



Montana NRCS Conservation Update

January 2012 Quarterly Newsletter www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov



In This Issue

- ❑ Funding for Oil Spill Prevention
- ❑ Sign-up Period for CSP
- ❑ January Deadline for Missouri River Counties to Apply for Flood Recovery Assistance
- ❑ Ranking Dates for Four Major Conservation Initiatives
- ❑ Bridger PMC-TV
- ❑ Environmental Stewardship Award
- ❑ Richland-Roosevelt Outdoor Classroom
- ❑ Sage-Grouse Workshop in Decker
- ❑ Soil Health Workshop in Hardin
- ❑ MACD Seeks Contractor to Operate Irrigation Water Management Program
- ❑ Female or Hispanic Farmers Claims Process
- ❑ Human Resources Report
- ❑ Upcoming Events

NRCS Offers Farmers Funding for Oil Spill Prevention

NRCS in Montana is offering financial and technical assistance to farmers in meeting revised regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) intended to prevent fuel and oil spills on their operations.

“An important part of our mission at NRCS is helping farmers develop plans to protect human health and the environment, including assistance to meet new Federal regulations,” said Joyce Swartzendruber, NRCS state conservationist for Montana. “This initiative will provide funding assistance to help agricultural producers meet a regulatory requirement designed to reduce the dangers of on-farm oil spills.”

The initiative is designed to help farmers that have above-ground storage tank facilities with the capacity to store more than 1,320 gallons of fuel. The EPA mandates that agricultural operations with concentrated fuel depots have a Spill Prevention Containment and Countermeasure (SPCC) plan and an Agricultural Secondary Containment Facility. NRCS assistance will help develop or update existing spill prevention plans that avoid and mitigate on-farm oil spillage.

There are two opportunities for assistance. For those facilities that have more than 10,000 gallons of fuel, oil and lubricants, NRCS will provide financial assistance for the development of the SPCC plan. The plan will be developed by a provider that has registered with NRCS as a Technical Service Provider (TSP) and possesses the technical knowledge, skills and abilities to complete all facets of the plan. For those operations that do not have an Agricultural Secondary Containment Facility, NRCS will assist with the installation of this practice.

Applications will be accepted by NRCS offices from January 16, 2012, through March 16, 2012. For accepted applications, SPCC plans must be developed by May 10, 2013. Additional information is available online at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov. Applications can be submitted at your local USDA Service Center, which can be found at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/offices/localoff.html.

Happy
New Year

NRCS Announces Sign-up Period for Conservation Stewardship Program

NRCS has set the ranking period cut-off date for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) for **Jan. 13, 2012**. Producers interested in CSP should submit applications to their local NRCS office by the deadline so that their applications can be considered during the first ranking period of 2012.

CSP is offered in all 50 states through continuous sign-ups. The program provides many conservation benefits including improvement of water and soil quality, wildlife habitat enhancements and adoption of conservation activities that address the effects of climate change. Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help potential applicants determine if CSP is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, contract obligations, and potential payments. It is available from local NRCS offices and on the national NRCS Web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

As part of the CSP application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete the resource inventory using a Conservation Measurement Tool. The tool determines the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

NRCS Sets January Deadline for Missouri River Counties to Apply for Flood Recovery Assistance

NRCS has extended the application deadline for the Emergency Watershed Protection program (EWP) until **Jan. 31, 2012** for project sponsors in McCone, Richland, Roosevelt, and Valley counties.

"The Missouri River drainage area experienced severe damage from flood water," said Joyce Swartzendruber, NRCS state conservationist for Montana. "Many of the damaged sites from Montana to Missouri were inaccessible until recently and more damage is now being revealed."

To date, NRCS has obligated \$6.5 million for emergency flood recovery projects across Montana. The EWP program is still available to assist landowners, operators, and individuals who need to stabilize or protect structural property along the Lower Missouri River below Fort Peck Dam. The area was threatened by the severe storms and floods of 2011. The EWP program is not a reimbursement program for existing damages. It is designed to stabilize and protect structural property from additional or future damages. Eligible practices include the removal of sediment and debris in channels to restore hydraulic capacity; repair of irrigation canals and drainage ditches to restore function; stabilization of slopes and embankments to prevent massive soil erosion and excessive runoff; stabilization of stream banks to protect houses and other structural property; removal of structures and obstructions that impede or impair the floodplain; disposal of animal carcasses from watercourses; and protection of

public and private roads, culverts, and bridges to preserve emergency routes and prevent closures.

