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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Colorado USDA Newsletter - June 10, 2024

Farm Service Agency | Natural Resources Conservation Service | Risk Management Agency

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Colorado Farm Service Agency is Hiring!

The Farm Service Agency is accepting applications for the following positions. Interested individuals may apply using the below links to USAJOBS:

- **County Program Technician:**
 - [Pueblo, CO](#) - Open 05/30-06/13
 - [Dove Creek, CO](#) - Opens 05/30-06/14
 - [Fort Collins, CO](#) - Opens 05/30-06/14
 - [Hugo, CO](#) - Opens 05/30-06/14

If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested, please share this information with them. Contact Claudia Drechsel at claudia.drechsel@usda.gov or 720-544-2878 if you have specific questions regarding the positions.

USDA Farm Service Agency Presents Denver Urban County Committees Webinar

USDA has been increasing services to producers in urban locations throughout the nation. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committees (COC), critical entities of the day-to-day operations of FSA that allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs. Colorado FSA is establishing the Denver Urban County Committee this year! To discuss this exciting announcement, USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU), and Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE), have come together to host a webinar on this topic.

During this webinar, we will go over what is the FSA Urban County Committee, the Nomination and Election Process, Eligible Nominees and Voters, How to get Involved, Other resources for Urban producers, and more! Below is the logistics and registration link for the event; please register for the event, however, registration is not required to attend.

Date: June 17, 2024

Time: 5:30 p.m. MST

Registration Link: [Denver Urban County Committees Webinar Link](#)

Please join us by registering for this event and bring any questions you may have.

For more information on programs and Colorado FSA Information, visit [Colorado State Office \(usda.gov\)](#); for more information on Urban County Committees, visit [County Committee Elections \(usda.gov\)](#).

Eligibility for Nominations for the 2024 County Committee Elections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs.

Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision-making and farm program delivery process.

A county committee is composed of 3 to 11 elected members from Local Administrative Areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. To be eligible for nomination and hold office as a committee member or alternate, a person must fulfill each of the following requirements:

- Be eligible to vote in an FSA county committee election*.
- Reside in the LAA that is up for election.
- Must not have been:
 - Removed or disqualified from:
 - FSA County Committee Membership or Alternate membership, or
 - FSA employment.
 - Removed for cause from any public office or have been convicted of fraud, larceny, embezzlement or any other felony.
 - Dishonorably discharged from any branch of the armed services.

*The following requirements must be met for a person to be eligible to vote in the county committee elections:

- Be of legal voting age or, if not of legal voting age, supervise and conduct the farming operation of an entire farm.
- Have an interest in a farm or ranch as:
 - An individual who meets one or more of the following:
 - Is eligible and capable to vote in one's own right.
 - Is a partner of a general partnership.
 - Is a member of a joint venture.
 - Is an authorized representative of a legal entity.

- Participates or cooperates in any FSA program that is provided by law. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation(s) but may not have applied or received FSA program benefits.

All nomination forms for the 2024 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by Aug. 1, 2024. For more information on FSA county committee elections, including fact sheets, nomination forms and FAQs, visit fsa.usda.gov/elections.

USDA FSA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program General Signup for 2024

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can now sign up for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (Grassland CRP). The signup runs from today through June 28, 2024. Grassland CRP, offered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), is a voluntary working lands conservation program that enables participants to conserve grasslands and provide important conservation benefits for wildlife, soil health and carbon sequestration, all while continuing most grazing and haying practices.

More than 2.3 million acres from agricultural producers and private landowners were accepted through the 2023 Grassland CRP signup. That signup reflects the continued success and value of investments in voluntary, producer-led, working lands conservation programs. The current total participation in Grassland CRP is 8.64 million acres, which is part of the 24.8 million acres enrolled in CRP opportunities overall.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), which generally extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through Sept. 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including CRP, to continue operating.

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before the June 28 deadline.

Other CRP Options

FSA is also accepting applications for the [Continuous CRP](#) signup, which opened in January 2023. Under this enrollment, producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

Additionally, FSA also offers financial assistance to producers and landowners enrolled in CRP to improve the health of their forests through the [Forest Management Incentive](#) (FMI), which can help participants with forest management practices, such as brush management and prescribed burning.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the [Transition Incentives Program](#) (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

Read the full [CRP Grassland News Release](#)!

