



## Farm Bill MPP-Dairy Sign-Up Under Way

BROOKINGS — The sign-up period for the 2016 Milk Margin Protection Program for Dairy producers (MPP-Dairy) is under way and runs through Sept. 30 at your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

“The MPP-Dairy program is a voluntary safety net program established by the 2014 Farm Bill that continues through Dec. 31, 2018,” said Tracey Erickson, SDSU Extension Dairy Field Specialist.

Erickson explained that the program provides eligible producers with indemnity payments when the difference between an all milk price and average feed cost (the margin), falls below coverage levels producers select on an annual basis.

To be eligible for MPP-Dairy, operations must produce and commercially market milk in the U.S., provide proof of milk production when registering, and not be enrolled in the Livestock Gross Margin for Dairy program (LGM-Dairy).

“Eligible dairy operations must register for MPP-Dairy coverage at the FSA office where their records are stored,” Erickson said.

When signing up for the program, producers will need to supply the following information.

- A production history establishment, which is completed on form CCC-781;
- Election of the annual coverage level and completion of the contract on form CCC-782;
- Payment of the \$100 administrative fee, annually; and
- Payment of the premium, if there is a premium owed.

This will be dependent upon the premium level selected.

An operation must pay:

- 1) the premium in full at the time of annual coverage election;
- 2) a minimum of 25 percent of the premium by Feb. 1 of the applicable calendar year of coverage with the remaining balance to be paid by June 1 of the applicable calendar year of coverage.

In mid-August, a collaborative group will host a meeting to explain the parameters of the program, along with showcasing the recently updated MPP-Dairy Risk Management calculator. For dates, times and locations, visit [www.igrow.org](http://www.igrow.org).

The collaborative group includes: SDSU Extension, Southwest Minnesota Dairy Profit Group, Midwest Dairy Association, NDSU Extension Service, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, University of Minnesota Extension, South Dakota Dairy Producers, Minnesota Milk Producers Association, Iowa State Dairy Association, North Central Risk Management Education Center and United States Department of Agriculture.

To learn more, contact Erickson at [tracey.erickson@sdstate.edu](mailto:tracey.erickson@sdstate.edu).

## Farm Beginnings Program Offered In SF

SIoux FALLS — After six successful years training new farmers, Dakota Rural Action’s Farm Beginnings® course will be offered in Sioux Falls this year. Farm Beginnings is a farmer and rancher-led training and support program that provides participants the opportunity to learn first-hand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming and ranching and the tools to successfully launch a profitable enterprise.

Farm Beginnings classes are held December to April and focus on topics such as whole farm planning, financial and business planning, marketing, and connecting with resources and mentors. All classes are led by established farmers and ranchers and agricultural professionals. There are opportunities for students to further their skills by participating in mentorships with local farmers and 4-6 field days are offered through DRA’s Farmer Network in the summer. Over eighty-percent of course graduates participate in these on-farm activities after finishing the course.

Prospective participants should contact Dakota Rural Action at (605) 697-5204 or email [Matthew.West@dmwest@dakotarural.org](mailto:Matthew.West@dmwest@dakotarural.org). Class size is limited and early application is encouraged. Application deadline for the 2015 Sioux Falls class is Oct. 31. There are a limited amount of scholarships available to help with tuition costs. Course information and online applications can be found at [www.dakotarural.org/grow](http://www.dakotarural.org/grow).

Dakota Rural Action is a grassroots family agriculture and conservation group that organizes South Dakotans to protect our family farmers and ranchers, natural resources and unique way of life.

## Online Conservation Assistance Offered

LINCOLN, Neb. — Craig Derickson, state conservationist in Nebraska announced that farmers and ranchers can now do business with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through a new online tool. The Conservation Client Gateway website gives producers the ability to work with NRCS online to access Farm Bill programs, request assistance and track payments for their conservation activities.

“What used to require a trip to a USDA Service Center can now be done from a home computer through Conservation Client Gateway,” Derickson said. “USDA is committed to providing effective, efficient assistance to its clients, and Conservation Client Gateway is one way to improve customer service.”

Conservation Client Gateway enables farmers, ranchers and private landowners to securely:

- Request NRCS technical and financial assistance;
- Review and sign conservation plans and practice schedules;
- Complete and sign an application for a conservation program;
- Review, sign and submit contracts and appendices for conservation programs;
- Document and request certification of completed practices;
- Request and track payments for conservation programs; and
- Store and retrieve technical and financial files, including documents and photographs.

Conservation Client Gateway is entirely voluntary, giving producers a choice between conducting business online or traveling to a USDA Service Center.

“We know how busy farmers and ranchers are. Our goal is to make it easy and convenient to work with USDA,” Derickson said. “Customers can log in 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to electronically sign documents, apply for conservation programs, access conservation plans, report practice completion, or track the status of conservation payments. Through Conservation Client Gateway, producers have their conservation information at their fingertips, and they can save time and gas money by reducing the number of trips to USDA Service Centers.”

Conservation Client Gateway is currently available to individual landowners and will soon be extended to business entities, such as Limited Liability Corporations.

For more information about Conservation Client Gateway, and to sign up to begin using this service, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway/).

# Pollinator Plantings In Pastures

## Can Pastures Stay Profitable As Pollinator Habitats?

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part series.

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

In many places, the once-iconic monarch butterfly is now a rare sight — as are honey bees, bumble bees and other native pollinators. With more than 85 percent of the world’s flowering plants, including two-thirds of the world’s crop species, relying on pollinators for reproduction — according to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation in Portland, Oregon — rapidly declining populations of pollinators are more than a passing concern, for both conservationists and producers.

