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## Niobrara County Updates

Greetings Niobrara County Farmers and Ranchers!

I hope you all are surviving this unusual and brutal winter we've endured these past several months.

There are a variety of programs to assist with problems relating to this winter weather, so if you are encountering some difficulties with livestock losses and other impacts due to the snow, wind, cold, and other extreme weather conditions, please contact the office to visit about the possible programs that could assist you.



Also, please remember that Niobrara County and many surrounding counties are eligible for additional feed and livestock transportation mileage from January 1 through April 30, 2023 due to the drought conditions in 2022. If you are still incurring additional transportation, please contact the office to submit a notice of loss, and once you are finished transporting everything you will be for this spring, make an appointment to complete your application.

There are a few new revenue based programs available for revenue losses in 2020 and 2021. There is an article included in this newsletter with more information. Please contact the office for more information.

In other news, I am pleased to inform you I have been offered and accepted the permanent position as the County Executive Director Trainee for the Niobrara County FSA Office. It is very exciting for me to have the opportunity to continue to serve the agricultural producers of the Niobrara County area on a deeper level.

I want to thank the Niobrara County FSA Committee for their trust and belief in me and for granting me, out of all the eligible candidates, the honor of being able to continue to serve you in this capacity. I also want to thank those of you out there who have supported me and encouraged me to take this next step for our county.

I am a passionate supporter of the agricultural community. I am committed to the FSA mission. I will advocate for our producers and am dedicated to deliver program assistance effectively and efficiently.

In order to successfully complete these objectives, I will need to complete a 52 week CED training program.

To ensure the forward progress of this office and to continue to provide assistance to our producers while I complete the required training, the CED of Goshen County, Courtney Yelton, will continue to be the Acting CED for Niobrara County. She and her team will be assisting our current PT, Calla Diane, to deliver program information and benefits to you.

I want to express my gratitude for your patience with us through all of our staff changes and extreme heavy workloads for the past couple of years. I ask you to continue to keep practicing your patience a little longer while we take these next steps.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to the Niobrara County Office at 307-334-2953, or the Niobrara FSA County Committee members. Acting CED, Courtney Yelton may also be reached in Torrington at 307-532-4880.

In the meantime, I will miss all of you.

Kimberly Nusbaum

**Please note the following important dates and deadlines:**

April 3, 2023 – Deadline to obtain NAP coverage on spring-seeded crops

April 7, 2023 – Deadline to submit offer for General CRP signup

May 29, 2023 – OFFICE CLOSED – Memorial Day Holiday

June 2, 2023 – Deadline for ERP/PARP

Within 15 days of noticing crop loss – File NAP Notice of Loss

Within 30 days of noticing livestock, pasture, or feed loss, or beginning additional feed, livestock, or water transportation due to drought – File LIP/ELAP Notice of Loss

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## USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup starting **February 27 through April 7, 2023**. CRP is a cornerstone voluntary conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris administration's effort to address climate change and help agricultural communities invest in the long-term well-being of their land and natural resources.

"The Conservation Reserve Program is one of the largest private lands conservation programs in the United States, offering a range of conservation options to farmers, ranchers and landowners," Vilsack said. "CRP has and continues to be a great fit for farmers with less productive or marginal cropland, helping them re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and support wildlife habitat. Under this administration, we have made several updates to the program to increase producer interest and enrollment, strengthen the climate benefits of the program and help ensure underserved producers can find a pathway to entry into CRP."

Producers and landowners enrolled more than 5 million acres into CRP through signups in 2022, building on the acceptance of more than 3.1 million acres in the [largest Grassland CRP signup in history](#). There are currently 23 million acres enrolled in CRP, with 1.9 million set to expire this year. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is aiming to reach the 27-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2023.

### General CRP

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. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

### Continuous CRP

Under Continuous CRP, 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. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR30), the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watershed, has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices. Under this administration, FSA also moved SAFE practices back to the Continuous CRP signup, giving producers and landowners more opportunities to participate in the initiative. Through the FWP, producers and landowners can enroll land in CRP as part of their efforts to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, to improve both vegetation and water flow.

This administration has also made significant improvements to CREP, which leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific State, regional or nationally significant conservation concerns. Specifically, USDA made significant improvements to CREP to reduce barriers and make the program more accessible to a broad range of producers and new types of partners. These updates included flexibility for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, along with an investment in additional staff to work directly with partners. Through CREP, for the first time ever, three Tribal Nations are now partnering with USDA to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

### **Grassland CRP**

FSA will announce the dates for Grassland CRP signup in the coming weeks. 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.

### **How to Sign Up**

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

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.

### **More Information**

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 touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under 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](https://www.usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

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## USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Agricultural Producers Impacted by Recent Winter Storms

Agricultural operations in Idaho, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming have been significantly impacted by recent snowstorms. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover from these adverse weather events. Impacted producers should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about program options available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure, and livestock losses and damages.

“These recent winter storms have taken their toll on livestock producers in Idaho, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming leaving producers with snow removal costs as well as increased feed expenses,” said Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). “We stand with our producers who have worked tirelessly in these severe conditions to keep livestock fed and to protect crops from Mother Nature’s wrath. We know these storms have left damage in their wake, and I’m glad that USDA offers a strong portfolio of disaster assistance programs available to help.”

### USDA Disaster Recovery Assistance

Producers who experience livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality may be eligible for the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). To participate in LIP, producers will have to provide acceptable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent.

