



USDA Offers Resources for Farmers, Ranchers, and Communities Affected by Recent Disaster

Nebraska Farm Bureau News sat down with Bobbie Kriz-Wickham, public affairs and outreach coordinator for USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Nebraska. She talks about a list of federal programs available to those individuals who have been impacted by the historic flood and blizzard that hit Nebraska. For additional information please go to www.fsa.usda.gov/ne.

Q1. Whether we're talking about USDA programs for livestock or crops, what is the first point of contact for farmers and ranchers wanting to find out if they qualify for federal disaster assistance programs?

A1. Producers should always begin by contacting their county Farm Service Agency office. Since not everyone may be familiar with their office, producers can find that contact information by typing offices.usda.gov into their internet browser. This pulls up a clickable map that includes the phone number and physical address of each office in the state. Nebraska FSA has 71 county offices. Of note, at offices.usda.gov producers also can find contact information for other USDA partner agencies, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development. FSA and NRCS are co-located in most service centers across the state.

Q2. For cattle producers who saw losses of both adult cows and bulls as well as calves, are there programs available to at least partially cover those losses?

A2. Producers with livestock losses should inquire about the Livestock Indemnity Program, or LIP. This program provides financial assistance for livestock losses above normal mortality rates. USDA sets a national payment rate per head based on average fair market value, and that rate varies by livestock and by livestock type/size. For example, there are different rates for cows and bulls versus calves and yearlings. The 2019 payment rate for an adult cow is \$916.87, for bulls \$1,191.93. For a calf between 400 and 799 pounds, it is \$661.19.

It's important to note that a variety of livestock are covered through LIP, including swine and chickens. The losses must be attributable to a qualifying disaster event, and this can include flooding and blizzards.

Q3. What is the sign up date for LIP and what will livestock producers need to do to sign up?

A3. There are various parts to the LIP application process, with different deadlines attached to those parts. The most important thing for livestock producers to know right now is that to establish initial eligibility for LIP, livestock owners must file a Notice of Loss with their county FSA office within 30 days of when the livestock losses become apparent. That 30-day window is the normal timeline.

However, Nebraska producers have faced some abnormal, extreme weather conditions since the beginning of the year. This includes extended, extreme cold combined with abnormal precipitation through January, February, and early March, as well as the March flooding and blizzard conditions. Because of these combined circumstances, Nebraska producers have until April 29 to submit Notices of Loss to their county FSA office for livestock losses suffered in January, February, and March.



Q4. Do programs exist for those who lost hay and feed supplies? What about damage to on-farm stored grain?

A4. The program that has been discussed publicly to address lost hay and feed supplies is the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program, or ELAP. The ELAP program provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees, and farm-raised fish, as the name indicates, for losses due to an adverse weather event.

In Nebraska's current situation, this program was discussed as a tool to financially assist producers for hay and other feedstuffs destroyed due to the flooding. However, at this time, Nebraska FSA is uncertain whether ELAP, as implemented through existing program regulations, will be applicable to the March flooding incident. The program regulations have a payment structure that is based around "grazing days lost for eligible livestock." Because the flood event occurred during a time when Nebraska cattle were not actively grazing, there is not a way to calculate "grazing days lost."

Nebraska FSA is looking into this program issue.

As far as damage to on-farm stored grain, we really don't have any program that is applicable for those losses unfortunately.

Q5. What program(s) exist for farmers and ranchers who lost fencing?

A5. The Emergency Conservation Program, or ECP, is a cost-share program that can assist producers through reimbursement of expenses associated with fence restoration or repair. This program is initiated at the county FSA level, and once approved, offices can begin accepting applications. Currently, there are 47 Nebraska counties approved for ECP, generally including the counties most impacted by the early March flooding and blizzard.

A producer who wants to access this cost-share option must contact their county FSA office about the program before starting restoration/repair work. FSA cannot cost-share on repairs that are initiated before application approval.

Q6. What do they need to know about the ECP process and how to sign up?

A6. Once a county is approved for ECP, it will establish a 60-day sign-up period. Most of the 47 approved counties already have started sign up, with deadlines generally in late May, but producers should check locally for timeline details.

As with any government program, there is paperwork and a process involved, and for ECP in particular there are required inspections, as well as environmental and cultural consultations required under the federal National Environmental Policy Act. However, specifically for fence work and debris removal that will not have ground disturbance below the plow line, and that is designed to return a field or pasture to pre-disaster event condition, FSA has put in place a streamlined inspection and environmental and cultural consultation process. The 30-day consultation window that producers may have heard about associated with ECP most likely will not be applicable for basic fence repair situations.



