

In This Issue:

- [Important ARC/PLC Deadlines](#)
- [Notification of Changes to Farming Operations](#)
- [Bank Account Changes](#)
- [Apply for OCCSP for Organic Certification Cost Share Reimbursements](#)
- [NAP Coverage – Consider Protecting 2024 Crops Now](#)
- [Disaster Assistance for 2023 Livestock Forage Losses](#)
- [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#)
- [Keeping Livestock Inventory Records](#)
- [Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation](#)
- [Emergency Haying, Grazing of Conservation Reserve Program Acres Available to Help Livestock Producers Weather Drought](#)
- [Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 – Discrimination Financial Assistance Program Application Period is Open](#)
- [Vacancy Announcements for Permanent FSA Positions in WA State](#)
- [Important Dates and Deadlines](#)

Important ARC/PLC Deadlines

All changes to farming operations for FY 2023 that result in succession of interest ARC/PLC contracts **must be made by September 29, 2023**. Changes that can result in succession of interest contracts include things such as a sale of land, changes to an operator or producer on the contract, or changes to shares that were originally approved on the contract. Failure to notify your local servicing office of changes to your operation may result in delay of payment or a determination of ineligibility for your contract.

Notification of Changes to Farming Operations

Program participants are responsible for ensuring that all eligibility documentation is up to date and correct at all times. This includes the CCC-902 (Farm Operating Plan), AD-1026, and other applicable eligibility documents. Please notify your local FSA office of any

changes that have occurred to your operation prior to **September 22, 2023**. Failure to timely submit changes and eligibility documentation may result in ineligibility, improper payments, or delays in issuance of payments.

Bank Account Changes

FSA program payments are issued electronically by direct deposit into your bank account. In effort to assist FSA in timely issuing payments, you must notify your servicing office of any changes to your banking information. This includes if you close your account, or if your banking information is changed for other reasons, such as a financial institution merge or purchase. Program payments may be delayed if FSA is not timely notified of changes to bank accounts or routing numbers.

Apply for OCCSP for Organic Certification Cost Share Reimbursements

Are you an organic producer or handler who received an organic certification from a USDA-accredited certifying agent? If so, you can request cost-share assistance through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP). Cost share funds are available for eligible certification expenses paid between Oct. 1, 2022, and Sept. 30, 2023. Eligible paid expenses must be submitted with supporting documentation on a 2023 OCCSP application. **2023 OCCSP applications are due Nov. 1, 2023.**

OCCSP provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products for the costs of obtaining or maintaining organic certification under the USDA's National Organic Program. Eligible producers include any certified producers or handlers who have paid organic certification fees to a USDA-accredited certifying agent. Eligible expenses for cost-share reimbursement include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, travel expenses for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage.

Producers and handlers certified organic by Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) should automatically receive cost-share reimbursement from WSDA while funding is available. If cost-share is paid through WSDA, producers and handles are not eligible to receive duplicate cost-share reimbursement from USDA-FSA. For more information on applying for organic certification and cost-share reimbursement through WSDA, [visit this website](#).

For 2023 OCCSP, certified producers and handlers are eligible to receive reimbursement for up to 50 percent of the certified organic operation's eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope. In Washington State, eligible certification scopes remain the same – crops, livestock, wild crops, and processing/handling. The payment calculation and maximum payment amount are applicable to all certified organic operations, regardless of whether they apply through an FSA county office or through WSDA.

To learn more about organic certification cost share, please visit the [OCCSP webpage](#) or contact [your local USDA Service Center](#). All USDA Service Centers are open for

business, including some that are open to visitors to conduct business in person by appointment only. Please call ahead to schedule an appointment.

NAP Coverage – Consider Protecting 2024 Crops Now

For crops that are not insurable with catastrophic level coverage (CAT) through your crop insurance agent, Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage is an available tool to help mitigate financial risk. NAP covers non-insurable crops damaged, lost or prevented from being planted due to a natural weather-related disaster condition.

There are several coverage level options through this program. NAP provides a catastrophic level (CAT) of coverage for losses that exceed 50 percent of the expected yield at 55 percent of the approved NAP price for the crop. The 2018 Farm Bill reinstated higher levels of coverage, from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the approved NAP price. Producers who elect a higher level of coverage must “buy-up” and pay a premium in addition to the service fee. Producers with an organic certification can select the organic option when requesting NAP coverage at either CAT or buy-up levels of coverage at 100 percent of the approved organic NAP price. Buy-up coverage is not available for crops intended for grazing.

