

Alaska FSA Newsletter - April 2022

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From the Alaska FSA State Executive Director

Having been involved in the Alaska Agriculture industry for the past 17 years, I'm lucky to know many of you within the state of Alaska. For those of you whom I haven't met yet, here's a little of my background. I was raised on a cow-calf operation on the Southern Oregon Coast where generations of my family have raised premier beef cattle for over 100 years. I went to college to find a cowboy to take back to my Dad's ranch, and married an Alaskan teacher instead. I graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Business Management in 2003.

I spent two years in the Kansas Field Office of the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service and thoroughly enjoyed my introduction to Midwest agriculture. I came to Alaska in 2005 and began my career as a Summer Intern with the State Division of Agriculture. During my tenure, I led the Marketing & Development team, managed and developed the Alaska Grown program, conducted Country



of Origin Labeling inspections across the State and facilitated millions of dollars in grant dispersal. I became the Executive Director of the Alaska Farmland Trust in 2015 where my role included permanently protecting valuable agricultural lands, promoting the industry across multiple platforms, and educating fellow Alaskans on the importance of their food system.

When I'm not working to inspire others about Alaska's agriculture industry, I enjoy chasing my teenaged daughters from the soccer pitch to the basketball court and try to get back to the Southern Oregon Coast as often as possible.

I am excited to join the USDA FSA family. I love the agriculture industry. I love local food. I know that producers across Alaska and the Country work in acres not hours and my respect for your efforts is deep. I look forward to expanding our FSA outreach and want to hear from you on how we can improve our services.

Reminders:

- Grassland CRP signup will run from April 4 to May 13.
- The Alaska Farmers Market Association summit Friday, April 8.
 https://www.alaskafarmersmarkets.org/2022-alaska-farmers-market-summit-april-8th/
- Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program deadline to submit applications is April 29, 2022.
- Drive Your Tractor to Work Day is celebrated in Palmer the day before Alaska Agriculture Day, Monday May 2. If you're in the area watch for the parade of Tractors through town Monday morning.
- Alaska Agriculture Day is legislatively designated as the First Tuesday in May so mark your calendars for Tuesday May 3. I encourage all Alaskans to purchase extra(!) Alaska Grown products on that day.
- Acreage Reporting date for 2022 Crop year for Nursery is May 31, 2022.

Amy Pettit State Executive Director Alaska Farm Service Agency

USDA Updates Eligibility for Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has clarified the definition of a spot market sale and hog eligibility under the <u>Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program</u> (SMHPP), which assists producers who sold hogs through a spot market sale from April 16, 2020, through Sept. 1, 2020. Hog producers will also now be required to submit documentation to support information provided on their SMHPP application. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications through April 29, 2022, which is an extension of the April 15, 2022, deadline previously set for the program.

USDA is offering the SMHPP in response to a reduction in packer production due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in fewer negotiated hogs being procured and subsequent lower market prices. The program is part of USDA's broader Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative and addresses gaps in previous assistance for hog producers.

SMHPP Program Updates

When the pandemic disrupted normal marketing channels, including access to packers, producers sold their hogs through cash sales to local processors or butchers, direct sales to individuals and third-party intermediaries, including sale barns or brokers. The use of third-party intermediaries was the only available marketing alternative for many producers and are now included in SMHPP. The only direct to packer sales that are eligible for SMHPP are those through a negotiated sale. Hogs sold through a contract that includes a premium above the spot-market price or other formula such as the wholesale cut-out price remain ineligible. Hogs must be suitable and intended for slaughter to be eligible. Immature swine (pigs) are ineligible.

FSA will now require documentation to support the accuracy of information provided on the FSA-940 Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program application, including the number of hogs reported on the application that were sold through a spot market sale and how the price was determined for the sale.

SMHPP payments will be calculated by multiplying the number of head of eligible hogs, not to exceed 10,000 head, by the payment rate of \$54 per head. To ensure SMHPP funding availability is disbursed equitably to all eligible producers, FSA will now issue payments after the application period ends. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be factored.

Applying for Assistance

Eligible hog producers can apply for SMHPP by April 29, 2022, by completing the FSA-940, Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program application, along with required supporting documentation. Producers can visit farmers.gov/smhpp for examples of supporting documentation, information on applicant eligibility and more information on how to apply.

Applications can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. To find their local FSA office, producers should <u>visit farmers.gov/service-locator</u>. Hog producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.

USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022

Agricultural producers and landowners can sign up soon for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a cornerstone conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris

Administration effort to address climate change and achieve other natural resource benefits. The General CRP signup will run from **Jan. 31 to March 11**, and the Grassland CRP signup will run from **April 4 to May 13**.

Producers and landowners enrolled 4.6 million acres into CRP signups in 2021, including 2.5 million acres in the largest Grassland CRP signup in history. There are currently 22.1 million acres enrolled, and FSA is aiming to reach the 25.5-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2022.

CRP Signups

General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland.

Meanwhile, Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

Alongside these programs, producers and landowners can enroll acres in Continuous CRP under the ongoing sign up, which includes projects available through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

Climate Benefits

Last year, FSA enacted a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP General and Continuous signups, to better target CRP on addressing climate change. This incentive aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CRP's climate-smart practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA invested \$10 million last year in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

More Information on CRP

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local <u>USDA Service</u> <u>Center</u> to learn more or to apply for the program -- for General CRP before the **March 11 deadline**, and for Grassland CRP before the **May 13 deadline**. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some <u>USDA Service Centers</u> are open to limited visitors. Additionally, fact sheets and other resources are available at <u>fsa.usda.gov/crp</u>.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

USDA Reminds Producers to File Crop Acreage Reports

Agricultural producers who have not yet completed their <u>crop acreage reports</u> after spring planting should make an appointment with the Northern or Southern County Farm Service Agency (FSA) before the applicable deadline.

An acreage report documents a crop grown on a farm or ranch and its intended uses. Filing an accurate and timely acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage, can prevent the loss of benefits.

How to File a Report

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable for the Northern and Southern County Offices:

For 2022 Crop Year

May 31, 2022 Nursery

July 15, 2022 All other spring planted crops, CRP, Perennial Forage

For 2023 Crop Year

September 30, 2022 Value-loss crops and controlled environment crops

(except Nursery)

December 15, 2022 Fall-Seeded Small Grains

January 2, 2023 Honey

Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some <u>USDA Service Centers</u> are open to limited visitors. Contact the Northern or Southern County FSA office to set up an in-person or phone appointment.

To file a crop acreage report, you will need to provide:

- Crop and crop type or variety.
- Intended use of the crop.
- Number of acres of the crop.
- Map with approximate boundaries for the crop.
- Planting date(s).
- · Planting pattern, when applicable.
- Producer shares.

- Irrigation practice(s).
- Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable.
- Other information as required.

Acreage Reporting Details

The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, then
 the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or
 acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county
 office.

Producers should also report crop acreage they intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were unable to plant. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA's Risk Management Agency.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP-covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

More Information

For questions, please contact the Northern County FSA office and the Southern County FSA Office at 907-761-7773.

Update Your Records

FSA is cleaning up our producer record database and needs your help. Please report any changes of address, zip code, phone number, email address or an incorrect name or business name on file to our office. You should also report changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase. You should also report any changes to your operation in which you reorganize to form a Trust, LLC or other legal entity.

FSA and NRCS program participants are required to promptly report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and to update their *Farm Operating Plan* on form CCC-902.

To update your records, you can find contact information at <u>farmers.gov/service-locator</u>.

Five Facts About the United States Drought Monitor

This is likely no surprise to you, but drought persists across the western U.S. and is intensifying in some areas. No geographic area is immune to the potential of drought at any given time. The <u>U.S. Drought Monitor</u> provides a weekly drought assessment, and it plays an important role in USDA programs that help farmers and ranchers recover from drought.

Fact #1 - Numerous agencies use the Drought Monitor to inform drought-related decisions.

The map identifies areas of drought and labels them by intensity on a weekly basis. It categorizes the entire country as being in one of six levels of drought. The first two, None and Abnormally Dry (D0), are not considered to be drought. The next four describe increasing levels of drought: Moderate (D1), Severe (D2), Extreme (D3) and Exceptional (D4).

While many entities consult the Drought Monitor for drought information, drought declarations are made by federal, <u>state</u> and local agencies that may or may not use the Drought Monitor to inform their decisions. Some of the ways USDA uses it to determine a producer's eligibility for certain <u>drought assistance programs</u>, like the <u>Livestock Forage Disaster Program</u> and <u>Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres</u> and to "fast-track" <u>Secretarial drought disaster designations</u>.

Fact #2 - U.S. Drought Monitor is made with more than precipitation data.