EWP assistance must be requested through an eligible project sponsor. A project sponsor can be a state agency or a legal subdivision chartered under state law, which may include the following: cities, counties, conservation districts, and irrigation districts. A tribe or tribal organization can also be a project sponsor.

The NRCS shares the construction cost with a project sponsor, typically 75 percent, through a project agreement. Project sponsors are responsible for a local match, construction cost overruns, and long-term maintenance of emergency recovery measures.

Project sponsors can request EWP assistance through NRCS field offices located in Circle, Culbertson, Glasgow, and Sidney, or the tribal reservation office located in Poplar. Office locations can be found at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/offices/. More information is available on the Web at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/eng/ewp/.





NRCS Announces Ranking Dates for Four Major Conservation Initiatives

NRCS has set ranking dates for the On-Farm Energy, Organic, Seasonal High Tunnel and Air Quality conservation initiatives. All four initiatives offer technical and financial assistance through the agency's Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

"Producers tell us they want to apply for these initiatives, but many want more time to make sure they choose the one that's right for their operation," said Tim Ouellette, NRCS assistant state conservationist for programs in Montana. "Moving to multiple ranking dates for each initiative is going to make it easier for more producers to apply and implement the practices they need to benefit the natural resources on their operations."

Although NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year, there will be three ranking periods for the **Organic, On-Farm Energy and Seasonal High Tunnel initiatives, all ending on Feb. 3, March 30 and June 1, 2012.**

Ranking periods for the **Air Quality Initiative end Feb. 3 and March 30, 2012.**

At the end of a ranking period, NRCS ranks all submitted proposals for funding consideration. NRCS will notify all applicants of the results of the rankings and begin developing contracts with selected applicants.

Initiative Overviews

On-Farm Energy Initiative:

NRCS and producers develop Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMP) or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. NRCS then uses audit data to develop energy conservation recommendations. Each AgEMP has a landscape component that assesses equipment and farming processes and a farm headquarters component that assesses power usage and efficiencies in livestock buildings, grain handling operations, and similar facilities to support the farm operation.

Organic Initiative:

NRCS helps certified organic growers and producers working to achieve organic certification install conservation practices for organic production. New for fiscal year 2012, applicants will be evaluated continuously during the ranking periods. Applications meeting or exceeding a threshold score may be approved for an contract before the end of the ranking period. A new threshold score will be established at the beginning of each ranking period. This new scoring process allows organic producers to implement conservation practices in a timelier manner.

Seasonal High Tunnel Pilot Initiative:

NRCS helps producers plan and implement high tunnels, steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality due to fewer vehicles being needed to transport crops.

Air Quality Initiative:

NRCS helps producers address air quality concerns on their operations and is available in seven Montana counties: Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, Missoula, Rosebud, Sanders and Silver Bow. Assistance includes establishing cover crops, planting windbreaks, implementing nutrient management practices and applying other conservation measures that mitigate and prevent air quality problems. Conservation practices installed through this initiative reduce airborne particulate matter and greenhouse gases and conserve energy.

Visit the NRCS Montana Web site at <http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/> for more information on how to apply for these initiatives and to find an NRCS office near you.

View Happenings at the Bridger Plant Materials Center on Bridger PMC TV

The Bridger Plant Materials Center (PMC) had a big foundation seed production year because of the great growing season in 2011. You can see this and other PMC happenings in the new videos loaded on the Bridger PMC TV web page at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ecs/plants/bridgerpmctv.html. Joe Scianna, Bridger PMC manager, describes conservation trees and shrubs; Susan Winslow, Bridger PMC agronomist, shows the latest native wildflower release, 'Meriwether' blanketflower, and 'Stillwater' upright prairie coneflower; and Roger Hybner, Bridger PMC agronomist, talks about some of the conservation grasses. You can discover the biggest factor to improve the growth of woody plants, see the weed screen in action, and learn about some of the studies at the center. These videos show producers some of the conservation plants available when working on conservation plans.