Premium cost for buy-up coverage on yield-based crops will be calculated based on the lesser of either of the following:

- The applicable payment limitation (\$300,000 for buy-up) X 5.25% premium fee = \$15,750 maximum premium per individual or legal entity, or
- The sum of acres X APH yield X share X coverage level X NAP price X 5.25% premium fee for each NAP crop with buy-up coverage selected.

NAP payment limitation for basic coverage remains at \$125,000 per individual or legal entity. Beginning, limited resource, and targeted underserved farmers or ranchers remain eligible for a NAP premium reduction.

NAP service fee is \$325 per crop per county, up to \$825 per county, not to exceed \$1,950 per producer with NAP covered crops in multiple counties. A waiver of the NAP service fee is available to beginning, limited resource, and traditionally underserved farmers and ranchers.

NAP coverage for eligible 2024 crops should be purchased at least 1 day before the crop is planted, but no later than the established NAP application for coverage closing date for the crop or crops listed as follows:

September 30, 2023 – 2024 aquaculture; beets (for stecklings); Christmas trees; floriculture; garlic; mint; mushrooms; turf grass sod; biennial/perennial forages and mixed forages for hay, seed, or grazing.

November 20, 2023 – 2024 asparagus, berries, grapes, hops, tree fruits, nuts, and other perennial crops not listed under the 9/30 category.

December 31, 2023 – 2024 honey.

March 15, 2024 – 2024 artichokes, beets (for seed or fresh), buckwheat, camelina, carrots (for fresh or processing), hemp, mustard, radish (for seed or fresh), small grain forage (wheat, barley, oats, peas), and any other spring planted crops not mentioned in other closing dates.

NAP application for coverage deadlines are also posted on the Washington State FSA website located [here](#). Contact your local county FSA office if you are interested in applying for NAP coverage, or if you have any questions regarding NAP availability or application closing dates.

Disaster Assistance for 2023 Livestock Forage Losses

LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land or fire on federally managed land.

County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact your local FSA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)

ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to disease, adverse weather or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible losses include:

- **Livestock** - grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, additional cost of transporting water because of an eligible drought and additional cost associated with gathering livestock to treat for cattle tick fever.
- **Honeybee** - loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, cost of additional feed purchased above normal quantities due to an eligible adverse weather condition, colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.
- **Farm-Raised Fish** - death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

If you've suffered eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses during calendar year 2023, you must file:

- A notice of loss within 30 calendar days after the loss is apparent (15 days for honeybee losses)
- An application for payment by Jan. 30, 2024

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 livestock disaster assistance programs, 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 within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent. For grazing or feed losses, you must submit a notice of loss to your local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent 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.

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 a project is approved.

For all FSA programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions, such as site preparation or ground disturbance are approved. These programs include, but are not limited to, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Tree Assistance Program (TAP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans.

If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, this will result in a denial of the request. There are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies. It is important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions, including, but not limited to, vegetation clearing, site preparation or ground disturbance.

Emergency Haying, Grazing of Conservation Reserve Program Acres Available to Help Livestock Producers Weather Drought

Agricultural producers impacted by drought can now request haying and grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in certain counties, while still receiving their full rental payment for the land.

Outside of the [primary nesting season](#), emergency haying and grazing of CRP acres may be authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disaster. The primary nesting season for Washington State ended July 1st. Counties are approved for emergency haying and grazing due to drought conditions on a county-by-county basis when a county is designated as level “D2 Drought - Severe” according to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#). FSA provides a weekly, online update of [eligible counties](#).

Producers can use the CRP acreage under the emergency grazing provisions for their livestock or may grant another livestock producer use of the CRP acreage.

Producers interested in emergency haying or grazing of CRP acres must notify their FSA county office before starting any activities. This includes producers accessing CRP acres held by someone else. To maintain contract compliance, producers must have their conservation plan modified by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Emergency CRP Haying and Grazing Option

CRP emergency haying and grazing is available in eligible counties as long as stand condition can support grazing and a modified conservation plan is in place. In eligible counties, hay may be cut once each program year (Oct. 1-Sept. 30). According to an approved conservation plan, haying must conclude prior to Aug. 31 to allow time for regrowth prior to winter conditions.