USDA Now Accepting Applications for Available Funds to Help Cover Organic Certification Costs

Through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will cover up to 75% of organic certification costs at a maximum of \$750 per certification category. FSA is now accepting applications, and organic producers and handlers should apply for OCCSP by the Oct. 31, 2024, deadline for eligible expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2023, to Sept. 30, 2024. FSA will issue payments as applications are received and approved.

OCCSP was part of a [broader organic announcement](#) made by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on May 15, 2024, which also included the Organic Market Development Grant program and Organic Transition Initiative.

Eligible Applicants, Expenses and Categories

OCCSP provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of organic agricultural commodities for expenses incurred obtaining or maintaining organic certification under USDA's [National Organic Program](#). Eligible OCCSP applicants include any certified organic producers or handlers who have paid organic certification fees to a USDA-accredited certifying agent.

Cost share assistance covers expenses including application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, inspector travel expenses, user fees, sales assessments and postage. OCCSP pays a maximum of \$750 per certification category for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling, and state organic program fees (California only).

How to Apply

To apply, producers and handlers should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#) and be prepared to provide documentation of organic certification and eligible expenses. OCCSP applications can also be submitted through participating state departments of agriculture. For more information, visit the [OCCSP](#) webpage.

Opportunity for State Departments of Agriculture

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA posted a [funding opportunity summary on grants.gov](#) and will electronically mail the Notice of Funding Opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture. Applications are due July 12, 2024.

If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA county offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. Producers or handlers can receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture but not both.

More Information

USDA offers other assistance for organic producers, including the [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), which includes direct farmer assistance for organic production and processing and conservation. For more information on organic agriculture, visit [farmers.gov/organic](#).

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by logging into their [farmers.gov account](#). If you don't have an account, sign up today.

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 the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP), 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 no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred. For the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP), you must submit a notice of loss to your local FSA office no later than the annual program application deadline of January 30 following the program year in which the loss occurred 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.

USDA RD Financial Assistance Program

Interested in applying for the USDA Rural Development Rural Energy for America Program? Don't know where to start? Check out our two technical assistance providers for application assistance.

USDA Rural Development's [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\)](#) provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements. Agricultural producers may also apply for new energy efficient equipment and new system loans for agricultural production and processing. Applications are being accepted on a quarterly basis. The deadlines for this Fiscal Year are June 30 and September 30.

USDA Rural Development has two providers in Colorado available to offer hands-on assistance to agricultural producers and small business owners applying for REAP

funding - the Colorado Department of Agriculture and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc. Assistance provided to potential applicants includes help with the application process, energy audits, preparing technical reports, registering with System Award Management (SAM), construction planning, and providing guidance in the completion of environmental reports. This technical assistance focuses on assisting distressed or disadvantaged communities and ensuring applicants pursuing projects applying underutilized technologies or seeking grants under \$20,000 have success.

If you are interested in this technical assistance, contact either of the following:

Colorado Department of Agriculture - <https://bit.ly/CO-REAP-assistance> or email cda_aero@state.co.us

Tri State Generation and Transmission Association Inc - <https://www.tristate.coop/programs>, email onbill@tristategt.org

If you have additional questions on the USDA REAP program, please send an email to sm.co.reap@usda.gov.

USDA RMA Hosts Informational Workshops on Newly Expanded Nursery Insurance Option

USDA has [expanded its Nursery Value Select \(NVS\) crop insurance](#) program to all counties in all states, and the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) is encouraging interested nursery producers to learn more about the program through upcoming informational workshops. These sessions will be valuable for producers in the newly expanded areas and especially for the Nursery Field Grown and Container (FG&C) crop insurance program, which ends beginning with the 2026 crop year.

Nursery Value Select is a pilot program that enables nursery producers to select the dollar amount of coverage that best fits their risk management needs. Its expansion is part of RMA's efforts to provide insurance options for a broader group of producers, including specialty crop producers.

There is one more Nursery Value Select workshop on **July 18**. [See more details here](#).

RMA has administered the Nursery FG&C crop insurance program for nearly 30 years. However, the program relies on a partnership between RMA and a private contractor to update and maintain the Eligible Plant List and Plant Price Schedule and associated software packages. The private contractor will be closing after providing all necessary contractual obligations for the 2025 crop year. Without access to the price schedule and associated software, the Nursery FG&C program will no longer be available to nursery producers beginning with the 2026 crop year.

