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## May: Colorado USDA Newsletter

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Colorado USDA Newsletter - May 7, 2024

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

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## From Colorado FSA's State Executive Director, Kent Pepler

It takes a lot of people to make FSA function. A good argument can be made that the county committees are the most important.

The county committee system was developed during the 1930s to allow grassroots input and local supervision of the programs FSA offered. Of course, it wasn't the "FSA", in those days we were called the "Agriculture Adjustment Administration". County committee members (COC) are elected locally and oversee county operations and are asked to make certain program decisions as well as provide technical advice to the county and state.

COC members have hard jobs. They make decisions that not only affect employees but also producers which are their neighbors and friends. County Committees must make sure programs are delivered fairly and that the integrity of the taxpayer investment is protected. Protecting taxpayer investment is key. COCs are what give our programs credibility and allow our different farm organizations to go back east and gain support for policies that work in rural America. Local oversight of tax dollars is so important.

On behalf of the employees, producers, and stakeholders in FSA, I would like to thank the COC members for willing to do such a crucial job for us all.

I would also like to encourage folks to participate in their local COC. It is a great way to serve your community and to insure a prosperous tomorrow for rural America.

Thanks again COC members and have a great day.

- KP

For more County Committee Election information, visit our [COC webpage](#).

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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:

- **Upcoming- County Program Technician:**
  - Pueblo County
- **\*Temporary County Program Technician:**
  - Morgan County, Open until filled

*\*To apply for one of the listed temporary positions, please contact Claudia Drechsel at [claudia.drechsel@usda.gov](mailto:claudia.drechsel@usda.gov) or 720-544-2878 for more information.*

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](mailto:claudia.drechsel@usda.gov) or 720-544-2878 if you have specific questions regarding the positions.

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## Farm Service Agency Call Center

Farmers and ranchers can contact a call center to receive one-on-one assistance from USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees ready to help. By calling 877-508-8364, customers can ask questions about FSA programs.

The call center was created as a way to better serve customers, especially those who have not worked with FSA previously.

Customers who contact the call center can expect to receive the same great service they would receive as if they were in their FSA county office.

FSA Call Center staff can also provide service to non-English speaking customers. Customers using the call center will still call 877-508-8364 and select 1 for English and 2 to speak with a Spanish-speaking employee. For other languages, customers select 1 and indicate their language to the call center staff.

The call center is just one of many ways USDA has adjusted and added flexibilities to meet the needs of our customers. One thing remains the same, USDA stands committed to offering exceptional customer service to our nation's farmers and ranchers.

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## File a Notice of Loss for Failed and Prevented Planted Acres

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds you to report prevented planted and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility for some programs.

You should report crop acreage you intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were prevented from planting. 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 the Risk Management Agency (RMA).

If you're unable to report the prevented planting acreage within the 15 calendar days following the final planting date, a late-filed report can be submitted. Late-filed reports will

only be accepted if FSA conducts a farm visit to assess the eligible disaster condition that prevented the crop from being planted. A measurement service fee will be charged.

Additionally, if you have failed acres, you should also use form CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, to report failed acres.

For hand-harvested crops and certain perishables, you must notify FSA of damage or loss through the administrative county office within 72 hours of the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent. This notification can be provided by filing a CCC-576, email, fax or phone. If you notify the County Office by any method other than by filing the CCC-576, you are still required to file a CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, within the required 15 calendar days.

For losses on crops covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), you must file a *Notice of Loss* within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent. You must timely file a *Notice of Loss* for failed acres on all crops including grasses.

To file a Notice of Loss, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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## USDA Partners with FarmRaise to Offer Educational Tools and Resources to Promote Financial Access and Equity for Agricultural Producers

The U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) today unveiled a new, online Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) Decision Tool and farm loan resources available to agricultural producers and cooperators who help producers access USDA disaster assistance, farm loans and other federal farm programs. The new LIP tool and the farm loan informational video resources were developed in partnership with FarmRaise and USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). These tools are now available at [www.farmraise.com/usda-fsa](http://www.farmraise.com/usda-fsa).

### Current FarmRaise Tools and Resources

[FarmRaise, Inc.](#) has created an online, [educational hub](#) -- called [Farm Service Agency 101](#) -- comprised of videos, and resources that enable cooperators and the agricultural producers they serve to learn about and access major FSA programs.