Here in the Midwest, surrounded by a sea of pesticide-dependent row crop production, its appearing more and more that any pollinator oasis will have to be found in pastures and rangeland.

“Grazing land accounts for one-third of the U.S. land area,” said Anne Stine, pollinator conservation specialist for the Xerces Society at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Fort Worth, Texas. She gave an online training on Sept. 2 hosted by NRCS and the Corvallis, Oregon-based Oregon Tilth.

“That’s something we can reach for: a productive ranch that is essentially a restored wilderness,” Stine said.

A concern producers may have is whether they can adequately balance a pasture’s benefit to pollinators with the need to stay profitable as an agricultural operation. According to Stine, this is nothing to worry about: Pollinator habitat and forage production go hand in hand.

“Forbs can help,” Stine added, not only in above-ground pasture quality for livestock — some forbs, like sunflowers, have a higher energy content than grasses and some legumes may have a higher protein content than grasses, according to the Kansas Native Plant Society in Lawrence, Kansas — but also soil fertility and health, drought resiliency, and noxious and invasive weed control.

The plant type that provides pollinator habitats are wildflowers, also known as forbs or broadleaves. The key to balancing between pollinator and livestock benefit is in the forb-to-grass ratio, Stine said. Sheep and goats are known for their preference of forbs to grass, but even cattle will find forbs palatable if in the right proportion.

Examples of palatable forbs include leadplant, prairie clovers, lespedeza, vetch, sunflower and evening primrose. Other forbs are palatable only during the early growth stage, such as daisy fleabane, gayfeather, yellow coneflower, blue sage, goldenrod, scurfp pea and ragweed.

However, some forbs are toxic to animal consumption, so producers need to have a weed guidebook on hand or be able to consult a grazing professional, such as through the local NRCS or university Extension office.

Stine promotes plant diversity to allow livestock to choose their optimum diet. The right proportion of forbs to grasses will then naturally occur with proper management.

“The ideal is a mix of grasses and abundant forbs,” Stine said.

What landowners don’t want to see is either an over- or under-grazed pasture, neither of which is productive agriculturally or as pollinator habitat. Forbs do not tolerate overgrazing, so the result is an overabundance of unpalatable, often invasive if not noxious, weeds. Forbs also cannot compete with grasses in an under-grazed pasture, so the result is an almost entirely grass-based pasture.

“Grasslands are special when it comes to ecology in that they are dynamic,” Stine said. “Grasslands require periodic disturbance to control woody encroachment and maintain plant diversity.”

Prescribed fire is most effective to



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

manage shrubs and brush, and grazing the primary means to manage plant species.

“Grazing will not boost forbs on every landscape,” Stine said. “But in the right landscape, you can find light to moderate grazing can increase forb diversity.”

However, because not every pasture is ideal in its forb-to-grass ratio to begin with, and because that ratio varies for the type of livestock grazed, and because each pasture has its own basis or lack of certain natural resources, pastures must be dynamically managed with the end goal in mind to increase forbs, she said.

“Adaptive management is what you’re going for,” Stine said. “I use the term, ‘adaptive management,’ to refer to a management style based on plants you’re managing, not on the calendar.”

For example, if a pasture has too much cool-season grass, she recommends using a heavy stocking rate and intensive grazing early in the season and again late in the season, followed with a prescribed fire. But if a pasture has too much warm-season grass, she advises light to moderate grazing in the late spring and summer, followed by a prescribed fire in the summer.

“Most grass actually loves fire. Most grass does really well with fire,” Stine said, so producers need to be careful with if and when they choose to do a prescribed burn, especially if they are attempting to control a certain grass species. Landowners new to using fire as part of pasture management should contact a prescribed burn professional, such as through the local NRCS, for more

information to their specific situation.

In another example, if a pasture has too much brush and shrubs, Stine proposes prescribed fire, mowing or grazing with goats. If a pasture has too many non-forb weeds, she suggests grazing with sheep or goats, mowing, tillage or solarization.

“It [solarization] works really well for small areas or strips, but it may not be practical for larger areas,” Stine said. Solarization is done by laying out greenhouse plastic on top of the plants, securing the plastic to the ground and letting the sun cook the weeds to death.

Another common pasture situation is drought, during which there are only two management options: securing additional pasture ground, which is in short supply during any dry year; or reducing stocking rate. Stine recommends reducing the normal, non-drought stocking rate to 35 percent during a drought year. She also suggests landowners do proactive planning, with such ideas as planting forage cover crops and not grazing certain pastures to reserve them for lean times.

No matter the scenario, adaptive management depends a bit on trial and error to see what works best for a certain pasture, producer’s resources and grazing goals. If a pasture happens to get overgrazed one year, it can still bounce back to its original productivity with better management.

“Prairie is pretty tough,” Stine said.

Part 2 will look at the issue of increasing monarch butterfly habitat in pastures, given that grazing milkweeds are toxic to livestock.

**GETTING MORE FOR YOUR MONEY STARTS WITH GETTING MORE FROM YOUR LENDER.**

**A Farm Credit Services of America operating loan offers more than attractive rates and terms – you get access to valuable financial and management information, services and tools. Plus cash-back dividends that can return even more. Discover the difference of a lender that works for you.**

**YANKTON OFFICE: 605-665-9675**  
**SIoux CITY OFFICE: 712-271-1262**

**Farm Credit Services of America**  
AGRICULTURE WORKS HERE..

**FCSAMERICA.COM**