Environmental Stewardship Award Program

Nominations are now open for the 2012 Environmental Stewardship Award Program sponsored by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, NRCS, Dow AgroSciences, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The award program has recognized several Montana ranches in the past. Environmental stewardship and conservation have long been the focus of America's foremost land stewards: farmers and ranchers. The 2012 nomination deadline is March 2, 2012, and more information can be found on the Environmental Stewardship Award Program Web site at www.environmentalstewardship.org.



Richland-Roosevelt Outdoor Classroom

The Richland and Roosevelt conservation districts with assistance from the Sidney and Culbertson NRCS field offices held a Richland - Roosevelt Outdoor Classroom for seventh and eighth graders. NRCS staff from both offices conducted presentations in soils, GPS, plants and map reading. The outdoor classroom is in its seventh year and continues to be a success.





Bruce Waage, NRCS BLM liaison, speaks to the workshop attendees at the CX Ranch.

Sage-Grouse Workshop Held in Decker

In October, the Hardin NRCS field office, the Big Horn Conservation District, and the Miles City Area Sage-Grouse Local Working Group held a Sage-Grouse and Range Management workshop at the Spring Creek School north of Decker, Montana. A grant for the workshop was funded through the Sage-Grouse Opportunity Grant offered through the Montana Association of Conservation Districts.

The workshop started with a field trip to the CX Ranch west of Decker to check out a conifer removal project. The purpose of the project was to remove conifers from sage-grouse habitat because conifers can create a perch for predatory birds. Conifers also use ground water that ranch managers need for grasses and forbs.

At the Spring Creek School, Rick Danvir, wildlife manager for the Deseret Land and Livestock Company,

spoke about their success with managing the ranch profitably for both livestock and wildlife.



Joe Fidel, NRCS Bozeman Area resource conservationist, and Tim Griffiths, NRCS National Sage-Grouse Initiative coordinator, show a local rancher how to estimate sage brush canopy cover.

Soil Health Workshop in Hardin a Success

The Hardin NRCS Field Office and the Big Horn Conservation District hosted a Soil Health Workshop at the MSU Extension office for more than 40 producers, who came from as far west as Columbus and as far east as Miles City.

Ray Archuleta, conservation agronomist with the NRCS East Technology Support Center in Greensboro, NC, was the first speaker. Archuleta used slake and infiltration tests to show producers the difference in soil structure on conventional-tilled soil and no-tilled soil. He also discussed the importance of managing soil to encourage soil microbe growth, diversifying crop rotations, and utilizing cover crops.

Mark Henning, Miles City NRCS area agronomist, talked about the success the Miles City area has had in encouraging producers to try cover crops, and listed some pointers producers should consider when choosing a cover crop mixture.

Ann Fischer, NRCS district conservationist for the Baker field office, talked about what Fallon County has been able to accomplish in terms of soil health, no-till, and cover crops. Dirk O'Connor, a farmer from Plevna, discussed the successes they've had in terms of managing their cropland for soil health. In addition to utilizing no-till practices on farmland, they use a stripper-header on wheat acres. They have added legumes into their cropping rotation; and they plant cover crops on a few acres each year that neighbors use for cattle grazing. Jerry Sikorski, a farmer from Baker, also spoke about his successes and lessons learned from switching over to no-till, diversifying his crop rotation, and utilizing cover crops.



Ray Archuleta, conservation agronomist, NRCS East National Technology Support Center



MACD Seeks Contractor to Operate Irrigation Water Management Program

Working together, the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) and the NRCS instituted a new program to assist growers with managing irrigation water in their fields. Irrigation Water Management helps growers evaluate the effectiveness of irrigation equipment, calculate good water management decisions, and justify irrigation adjustments. Irrigation Water Management is the practice of monitoring and managing the rate, volume, and timing of water application according to the seasonal crop needs, giving consideration to the soil intake and water holding capacity. Soil moisture is managed to obtain optimum yields without losses to deep percolation or runoff.

Fifty fields across the state are participating in the program for the 2012 growing season.