Meanwhile, the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) provides eligible producers with compensation for feed and grazing losses. ELAP also includes costs associated with equipment rental fees for hay lifts and snow removal. For ELAP, producers will need to file a notice of loss within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days.

Additionally, eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines lost. This complements the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days.

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed [farm loans](#), including operating and emergency farm loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low-interest [emergency loans](#) to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs. Additionally, FSA has a variety of loan servicing options available for borrowers who are unable to make scheduled payments on their farm loan programs debt to the Agency because of reasons beyond their control.

### Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or FSA’s [NAP](#) should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office. If they have crop insurance, producers should provide a notice of loss to their agent within 72 hours of initial discovery of damage and follow up in writing within 15 days.

For NAP covered crops, a [Notice of Loss \(CCC-576\)](#) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours. A recent policy change

simplifies the NAP application process for underserved producers, allowing form CCC-860 Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification to serve as an application for basic NAP coverage for all eligible crops. These producers will have all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage waived, in addition to a 50% premium reduction if higher levels of coverage are elected.

### Conservation

FSA's [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, damaged farmland or forests.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is always available to provide technical assistance during the recovery process by assisting producers to plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches and working forests impacted by natural disasters. The [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) can help producers plan and implement conservation practices on land impacted by natural disasters.

### More Information

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on [farmers.gov](#), including USDA resources specifically for producers impacted by [winter storms](#). Those resources include the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) and [Loan Assistance Tool](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, producers should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#).

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## USDA Offers Options for Signing and Sharing Documents Online

Farmers and ranchers working with USDA's Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service can now sign and share documents online in just a few clicks. By using Box or OneSpan, producers can digitally complete business transactions without leaving their homes or agricultural operations. Both services are free, secure, and available for multiple FSA and NRCS programs.

Box is a secure, cloud-based site where FSA or NRCS documents can be managed and shared. Producers who choose to use Box can create a username and password to access their secure Box account, where documents can be downloaded, printed, manually signed, scanned, uploaded, and shared digitally with Service Center staff. This service is available to any FSA or NRCS customer with access to a mobile device or computer with printer connectivity.

OneSpan is a secure eSignature solution for FSA and NRCS customers. Like Box, no software downloads or eAuthentication is required for OneSpan. Instead, producers interested in eSignature through OneSpan can confirm their identity through two-factor authentication using a verification code sent to their mobile device or a personalized question and answer. Once identity is confirmed, documents can be reviewed and e-signed through OneSpan via the producer's personal email address. Signed documents immediately become available to the appropriate Service Center staff.

Box and OneSpan are both optional services for customers interested in improved efficiency in signing and sharing documents with USDA, and they do not replace existing systems using eAuthentication for digital signature. Instead, these tools provide additional digital options for producers to use when conducting business with FSA or NRCS.

USDA Service Center staff are available to help producers get started with Box and OneSpan through a few simple steps. Please visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator) to find your local office and let Service Center staff know you're interested in signing and sharing documents through these new features. In most cases, one quick phone call will be all that is needed to initiate the process.

Visit [farmers.gov/mydocs](https://farmers.gov/mydocs) to learn more about Box and OneSpan, steps for getting started, and additional resources for conducting business with USDA online.

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## New Technology Helps Ranchers Maximize Grass Production

One out of every three acres in the U.S. is rangeland. Two-thirds of these are privately owned, mainly by ranchers who graze their livestock in the open country of the American West. Our rangelands produce premium beef, wool, and dairy. But it's the plants that feed these livestock that are the foundation for profitable agriculture in the West. But ranchers haven't had a good way to measure how their grass is faring — until now.

The Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP), developed in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the University of Montana, allows producers to track changes in the amount and types of plants growing on their property.

RAP is a free online resource that provides data on vegetation trends across the West from the mid-1980s to the present; and it calculates how productive those plants are. A combination of long-term datasets shows landowners how their lands have changed over time, which translates directly into their operation's profitability.

Farmers in the central and eastern U.S. have been using technology to track changes in crop production for decades. As soon as they see that their plant productivity is declining — and revenues following suit — they can take steps to address the limitations and boost productivity again.

RAP provides the same power to ranchers. RAP can show ranchers the gap between their potential production and the actual production they realize in terms of pounds-per-acre of grass. It helps landowners understand how much they can potentially gain by changing management practices to boost available forage and close the gap.

Landowners can see how their plant production has changed in a single month or over the span of several years. The technology can be used to visualize plant productivity in an area as small as a baseball diamond or as large as several states. New technology like RAP helps us “help the land” in order to sustain wildlife, provide food and fiber, and support agricultural families long into the future.

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## Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be successful. FSA staff will provide guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower's graduation to commercial credit. 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

If a farm loan borrower can't make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

For more information about farm loans, contact the Platte County USDA Service Center at 307-322-4050 x2 or visit [fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov).



## Niobrara County USDA Service Center

905 S Main St  
Lusk, WY 82225

Phone: 307-334-2953  
FSA - Ext. 2 --- NRCS - Ext. 3  
Fax: 855-415-3433

### FARM SERVICE AGENCY

PO BOX 720  
LUSK, WY 82225

#### **Acting County Executive Director**

Courtney Yelton  
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#### **Program Technician**

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### Niobrara FSA County Committee

Joe Kruse, Chairman  
Kurt Gaukel, Vice Chairman  
Carson Wurdeman, Member  
Carol Geisinger, SDA Voting Member

Next Meeting: TBD

### NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE

PO BOX 659  
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#### **District Conservationist**

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