When producers come in for an initial appointment, they should be prepared to show the location of the damaged/destroyed fence on a map, have an idea of the type of/amount of equipment/materials needed to make the repair (how many linear feet of fence is damaged/destroyed, for example), and when they want to start repairs.

With this information available at an initial appointment, county FSA offices should be able to proceed fairly quickly with an ECP fence repair application and get the producer approved to move forward.

Once approved and they begin the work, producers will need to maintain any bills and receipts associated with the work, along with documentation of payment, so FSA can later validate the cost-share reimbursement.

Q7. Is there any assistance available for farmers with new excess sand on their fields due to flooding? What will farmers need to do to sign up?

A7. The Emergency Conservation Program, or ECP, also is the applicable program tool for excess sand removal. As noted for fence repair in the previous example, debris removal (such as excess sand, dead timber, etc.) is an approved ECP practice in the 47 counties currently authorized for this program.

Also, as in the previous example, FSA has put in place a streamlined inspection and environmental and cultural consultation process for basic debris removal under an ECP contract, as long as that debris removal will not have ground disturbance below the plow line and is designed to return a field or pasture to the pre-disaster event condition. Again, the 30-day consultation window that producers may have heard about associated with ECP most likely will not be applicable for basic debris removal situations.

When producers come in for an initial appointment, they should be prepared to show the location of the debris removal needs on a map, have an idea of the type of/amount of equipment/materials needed to remove the debris (what type of equipment will be used and how many hours do they estimate the removal process will take), and when they want to start repairs.

Again, with this information available at an initial appointment, county FSA offices should be able to proceed fairly quickly with an ECP debris removal application and get the producer approved to move forward. Also, as with the previous example, once approved for debris removal and they begin the work, producers will need to maintain any bills and receipts associated with the work.

Q8. Will farmers and ranchers be able to fix new erosion features created by the flooding?

A8. Producers with significant field damage, such as new gullies formed and terraces washed out, also can apply for cost-share assistance for repair work through the Emergency Conservation Program. For these types of more extensive repair - where land grading, shaping and releveling may be needed or conservation structures may need to be rebuilt - the ECP application process is more intensive. Pre-inspection will be required, and the environmental and cultural consultation process will most likely take more time - potentially as much as 30 days due to required notification timelines.



While the application process for this type of ECP work is more detailed, producers with an interest in ECP cost-share are encouraged to contact their county FSA office about program parameters before they decide the program is not for them and before they start any repair work. Depending on the circumstances, producers can have more than one ECP application, allowing them to move ahead with cost-share work on one practice, while an application for another practice is being processed.

Incidentally, producers have asked county FSA offices about ECP funding levels. Nebraska FSA office staff are focused on assisting producers with successful ECP applications so that those producers are positioned to receive cost-share assistance whenever that funding becomes available.

Q9. There has been a lot of questions about ECP funding availability will there be any?

A9. Our staff is really focused on getting producers through a successful application process for ECP so that they are set up to be able to access those funds when they become available.

Q10. For those farmers who will be unable to plant this year, what options are available to them?

A10. Prevented planting provisions in crop insurance policies can provide valuable coverage for producers when circumstances, such as the severe flooding Nebraska has faced, keep producers from planting their crops. Crop insurance is handled by the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) through approved insurance providers. Nebraska Farm Service Agency does not have a role in prevented planting determinations associated with policy indemnity on crops for which there is RMA crop insurance availability.

Generally speaking, there is a final planting date, as well as a late planting period, that can vary by crop and by location. If producers cannot get their crop planted either during the planting period or during the late planting period, they may choose to plant after the late planting period, leave the acreage idle, plant a cover crop, or plant a second crop. There are different decision points associated with each of these options. Eligibility for prevented planting is determined on a case-by-case basis, and producers should maintain contact with their crop insurance agent regarding their policy provisions and final planting dates. You can find an article on prevented planting and floods at www.rma.usda.gov under "Flooding."

Nebraska Farm Service Agency county offices do want farmers to report prevented planting acres as this information is an important part of a farm's planting history that can be a part of FSA farm program implementation. Prevented planting reports should be submitted to FSA within 15 days of the final planting date for the crop.