The newly launched LIP Decision Tool assists livestock producers who suffered losses from eligible adverse weather events and other causes of loss as well as cooperators who are helping disaster-impacted livestock producers navigate available federal disaster assistance programs. The optional decision tool gives producers guidance on what is needed to gather and submit required loss documentation, reducing the amount of time needed to complete applications and enabling FSA county office staff to deliver much-needed assistance faster. Using this tool, however, is not an application for benefits or a determination of eligibility.

Through use of the LIP tool, livestock producers can provide supporting documentation, inventory numbers, and loss numbers to FSA county offices. Doing so, in advance of the initial county office visit, will help FSA staff serve customers more effectively and efficiently. Producers will also need to complete an application for LIP assistance and, upon request, may be asked to provide additional supporting documentation.

[LIP](#) offers payments to livestock producers for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by qualifying adverse weather events. LIP also covers losses due to eligible diseases and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law. This includes attacks by wolves and predatory birds.

In addition to the new LIP Decision Tool, the FarmRaise educational hub offers several, easily navigated farm loan programs how-to videos designed to introduce producers to FSA's many farm loan programs options and guide them through the application process.

More FSA program resources and tools will soon be added to the FarmRaise educational hub. Cooperators and agricultural producers are encouraged to visit the FarmRaise educational hub often to access all available resources.

### About the Partnership

USDA cooperators are organizations on the frontlines of access and often are the first point of contact connecting farmers to USDA programs. The partnership between FarmRaise, Inc. and FSA, through a cooperative agreement, aims to improve producer participation and customer experience in USDA programs through education and technical assistance to young, beginning, and small-scale to mid-sized producers, producers with disabilities, and veterans.

By developing a digital educational hub that delivers free, user-friendly, producer and cooperator-tested resources USDA and FarmRaise, Inc. will help FSA expedite program delivery to agricultural producers. The hub offers how-to videos and visual aids that educate producers about FSA programs and prepares them for submitting applications for program participation.

#### **More Information**

For more information about FSA farm and farm loan programs, visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov) or contact your local USDA Service Center - [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-center-locator). To learn more about

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## **USDA FSA Is Accepting CRP Continuous Enrollment Offers**

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Continuous Signup](#).

In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and to plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. The program's long-term goal is to re-establish valuable land cover to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods. Instead, they are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

For more information, including a list of acceptable practices, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov/crp](https://fsa.usda.gov/crp).

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## **Obtaining Payments Due to Deceased Producers**

In order to claim a Farm Service Agency (FSA) payment on behalf of a deceased producer, all program conditions for the payment must have been met before the applicable producer's date of death.

If a producer earned a FSA payment prior to his or her death, the following is the order of precedence for the representatives of the producer:

- administrator or executor of the estate
- the surviving spouse
- surviving sons and daughters, including adopted children
- surviving father and mother
- surviving brothers and sisters
- heirs of the deceased person who would be entitled to payment according to the State law

For FSA to release the payment, the legal representative of the deceased producer must file a form FSA-325 to claim the payment for themselves or an estate. The county office will verify that the application, contract, loan agreement, or other similar form requesting payment issuance, was signed by the applicable deadline by the deceased or a person legally authorized to act on their behalf at that time of application.

If the application, contract or loan agreement form was signed by someone other than the deceased participant, FSA will determine whether the person submitting the form has the legal authority to submit the form.

Payments will be issued to the respective representative's name using the deceased program participant's tax identification number. Payments made to representatives are subject to offset regulations for debts owed by the deceased.

FSA is not responsible for advising persons in obtaining legal advice on how to obtain program benefits that may be due to a participant who has died, disappeared or who has been declared incompetent.

