

April 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Alaska State FSA Newsletter

Alaska State Farm Service Agency

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State Executive

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Alaska FSA State Directors News

A month goes by and it seems like our families, farms and businesses have all taken another left turn. Here at FSA, our offices have taken a turn as well. We have adjusted with rotating our people into the office to keep staffed and are taking turns working from home. The technology available to us is being put in practice every day as FSA is here to help and serve you to meet all your program and farm lending needs and comply with guidelines provided by government authorities.

Alaskan's in agriculture currently face unplanned challenges with the COVID-19 virus. Does your emergency plan include family or employees becoming too sick to work? Planned strategies make it much easier to meet new challenges. Historically severe challenges like this were overcome with visionary ideas and actions. Some will recognize a new opportunity in these difficult times. History will

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

Committee Meetings:
Northern Co TBA
Southern Co May 12, 10 am

Please contact your local FSA
Office for questions specific to
your operation or county.

determine the result. But, if we all continue to do the same things, we will all surely get the same planned results.

Life on the farm for many has not changed all that much. It is inspiring to see the social media posts of mother cows and baby calves with calving season underway. There is lots of extra work that comes with each major event, like calving season, planting season and harvesting season. All other chores still need to be done, like cows milked, animals fed, watering tanks cleaned, bedding animals, snow plowing so equipment can move around the farmyard. Product still needs to be sold and moved to the market/buyer as well as receiving inputs like fertilizer, seed, and fuel. Greenhouse operations continue as do all the work preparing for farmers market activities. My garden plan keeps me focused on each task to get completed on time.

I have spoken to several people in the last month who are much more motivated in securing their families food supply. Some want to raise chickens, get a milk cow, expand their garden, and attempt new crops. Looking forward, plans are underway to bottle, freeze, dry and store more food to secure the families food supply. The last Agriculture census documented Alaska leading the nation with a 30% increase in the number of farms. Alaskans could very well see similar growth this coming year for added food security. With all team sports cancelled this year, I offer my latest cheer to Alaska farmers. Go Agriculture.

USDA Service Centers Open for Business by Phone Appointment Only

U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Centers are encouraging visitors to take proactive protective measures to help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

USDA Service Centers in Alaska 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, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or any other Service Center agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment. In the event a Service Center is closed, producers can receive assistance from the closest alternate Service Center by phone.

Producers can find Service Center phone numbers at farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

FPAC agencies continue to look at the flexibilities to deliver programs on behalf of producers, just as they have in past situations, such as natural disasters. Farmers and ranchers are resilient and FPAC agencies will continue to deliver the farm safety net programs and resource conservation programs that keep American agriculture in business today and long into the future.

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway](#). Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance, and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in.

For the most current updates on available services and Service Center status visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

USDA Announces Payments Set to Begin for 2019 Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program

Program Helps Offset Cost for Farmers and Ranchers Outside the Contiguous U.S.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Alaska today announced that fiscal year 2019 payments for the [Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program \(RTCP\)](#) will begin on April 6, 2020. State Executive Director Bryan Scoresby said RTCP will help eligible farmers and ranchers offset a portion of the cost of transporting agricultural products over long distances.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 reauthorized RTCP and allows farmers and ranchers in Alaska, Hawaii and insular areas including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Virgin Islands of the United States, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Republic of Palau, to recover any costs to transport agricultural commodities or inputs used to produce an agricultural commodity.

RTCP payments are calculated based on the costs incurred for transportation of the agricultural commodity or inputs during a fiscal year, subject to an \$8,000 per producer cap per fiscal year. If claims for payments exceed the funds available from the program for a fiscal year, payments will be reduced on a pro-rata basis.

To find your local FSA county office, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

FSA Makes Changes to Farm Loan, Disaster, Conservation and Safety Net Programs to Make it Easier for Customers to Conduct Business

FSA Services Available by Phone Appointment Only

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) county offices are open in Alaska by phone appointment only until further notice, and FSA staff are available to continue helping agricultural producers with program signups, loan servicing and other important actions. Additionally, FSA is relaxing the loan-making process and adding flexibilities for servicing direct and guaranteed loans to provide credit to producers in need.

FSA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with our agricultural producers by phone and using email and online tools whenever possible.

FSA is delivering programs and services, including:

- Farm loans;
- Commodity loans;
- Farm Storage Facility Loan program;
- Disaster assistance programs, including signup for the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (this includes producers now eligible because of losses due to drought and excess moisture in 2018 and 2019);
- Safety net programs, including 2020 signup for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs;
- Conservation programs; and
- Acreage reports.

Relaxing the Farm Loan-Making Process

FSA is relaxing the loan-making process, including:

- Extending the deadline for applicants to complete farm loan applications;
- Preparing Direct Loans documents even if FSA is unable to complete lien and record searches because of closed government buildings. Once those searches are complete, FSA would close the loan; and
- Closing loans if the required lien position on the primary security is perfected, even for loans that require additional security and those lien searches, filings and recordings cannot be obtained because of closed government buildings.

Servicing Direct Loans

FSA is extending deadlines for producers to respond to loan servicing actions, including loan deferral consideration for financially distressed and delinquent borrowers.

FSA will temporarily suspend loan accelerations, non-judicial foreclosures, and referring foreclosures to the Department of Justice. The U.S. Attorney's Office will make the determination whether to stop foreclosures and evictions on accounts under its jurisdiction.

Servicing Guaranteed Loans

Guarantee lenders can self-certify, providing their borrowers with:

- Subsequent-year operating loan advances on lines of credit;
- Emergency advances on lines of credit..

FSA will consider guaranteed lender requests for:

- Temporary payment deferral consideration when borrowers do not have a feasible plan reflecting that family living expenses, operating expenses and debt can be repaid; and
- Temporary forbearance consideration for borrowers on loan liquidation and foreclosure actions.

Contacting FSA

FSA will be accepting additional forms and applications by facsimile or electronic signature. Some services are also available online to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in.

FSA encourages producers to contact their county office to discuss these programs and temporary changes to farm loan deadlines and the loan servicing options available. For Service Center contact information, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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.

Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be a success. A part of ensuring this success is providing guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower's graduation to commercial lending institutions. While it is FSA's commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for

borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower's responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation;
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses;
- The development of problem situations;
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

In addition, if a farm loan borrower cannot make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, visit fsa.usda.gov.

Livestock Losses

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides assistance to eligible producers for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law.

LIP compensates livestock owners and contract growers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather, including losses due to hurricanes, floods, blizzards, wildfires, extreme heat or extreme cold.

For disease losses, FSA county committees can accept veterinarian certifications that livestock deaths were directly related to adverse weather and unpreventable through good animal husbandry and management.

For 2020 livestock losses, eligible livestock owners must file a notice within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent.

Participants must provide the following supporting documentation to their local FSA office no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred.

- Proof of death documentation
- Copy of grower's contracts
- Proof of normal mortality documentation

USDA has established normal mortality rates for each type and weight range of eligible livestock, i.e. Adult Beef Cow = 1.5% and Non-Adult Beef Cattle (less than 250 pounds) = 3%. These established percentages reflect losses that are considered expected or typical under "normal" conditions.

In addition to filing a notice of loss, producers must also submit an application for payment by March 1, 2021.

Additional Information about LIP is available at your local FSA office or online at: www.fsa.usda.gov.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in these meetings and/or events should contact Lloyd Wilhelm, Northern CED, at (907) 895-4242, Erin Sturdivant, Southern CED, at (907) 761-7754 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

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).

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