Office with any questions regarding the SURE program.

NONINSURED CROP DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (NAP)

The noninsured crop disaster assistance program (NAP) is a federally funded program that helps producers reduce their risk when growing food and fiber crops, specialty crops and crops for livestock feed. These benefits are only available for crops for which the catastrophic level of crop insurance is not available. Application for coverage must be filed by the applicable crop's application closing date.

Production records for all crops must be reported to FSA no later than the acreage reporting date for the crop for the following year. FSA requires that any production reported in a loss year be verifiable according to Agency specifications. *NAP Losses must be reported within 15 days of loss.*

PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITIES FOR NAP RECORDS OF PRODUCTION

Producers are responsible for providing accurate and complete information. It is the producer's responsibility to report the total amount of unit production. It is not CCC's responsibility to determine the producer's amount of production.

The producer's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- providing, when required, the best verifiable or reliable production evidence available for the crop by practice, type, intended use, or planting period
- summarizing all the production evidence
- accounting for all the crop's production, whether or not records reflect this production
- providing the information in a manner that can be easily understood by COC
- reporting production by the date specified by CCC
- retaining production evidence for 3 crop years after the crop year it is initially certified.



All producers including producers of hand harvested crops are required to provide acceptable and verifiable production records for that production which is harvested. If selected for spot check, supporting evidence is required for acreage and production that was certified on the current crop year CCC-452.

During any year that CCC-576 is filed because of loss, producers of hand harvested crops are required to notify the County Office 15 calendar days after harvest is complete and before destruction of the crop so an appraisal of remaining production can be completed. The purpose of the appraisal is to document production left in the field because of quality or unmarketable because of the lack of market.

If the producer fails to provide acceptable production evidence where required by COC or as the result of a spot check, an assigned, zero credited, or T-yield will apply and shall be included in the APH database.

FOREIGN LANDOWNERS REPORTING REQUIREMENT

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. Foreign persons who 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 could result in civil penalties of up to 25% 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.

SPOUSAL SIGNATURES



Husbands and wives may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and Commodity Credit Corporation programs in which either has an interest. This option is automatically available unless a written request for exclusion is made to the county office staff by either spouse.

Other exceptions:

- Spouses may sign loan documents only when an FSA Power of Attorney form is on file.
- IRS will not accept spousal signatures on FSA-931, Average Adjusted Gross Income Certification and Consent.

For more clarification on spousal signature authority, feel free to contact your local FSA office.

COMMODITY LOAN PROGRAM

Time is running out to request a 2011 commodity loan on grain stored either on the farm in an eligible storage structure or in an approved warehouse.

The deadlines are:

- March 31st, 2012 for wheat, oats and barley.
- May 31st, 2012 for corn and soybeans.



Contact your local FSA for additional information.

LOANS FOR THE SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agriculture production. Loans are available for operating type loans and/or purchase or improve farms or ranches. While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, the FSA has provided priority funding for members of Socially Disadvantaged Applicants.

A socially disadvantaged applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of a group.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.



FARM LOAN PROGRAMS

FSA makes direct and guaranteed farm ownership (FO) and operating loans (OL) to family-size farmers and ranchers who cannot obtain commercial credit from a bank, Farm Credit System institution, or other lender. FSA loans can be used to purchase land, livestock, equipment, feed, seed, and supplies. Our loans can also be used to construct buildings or make farm improvements. Van Buren County producers should contact

William Hogan at 269-657-7055 and Kalamazoo County producers should contact Mack Francoeur at 269-781-4263 for more information.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

March 14	Kalamazoo County Committee Meeting
March 15	Final Date to Purchas NAP Coverage for Spring-Seeded Crops
March 20	Van Buren County Committee Meeting
March 31	Final Date to Request 2011-Crop Small Grain Loans/LDPs
May 28	Memorial Day Holiday – Offices Closed
May 31	Final Date to Request 2011-Crop Corn & Soybean Loans/LDPs
Ongoing	SAFE Program Enrollment
Ongoing	CRP Continuous Signup
Ongoing	Farm Storage Facility Loans



eGOV CUSTOMER REGISTRATION PROCESS

1. Access your website of interest:
 - USDA Customer Statement <http://customerstatement.usda.gov>
 - Electronic LDP Signup http://www.fsa.usda.gov/egov/eldp_default.htm
 - Electronic DCP Signup http://www.fsa.usda.gov/egov/edcp_default.htm
2. Create an online user profile and apply for Level 2 access
3. Respond to the verification email within 7 days of receipt.
4. Visit the County Office in person and provide photo identification to the Local Registration Authority in order to receive Level 2 Activation.
5. Access Level 2 applications within 1 hour after profile has been activated.

SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS

Special accommodations will be made upon request for individuals with disabilities, vision impairment or hearing impairment. If accommodations are required, individuals should contact their local County Office in person or by phone.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its program and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of Discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.