When you think about drought, you probably think about water, or the lack of it. Precipitation plays a major role in the creation of the Drought Monitor, but the map's author considers <u>numerous indicators</u>, <u>including drought impacts</u> and local insight from over 450 expert observers around the country. Authors use several dozen indicators to assess drought, including precipitation, streamflow, reservoir levels, temperature and evaporative demand, soil moisture and vegetation health. Because the drought monitor depicts both short and long-term drought conditions, the authors must look at data for multiple timeframes. The final map produced each week represents a summary of the story being told by all the pieces of data. To help tell that story, authors don't just look at data. They converse over the course of the map-making week with experts across the country and draw information about drought impacts from media reports and private citizens.

Fact #3 - A real person, using real data, updates the map.

Each week's map author, not a computer, processes and analyzes data to update the drought monitor. The <u>map authors</u> are trained climatologists or meteorologists from the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (the academic partner and website host of the Drought Monitor), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and USDA. The author's job is to do what a computer can't – use their expertise to reconcile the sometimes-conflicting stories told by each stream of data into a single assessment.

Fact #4 - The Drought Monitor provides a current snapshot, not a forecast.

The Drought Monitor is a "snapshot" of conditions observed during the most recent week and builds off the previous week's map. The map is released on Thursdays and depicts conditions based on data for the week that ended the preceding Tuesday. Rain that falls on the Wednesday just before the USDM's release won't be reflected until the next map is published. This provides a consistent, week-to-week product and gives the author a window to assess the data and come up with a final map.

Fact #5 – Your input can be part of the drought-monitoring process.

State climatologists and other trained observers in the drought monitoring network relay on-the-ground information from numerous sources to the US Drought monitor author each week. That can include information that you contribute.

The Drought Monitor serves as a trigger for multiple forms of federal disaster relief for agricultural producers, and sometimes producers contact the author to suggest that drought conditions in their area are worse than what the latest drought monitor shows. When the author gets a call like that, it prompts them to look closely at all available data for that area, to see whether measurements of precipitation, temperature, soil moisture and other indicators corroborate producer-submitted reports. This is the process that authors follow whether they receive one report or one hundred reports, although reports from more points may help state officials and others know where to look for impacts.

There are multiple ways to contribute your observations:

- 1. **Talk to your state climatologist** Find the current list at the <u>American Association of State Climatologists</u> website.
- 2. **Email** Emails sent to droughtmonitor@unl.edu inform the USDM authors.
- 3. **Become a CoCoRaHS observer** Submit drought reports along with daily precipitation observations to the <u>Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network.</u>
- 4. Submit Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR) go.unl.edu/CMOR.

For more information, read our <u>Ask the Expert blog with a NDMC climatologist</u> or visit farmers.gov/protection-recovery.

USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

Improvements Part of USDA's Commitment to Increase Equity in All Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs,

including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 <u>rule on the Federal Register.</u>

More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in

participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a <u>temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures</u> for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the <u>Farm Loan Discover Tool on farmers.gov</u> (<u>also available in Spanish</u>) or by contacting their local <u>USDA Service Center</u>. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Producers can <u>contact their local Service Center</u> to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;
- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

<u>Farmers.gov</u> now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers

and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

Managing USDA Business Online

Using farmers.gov, producers, entities and those acting on their behalf can also:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- · View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices, plans and contracts.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View farm loan and interest information (producers only).

Future plans include adding the ability to import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture planting boundaries.

To access your information, you'll will need a <u>USDA eAuth account</u> to login to farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit <u>farmers.gov</u> and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the <u>Sign In/Sign Up link</u> at the top right of the website. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

In addition to the self-service features available by logging into farmers.gov, the website also has ample information on USDA programs, including pandemic assistance, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance. Recently, USDA updated the navigation and organization of the site as well as added some new webpages, including "Get Involved," "Common Forms," and "Translations." Learn more about these changes.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in these meetings and/or events should contact the Northern County FSA Service Center and the Southern County FSA Service Center, at (907) 761-7773, or dial 7-1-1 to access telecommunication relay services.

Alaska State Farm Service Agency

800 E Palmer-Wasilla Hwy., Suite 216 Palmer, AK 99645 Phone: 907-761-7738 Fax: 907-761-7789

Northern County FSA Service Center Southern County FSA Service Center

PO Box 585 800 E Palmer-Wasilla Hwy. Ste 216

Delta Junction, AK 99737 Palmer, AK 99645

Phone: 907-761-7773 Phone: 907-761-7773

Fax: 855-711-9095 Fax: 907-761-7789

Hours: County Committee Meetings

Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Northern Co April 12, 9:00 a.m.

www.fsa.usda.gov/ak Southern Co April 12, 10:00 a.m.

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