MACD is searching for a contractor to operate the system in 2012. For more information see the Irrigation Water Management Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and map on the MACD Web site at <http://www.macdnet.org/>.



Summary of Female or Hispanic Farmers Claims Process

The United States government is establishing a claims process to make available \$1.33 billion or more to farmers who alleged discrimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) based on being female, or based on being Hispanic, in making or servicing farm loans during certain periods between 1981 and 2000. If you qualify and submit a timely claim, you could receive an award of up to \$50,000 in cash. USDA will also provide a total of up to \$160 million in debt relief to successful claimants who currently owe USDA money for eligible farm loans. Successful claimants will also receive an additional amount equal to 25 percent of the combined cash award plus debt relief, to help pay federal taxes that may be owed. Your claim will be decided by a claims adjudicator with independent decision-making authority.

Claimants who submit certain required documents and meet other requirements will each receive a "Tier 2" payment of \$50,000. Other claimants who do not provide such documents or otherwise do not meet the standards required for a Tier 2 payment but can successfully prove their claims may receive "Tier 1" compensation. Claimants under Tier 1 will be eligible to receive an award up to \$50,000, which might be reduced as Tier 1 funds will be divided among successful claimants. Total funds made available for Tier 1 awards will be between \$1.23 billion and \$1.33 billion, depending on the funds awarded to Tier 2 claimants. The total funds made available for Tier 2 awards will not be capped.

Do You Qualify?

You must satisfy the following criteria to recover:

- You are Hispanic or female;
- If you are Hispanic, you farmed, or attempted to farm, between January 1, 1981, and December 31, 1996, or between October 13, 1998, and October 13, 2000;

- If you are female, you farmed, or attempted to farm, between January 1, 1981, and December 31, 1996, or between October 19, 1998, and October 19, 2000;
- You were the owner-operator or a tenant-operator of farm property, or attempted to own or lease farm land, during the same time periods listed above;
- You applied for a farm loan or for farm-loan servicing at a USDA office during the same time periods listed above; or for those seeking a Tier 1 payment only, you made a bona fide effort to apply for a farm loan or for farm-loan servicing, and USDA actively discouraged the application during the same time periods;
- Your application for a farm loan from USDA was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, or restricted, or USDA failed to provide you an appropriate loan service;
- At the time you applied for the loan or loan servicing, you met all applicable USDA regulatory requirements for the loan or loan servicing;
- You believe USDA discriminated against you because you are Hispanic or female;
- USDA's treatment of your loan or loan application led to economic damage to you;
- You filed a discrimination complaint with USDA, either individually or through a representative, alleging that USDA discriminated against you based on your being Hispanic or female, in connection with a loan application or loan; and
- You have not participated in, and will not participate later in, any other resolution or claims process with USDA involving the same claims.

If you allege that you did not apply but made a bona fide effort to apply for a farm loan or for farm-loan

servicing and USDA actively discouraged the application during the same time periods, you may qualify for Tier 1 and will also be required to submit:

- A sworn, verified, or notarized written statement from someone who witnessed the alleged incident; or
- A contemporaneous written, rather than oral, complaint of that incident, filed with the USDA within one year of the alleged discriminatory action.

You may apply for a Tier 2 payment of \$50,000 if you submit a copy of the loan application and supporting documents, or related correspondence from USDA, and a copy of a written discrimination complaint that you submitted to USDA within one year of the event. To receive a Tier 2 payment, you must also provide additional, specific information about the alleged discrimination. Otherwise, you will be eligible for a Tier 1 payment of an amount up to \$50,000.

The Claims Process

Obtaining a Claim Package: You may request a Claim Package by calling 1-888-508-4429 or going to www.farmerclaims.gov. Later this year, the Claims Administrator will begin mailing Claim Packages, which will contain forms and instructions for participating in the claims process, to all interested persons. The Claims Administrator will also have a toll-free helpline to provide information about the process.

Entering Claims Process: You must enter into the settlement agreement included in the Claim Package, agreeing to the claims process and waiving your right to file a lawsuit. Once you decide to enter into the claims process, the only recovery available is that offered by the claims process. Decisions in the claims process are not appealable.

Submitting Claim to Claims Administrator: USDA will announce the start of the claims period, which will start in 2011 and last 180 days. You must submit a claim within that period.