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## **Colorado USDA Webinar Series for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers**

USDA is an "Every Day, Every Way" department that touches the lives of every American, every day by supporting the agriculture sector, strengthening rural communities, promoting healthy eating, and helping to protect our natural resources. At the forefront of our mission is the support we provide to farmers to help them start—and continue—farming. If you have been wondering where to start at USDA, this is the place for you.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), Rural Development (RD), and other partner organizations have come together to create a webinar series for all. The Webinar series will take place virtually every third Wednesday of the Month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

[Register for the May Meeting here!](#)

Our Agenda for the year is as follows (subject to change):

- **May 15, RD financial assistance programs REAP Program and Value-Added Producer Grants**
- June 19, Working with the Risk Management Agency (RMA) Crop & Livestock Insurance
- July 17, Technical and financial assistance to producers and forest landowners to address natural resource concerns (NRCS)
- August 21, Soil Health and how use Web Soil Survey
- September 18, Urban Ag
- October 16, What CSU has to offer!
- November 18, Colorado Department of Agriculture New Farmer & Rancher Resources

Previous presentations for the webinar series can be found on [Colorado FSA's Website](#) and previous recordings of the webinar series can be found on [Colorado NRCS's YouTube page](#).

For more information for beginning farmers visit: [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers | Farmers.gov](#)

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## 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](mailto:cda_aero@state.co.us)

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

If you have additional questions on the USDA REAP program, please send an email to [sm.co.reap@usda.gov](mailto:sm.co.reap@usda.gov).

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## 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](http://rma.usda.gov) or by contacting their [RMA Regional Office](#).

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## USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers that Farm Loan Programs can be used to support a variety of climate-smart agriculture practices, which build on many practices that farmers and ranchers already use, like cover cropping, nutrient management and conservation tillage.

Climate-smart agricultural practices generate significant environmental benefits by capturing and sequestering carbon, improving water management, restoring soil health and more. Farm loan funding complements other tools to help producers adopt climate-smart practices, such as FSA's [Conservation Reserve Program](#), [crop insurance options](#) that support conservation, and conservation programs offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

FSA offers [multiple types of loans](#) to help farmers and ranchers start, expand or maintain a family agricultural operation. These loans can provide the capital needed to invest in climate-smart practices and equipment including the establishment of rotational grazing systems, precision agriculture equipment or machinery for conversion to no-till residue management. Additionally, for programs like Conservation Reserve Program and NRCS conservation programs where USDA and the producer share the implementation cost, a farm loan could be used for the producer's share, if consistent with the authorized loan purpose.

Some additional ways farm loans can be leveraged to invest in climate-smart agriculture practices or equipment include:

- **Precision Agriculture Equipment** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment like GPS globes, monitors, or strip till fertilizer equipment.
- **Cover Crops** - Eligible producers could use an Annual Operating Loan for seed costs.

- **No/Reduced Till** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment.
- **Livestock Facility Air Scrubber or Waste Treatment** - Eligible producers could use a Farm Ownership Loan for capital improvements to livestock facilities.
- **Cross Fencing** - Eligible producers could use an Annual or Term Operating Loan to purchase fencing and installation equipment.

Visit the [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry webpage on farmers.gov](#) to learn more and see detailed examples of how an FSA farm loan can support climate-smart agriculture practices.

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## USDA NRCS Delivers Resources to Inform Science-based, Data-driven Conservation

As the U.S. Department of Agriculture's primary private lands conservation agency, NRCS delivers the data, technology, and standards that enable landowners and our many conservation partners to make decisions informed by objective, reliable science.

The [Conservation Effects Assessment Project \(CEAP\)](#) is an effort led by NRCS to evaluate and inform voluntary conservation across the nation's working lands. From a [decadal report on the outcomes of voluntary conservation in the sagebrush biome](#) to new data-driven tools for individual landowners, CEAP helps provide the science backing we need to:

- Identify how and where to invest conservation resources most strategically.
- Evaluate the outcomes of on-the-ground conservation actions.
- Leverage lessons learned from these findings to strengthen future conservation delivery.

Recent CEAP deliverables that support voluntary wildlife conservation include:

- [Conservation Outcomes Webinars](#) on [targeting conservation in sagebrush country](#), [rare turtle conservation in the Northeast](#), [reducing woody encroachment to conserve rangeland production](#), and [managing working lands for lesser prairie-chickens](#).
- [New research](#) quantifying the important role wetland easements play in wintering waterfowl conservation.
- The [Rangeland Brush Estimation Tool](#), which ranchers and other land managers may use to quickly estimate woody plant canopy cover and assess woody encroachment on western rangelands.

Visit the [CEAP Wildlife Assessments webpage](#) to access more than 130 publications and other reports, webinar recordings, and interactive, data-based tools to support voluntary wildlife conservation.

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