



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Oklahoma Newsletter - December 2023

# Oklahoma

Natural Resources Conservation Service



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## A Message from the State Conservationist

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Merry Christmas! The year is wrapping up fast and we are busy as ever at NRCS.

Offices are working diligently to obligate Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Renewal contracts, process 2023 payments on active CSP contracts and evaluate Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) applications. We are implementing some of our EQIP allocation through **ACT NOW** funding (an expedited funding process) for practices such as seasonal high tunnels, perennial seedings and cover crops this year. We look forward to starting that process now that we have our approved payment schedule and offices will be obligating those funds soon.



We are also continuing to hire new staff and have advertised several positions in the last couple of months. We are onboarding new soil conservationists and natural resource specialists across the state, and we are striving to fill our GS-11 Resource Conservationist positions in every field office.

I am pleased to announce that we have hired Karla Stephens as our new Assistant State Conservationist for Programs and Carrie Chlebanowski as our new Public Affairs Specialist.

We are restructuring and adding to our outreach team. Having added an Urban Conservationist and Resource Conservationist Partnership Program Specialist to the program staff this last year, in 2024 we are pursuing to provide more support and conservation delivery through those avenues, in addition to our traditional services.

We look forward to continuing to serve the producers and partners across Oklahoma in the new year!

**Jeanne Hamilton**

State Conservationist

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## NRCS Programs

NRCS staff are earnestly working to process FY23 Classic Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Conservation Stewardship Program-Grassland Conservation Initiative(CSP-GCI) payments to our producers prior to December 15<sup>th</sup>.

During this time they are also assessing CSP contract renewals as well as all Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) applications.

The **ACT NOW** process has begun for EQIP – Soil Health, Grass Planting and Seasonal High Tunnel funding pools. **ACT NOW** allows NRCS to immediately approve and obligate a ranked application in a designated ranking pool when an eligible application meets or exceeds a State determined minimum ranking score without waiting until the NRCS field office ranks all applications in the ranking pool.

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The target date for EQIP ranking on all other funding pools is February 1<sup>st</sup>.

CSP Renewal contacts are also being developed at this time and plan to be obligated prior to the end of December.

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## Conservation Practice-of-the-Month

### Sprinkler Systems (code 442)



There are several conservation practices that farmers and ranchers are already doing that are tied to Climate-Smart Agriculture. [The Sprinkler Systems \(code 442\)](#) practice uses a distribution system to apply water through a nozzle that is operated under pressure.

More information about [NRCS Conservation Practices](#).

See how Sprinkler Systems benefit field production in this [video](#).

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## Job Postings

There are no NRCS entry level positions open currently.

The best way to stay updated on job postings is to check [USA Jobs](#) often and sign up for notifications for job announcements.

**All jobs with NRCS are listed and posted on USAJobs.**

[NRCS Recruitment Video](#) - Your Field, Your World, Your Future

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## Photo of the Month



*Photo by Andrew Bennett, Comanche County.* Winners are highlighted here and the [Oklahoma NRCS Webpage](#). To enter a photo in this month's contest, email the full resolution photo with photographer's name and county where taken for credit to [NRCSinfo-OK@usda.gov](mailto:NRCSinfo-OK@usda.gov).

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## Dates to Remember

NRCS and FSA will have representatives at the following events/meetings if you have questions or want to visit.

### January

- [KNID Agrifest in Enid, Jan.12-13](#)

### February

- [OACD State Meeting in OKC, Feb. 25-27](#)
- [Oklahoma Local Ag Summit 2024 in Edmond, Feb.28- Mar.1](#)

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## Registration Open for 2024 Oklahoma Local Agriculture Summit

The 10th annual Oklahoma Local Agriculture Summit is set for Feb. 28 - March 1, 2024. The focus of the conference is to increase the availability of local food in Oklahoma communities and strengthen farmers markets and agritourism sites through education and networking opportunities. Two in-depth workshops will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 28, including hands-on marketing training and a workshop sharing best farm practices. The full summit with more than 20 breakout sessions is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 29 followed by the agritourism bus tour and innovative farm bus tour on Friday, March 1. Most of the events associated with the summit are free to attend, however, registration is required for each event. Registration is open online at <https://oklac.org/oklas> and will close on Feb. 28, or once capacity is met.

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## USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched an [online application for Direct Loan customers](#). More than 26,000 customers who submit a Direct Loan application each year can now use an online, interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan. This tool is

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part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, improve customers service, and expand credit access.

The online farm loan application replicates the support an applicant would receive when completing a loan application in person with an FSA Farm Loan Officer, while continuing to provide customers with one-on-one assistance as needed. This tool and other process improvements allow farmers and ranchers to submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete and withdrawn applications.

Through a personalized dashboard, borrowers can track the progress of their loan application. It can be accessed on [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov) or by completing FSA's Loan Assistance Tool at [farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool](https://farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool). To use the online loan application tool, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). For the initial stage, the online application tool is only available for producers who will be, or are currently, operating their farm as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

### **Farm Loan Improvement Efforts**

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate Farm Loan Program customer-facing business processes. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a Direct Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool on farmers.gov](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the Direct Loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.

### **More Information**

FSA continues to accept and review individual requests for assistance from borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans or those who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit [farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance](https://farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance).

The Inflation Reduction Act, a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for agricultural communities, provided \$3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with certain FSA direct and guaranteed loans and to expedite assistance for those whose agricultural operations are at financial risk. Since October 2022, USDA has provided approximately \$1.6 billion in immediate assistance to more than 27,000 financially distressed direct and guaranteed FSA loan borrowers.

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# Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Receive 2018 Farm Bill One Year Extension, Farmers Can Now Enroll for the 2024 Crop Year

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting Dec. 18, 2023. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

## 2024 Elections and Enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

## 2022 Crop Year Payments

This fall, FSA issued payments totaling more than \$267 million to agricultural producers who enrolled in the 2022 ARC-CO option and the ARC-IC option for covered commodities that triggered a payment. Payments through the PLC option did not trigger for the 2022 crop year.

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. These payments help mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. Payments for crops that may trigger for the 2023 crop year will be issued in the fall of 2024.

## Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

### Web-Based Decision Tools

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

### More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).



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