CRP emergency grazing is available in eligible counties as long as it does not exceed 90 days each program year (Oct. 1-Sept. 30) and must stop when the minimum grazing height is reached, as established within the modified CRP conservation plan or when the county is no longer eligible for emergency haying and grazing. Current counties eligible in Washington state are as follows:

Non-Emergency CRP Haying and Grazing Option

For producers not in an eligible county, there are options available under non-emergency haying and grazing provisions outside of the primary nesting season, including:

- Haying of all CRP practices, except for CP12 Wildlife Food Plots and several tree practices not more than once every three years for a 25% payment reduction. For non-emergency haying requests, 25% of the requested acreage must be left unhayed.
- Grazing of CRP acres not more than every other year for a 25% payment reduction.

Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 – Discrimination Financial Assistance Program Application Period is Open

On July 7, USDA and its partner vendors announced the opening of the application period for Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which directs USDA to provide financial assistance to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. The opening of the application process is an important step in delivering on USDA's commitment of providing financial assistance to those who have faced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs. The application process is open now and will close on October 31. Borrowers will have the option to apply for assistance online via 22007apply.gov or through a paper-based form.

Details about the program, including an application and e-filing portal, are available at 22007apply.gov. The website includes an English and Spanish language application that applicants can download or submit via an e-filing portal, information on how to obtain technical assistance in-person or virtually, and additional resources and details about the program. Applicants can also call the free call center at 1-800-721-0970, or visit one of several dozen brick-and-mortar offices the program has set up around the country. Locations are provided on the program website and vendors will update the local events schedule with more information as it becomes available. It is important to note that filing an application is FREE and does not require a lawyer.

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination by USDA in its farm loan programs prior to January 1, 2021, and/or are currently debtors with assigned or assumed USDA farm loan debt that was the subject of USDA discrimination that occurred prior to January 1, 2021, are eligible for this program.

Under the planned timeline, applications will be reviewed in November and December, with payments reaching recipients soon thereafter. Importantly, applicants should know that the application process is not on a first come, first served, basis. All applications received or postmarked before the October 31 deadline will be considered.

To support producers throughout the application process, USDA is ensuring that organizations with extensive experience conducting outreach to farm organizations are able to support individuals who may be eligible for the program. These groups include [AgrAbility](#), the [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#), [Farmers' Legal Action Group](#), [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#), [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#), [Land Loss Prevention Program](#), [National Young Farmers Coalition](#), and [Rural Coalition](#).

In standing up this program, USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about the discrimination assistance process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information. The official application process and filling out an application is **free** and does not require a lawyer.

For more information, please visit 22007apply.gov. If you want to get weekly updates on the program's events and progress, there's a button there to subscribe to a weekly newsletter.

Vacancy Announcements for Permanent FSA Positions in WA State

Lincoln County - Program Technician (multiple positions)

The Farm Service Agency office located in Davenport, WA is accepting applications for Full-Time Permanent Program Technician positions. Duties include carrying out office activities related to farm programs. The full vacancy announcement which includes qualifications, eligibility requirements will be posted on USA Jobs at www.usajobs.gov. The salary ranges from \$34,584 to \$60,703 per year.

Important Dates and Deadlines

September 12, 2023 – Deadline for eligibility forms to be filed for ERP and PARP.

September 29, 2023 – Deadline for **ALL** CRP contract approvals. This includes all forms of contracts such as General, Continuous, CREP, TIP, etc.

September 29, 2023 – Deadline for late-filed and succession-in-interest ARCPLC contracts.

September 29, 2023 – Deadline for Shellfish Acreage Reporting.

September 29, 2023 – 2024 NAP applications closing date for aquaculture; beets (for stecklings); Christmas trees; floriculture; garlic; mint; mushrooms; turf grass sod; biennial/perennial forages and mixed forages for hay, seed, or grazing.

October 31, 2023 – Deadline for Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) applications.

Washington State / FSA Office

11707 E. Sprague Ave
Suite 303
Spokane Valley, WA 99206

Phone: 509-323-3000
Fax: 855-843-1172

Jon Wyss
State Executive Director

State Committee

Bernard "Butch" Ogden, Chair
Brett Blankenship, Member
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