A Step-by-Step Guide to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Program Enrollment & Incentives for Kernza

For existing Kernza acres

1st step is farm registration with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Farm registration is a pre-requisite for FSA program access and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation program enrollment.

- You can find your local county office online at http://offices.usda.gov.
- During your first visit, be sure to bring: Proof of identity (driver's license, social security card, IRS EIN number) Proof of Ownership (copy of recorded deed) Leases Entity Identification Status (articles of incorporation, trust & estate documents, partnership agreement)

2nd step is crop reporting and certification with the FSA, filing your farm's crop acreage reports *by the deadline*. Acreage reporting or certification is an important part of determining eligibility for programs. All cropland acres must be annually certified with the FSA office to remain eligible for farm programs (including crop insurance, safety net programs, and any ad-hoc disaster assistance programs that have yet to be created).

- Contact your local USDA Service Center by the deadline to make an appointment to file your acreage report with FSA with the farm number and tract information using the Report of Acreage form (FSA-578).
- Local offices send out reminder postcards with deadlines to FSA-registered farms who are in the FSA database. State-by-state deadlines are fixed and do not change by year.
- You can (and should) still file late rather than not at all, but late-filed acreage reports will be penalized with a fee, up to one year after the deadline has passed.
- For Kernza certification, the FSA county office staff will record self-reported acres planted to intermediate wheatgrass by the short name 'WIN' under 'grasses' and select the crop's intended use for grain or forage (crop commodity is 'Grass' (0102); variety/type is actually listed as *intermediate wheat*, see *Figure 1*.). Please share this information with your county service staff if they are unfamiliar with the short name or crop. The crop certification form that a farmer signs will reflect acreage planted to WIN and intended use of the crop. If Kernza is planted in the fall, the reporting deadline is between Sept. 15 (i.e., IL) and Nov. 15 (i.e., WI) – fall reporting deadlines are state-specific and a farmer should check with their local FSA office for their deadline. If Kernza is planted in the spring, reporting must be completed by the fixed spring deadline of July 15 for most crops, but acreage reporting deadlines vary.
- Perennial forage is eligible for continuous acreage reporting, which allows producers to report their acreage once and keep their certification in place until they make a change.
- Examples of certification deadlines by crop category/species:
  - • July 15: spring-planted crops, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and perennial forage, and hemp (license number required)
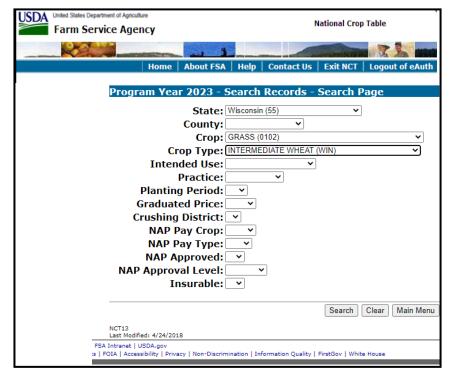 - • September 15 – November 15: fall-seeded small grains

Figure 1. Example of the FSA crop certification screen for Kernza.

To file a crop acreage report, producers must provide:
- Crop and crop type or variety.
- Intended use of the crop.
- Number of acres of the crop.
- Map with approximate boundaries for the crop.
- Planting date(s).
- Planting pattern, when applicable.
- Producer shares.
- Irrigation practice(s).
- Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable.
- Other information as required.

Acreage Reporting Details
The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:
- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.
- If crops are covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, acreage reports should be submitted by the applicable state, county, or crop-specific reporting deadline or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.
- Producers should also report crop acreage they intended to plant but were unable to because of a natural disaster.

3rd step is developing and accessing crop insurance and risk management products with the FSA as we develop comprehensive products with the Risk Management Agency (RMA).

a) Until robust RMA products are developed for Kernza, Kernza growers can apply for coverage under the **Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)** next year for 2024 coverage. Farmers can contact their local FSA county office to fill out the form CCC-471, "Application for Coverage". Full coverage requires Actual Production History (APH) for 4 years, otherwise a transition yield (county T-yield) is used as a percentage of the national average until enough cropping history is recorded to use your own yields. Without a national average, as in the case of Kernza, FSA county offices with interested farmers can submit the crop to the state office in which a NAP request is made. The state office will research the crop and establish the crop in the county that made the request.