Review of Claims: Every claim must be sworn to under penalty of perjury. USDA reserves the right to submit evidence to the Claims Adjudicator regarding any claim. All claims will be subject to random audits and other reviews, and fraudulent claims will be denied and subject to potential prosecution.

Determination by Claims Adjudicator: Based on the Claim Package you submit, the Claims Adjudicator will determine whether you are eligible to recover, with either a Tier 1 or Tier 2 payment, for your claim. USDA will provide loan balances for claimants seeking debt forgiveness. The Claims Adjudicator will decide if you meet the burden of proving your claim of discrimination. The decisions of the Claims Adjudicator are final and not appealable.

Assistance with Filing a Claim

A community organization for female or Hispanic farmers may be of assistance. USDA is not permitted to complete the Claims Package for you or provide you with legal advice. If you have questions, you may consult with counsel or another legal service provider. USDA does not require that you hire an attorney to participate in the claims process.

Successful Claimants Will Receive a Cash Award

If the Claims Adjudicator approves your claim, you will receive a Tier 2 cash award of \$50,000, or a Tier 1 cash award up to \$50,000. USDA may also provide debt relief by forgiving the outstanding balances of loans that were connected to alleged discrimination. In addition, you will receive an additional amount equal to 25 percent of the combined cash award plus debt relief to help pay federal taxes that may be owed. Because of the cap on Tier 1 awards and the cap on debt relief, the actual amount of any Tier 1 award may be reduced, and debt relief may be prorated.

Human Resources Report

New Employees

- *Max Blodgett, Soil Conservationist, Great Falls Field Office*
- *Brian Kloster, Soil Scientist, Miles City MLRA Office*
- *Allison Makoutz, Rangeland Management Specialist, Circle Field Office*
- *Abe Clark, Rangeland Management Specialist, Dillon MLRA Office*
- *Julie Malvitz, ASTC (Field Operations), Great Falls Area Office*
- *Madeleine Cantu, Soil Conservationist, Columbus Field Office*
- *Guy Stickney, Senior Civil Engineer, Miles City Area Office*
- *Robert Fisher, Biological Science Technician, Bridger PMC*

Promotions

- *Stuart Veith, Soil Scientist, Havre MLRA Office*
- *Cliff Merriman, District Conservationist, Chinook Field Office*
- *Wendy Williams, Resource Conservationist, Bozeman State Office*
- *Anne Stephens, District Conservationist, Browning Field Office*
- *Jake Ceartin, Purchasing Agent, Bozeman State Office*
- *Joel LaLiberty, District Conservationist, Whitehall Field Office*



NRCS electronics technician, Austin Beard, performs maintenance at the Elk Peak SNOTEL site in Meagher County, Montana. This photo was taken in May, 2011.

USDA-NRCS
10 E. Babcock St., Rm 443
Bozeman, MT, 59715
www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov
406-587-6811

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer."

Upcoming Events

For up-to-date conservation and agricultural related events and activities in Montana, visit mt.nrcs.usda.gov/news/events.html.

January 2012

- ❑ Soil Health Workshop, January 10, Billings
- ❑ Montana Weed Control Association Annual Meeting, January 11 - 12, Great Falls
- ❑ Montana Young Ag Couples Conference, January 11 - 14, Helena
- ❑ Southwest Ag Forum, January 12, Bowman, North Dakota
- ❑ Range Workshop, January 17, Baker
- ❑ Burleigh County Soil Conservation District Soil Health Workshop, January 18, Bismarck, North Dakota
- ❑ Soil Health and AFO/CAFO Producer Workshop, January 26, Circle
- ❑ Society for Range Management Annual Meeting, January 29 - February 2, Spokane, Washington
- ❑ Managing Land, Wealth and People for Success, January 30 to February 1, Bismarck, North Dakota

February 2012

- ❑ Soil Health on the Range and on the Farm Workshop, February 16, Miles City

March 2012

- ❑ National American Indian Science and Engineering Fair, March 21 - 24, Albuquerque, New Mexico

April 2012

- ❑ Weathering the Storm: Strategies and Solutions for Managing Storm Water, April 10 - 12, Kalispell