Nursery Value Select will be able to offer comparable but improved risk management options for those who currently have coverage with the Nursery FG&C program, making RMA's informational workshops a valuable opportunity to learn more about Nursery Value Select and any required transitions.

Prior to the expansion, Nursery Value Select was only available in select counties in Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Washington. Beginning with the 2025 crop year, Nursery Value Select **will be available in all counties in all states**. The sales closing date for the 2025 crop year is May 1, 2024, or Sept. 1, 2024, as provided in the actuarial documents.

Nursery Value Select was first available in the 2021 crop year, and producers insured more than \$460 million in liabilities in crop year 2023.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA Agent Locator](#). Producers can learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov or by contacting their [RMA Regional Office](#).

Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Youth Loans with Tina Mellinger

In this *Ask the Expert*, Tina Mellinger answers questions about Farm Service Agency (FSA) Youth Loans. Tina is a Farm Loan Manager in Ohio and has worked for FSA for 37 years. Her FSA farm loan team makes an average of around 50 loans each year, with around five of those being Youth Loans. Her entire career has been centered around loan-making. At the beginning of her career, she worked for Rural Development making home loans.

Tina grew up on a 50-cow dairy farm in southeastern Ohio. She earned an animal science and ag education degree from the Ohio State University.

To read the full blog, visit farmers.gov/blog/ask-expert-qa-on-youth-loans-with-tina-mellinger.

Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, the request will be denied. Although there are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies, it's important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions.

Applications cannot be approved until FSA has copies of all permits and plans. Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

USDA Forms New Partnerships to Support Organic Transition, Conservation Assistance

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is partnering with Oregon Tilth and Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) to strengthen organic expertise for conservation programs and expand relationships among producers wanting to transition to organic. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is investing \$5 million in these five-year partnerships, which are part of USDA's Organic Transition Initiative (OTI), a Department-wide effort to support agricultural producers interested in transitioning to organic. Additionally, NRCS encourages organic and transitioning producers to apply for assistance through its conservation programs that currently have boosted funding from the OTI as well as the Inflation Reduction Act.

These OTI partnerships were part of a broader [organic announcement](#) made by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on May 15, 2024, which also included the Organic Market Development Grant program and Organic Certification Cost Share Program.

The OTI partnerships include seven new staff positions. An OFRF organic research specialist will disseminate the latest in organic research and national training to NRCS staff and Oregon Tilth will establish six organic specialists across the country who will develop regional networks, provide hands-on organic training for producers, and support NRCS staff who assist farmers transitioning to organic. The organic specialist positions will be filled by staff from Oregon Tilth working with organic partners including Marbleseed, California Certified Organic Farmers Foundation, and Organic Agronomy Training Service.

Conservation Assistance

As part of OTI, NRCS introduced a new organic management standard in 2023 to allow producers flexibility to get assistance and education, such as attending workshops or requesting help from experts or mentors. The management standard supports conservation practices required for organic certification and may provide foregone income reimbursement for dips in production during the transition period.

In 2023, NRCS allocated \$12 million in 22 states, signing 112 contracts with transitioning producers.

In addition to the new standard, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help with conservation plans supporting organic transition and organic management, cover cropping and crop rotation, field borders and hedgerows, high tunnels, irrigation practices, nutrient management, mulching and pest management. Many of these practices are [NRCS' Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Activities](#) and eligible for Inflation Reduction Act funding.

Higher payment rates and other options are available for underserved producers including socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran, and limited resource farmers and ranchers.

Producers beginning or in the process of transitioning to organic certification are encouraged to apply at their local [USDA Service Center](#). If a state deadline is missed, applications will be considered for the next fiscal year.

More Information

These NRCS partnerships are part of the OTI's multi-agency effort to support organic and transitioning producers including farmer-to-farmer mentoring, direct support for crop insurance in 2023, and market development projects.

OTI complements [existing assistance for organic producers](#), including the Farm Service Agency's [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#), (OCCSP) that provides cost share for producers who obtain or renew their organic certification. Sign-up for 2024 OCCSP begins on May 15 and runs through October 31.

For more information on organic agriculture, visit farmers.gov/organic or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also apply for NRCS programs, manage conservation plans and contracts, and view and print conservation maps by [logging into their farmers.gov account](#). If you don't have an account, [sign up today](#).

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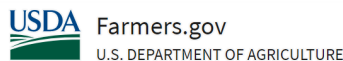
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