NAP coverage details:
- Standard NAP coverage includes a catastrophic level (CAT) coverage.
- Makes payments when losses exceed 50% of expected production at 55% of the approved NAP market price.
- Additional levels of NAP are available from 50-65% of production set in 5 percent increments, and up to 100% of the approved NAP market price with a separate premium in addition to the service fee.
- Producers with an organic certification can select the organic option.
- Buy-up coverage is not available for crops intended for grazing.
- Service fees must be paid prior to coverage. Closing dates vary by crop. The NAP service fee is $325 per crop or $825 per farmer per administrative county, not to exceed $1,950 for farmers in multiple counties.
- Beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged and qualifying veteran farmers or ranchers are eligible for a waiver of the service fee and a 50 percent premium reduction when they file form CCC-860, "Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Veteran, or Beginning Farmer or Rancher Certification."

The following crop acreage information must be reported for NAP coverage:
- Name of the crop (lettuce, clover, etc.) (intermediate wheatgrass);
- Type and variety (head lettuce, red clover, etc.) (Kernza grain producing variety);
- Location and acreage of the crop (field, sub-field, etc.);
- Share of the crop and the names of other producers with an interest in the crop;
- Type of practice used to grow the crop (irrigated or non-irrigated);
- Date the crop was planted in each field; and
- Intended use of the commodity (fresh, processed, etc.). Producers must report crop acreage shortly after planting (early in the risk period) to ensure reporting deadlines are not missed and coverage is not lost.

In addition, farmers must provide the following production information:
- The quantity of all harvested production of the crop in which the producer held an interest during the crop year;
- The disposition of the harvested crop, such as whether it is marketable, unmarketable, salvaged or used differently than intended; and
- Verifiable or reliable crop production records (when required by FSA).

b) We are working with the RMA to develop risk management products for Kernza-producing varieties of intermediate wheatgrass. Specifically, our project has been connecting the policy, agronomic, and commercialization/licensing teams to coordinate farmer outreach for data collection. The following data list captures everything we need at the outset of this effort, in accordance with the crop insurance handbook.

Data needed:
- Acreage and yield/acre (pounds, bu., etc., whatever metric would customarily be sold by the producer) under best management practices.
- County information: Acre total and location by county. Location data will ideally include GIS location and identity, but county-level information is OK. Data by trial and farm will be aggregated for total acreage.
- A breakout of irrigated vs. non-irrigated
- A breakout of organic vs. non-organic (must be certified as organic to qualify as organic) –
- Verifiable records from a disinterested third party can count as proof of yields (i.e., scale tickets). Additionally, contracts for pricing can be submitted as verification on price. (see handbook for specific language).
- Year of production (i.e., Yr 1 grain after planting, Yr 2 grain after planting, etc.)

For new Kernza acres

1ˢᵗ step is farm registration with the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

2ⁿᵈ step is conservation program enrollment with the NRCS. For any Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract, the farmer must first establish their farm with the FSA. The next step is for the operator to stop by their local NRCS field office (https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/) to discuss interest in E328O, Perennial Grain Crop Conservation Rotation for perennial grains.

CSP Overview
- The purpose of CSP is to help agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns.
- A resource concern is a condition of the soil, water, air, plant, animal or energy resource that is less than established NRCS standards
- Stewardship Threshold Requirement as a pre-requisite
    - An application must already meet two resource concerns for each land use (crop, pasture, range and forest) and land management system
    - An applicant must add one additional resource concern for each land use by the end of the contract
- Targeted Resource Concerns are higher-ranking resource concerns that your program staff will help identify, such as soil erosion, soil quality degradation, water quality degradation, fish & wildlife – inadequate habitat, livestock production limitation

Program enrollment includes the following process:
1. Make a conservation plan with your local conservation planner and receive technical assistance on your privately-owned land
2. Start an application (form CPA 1200), and make sure conservation plans are already in place for highly erodible lands and identified wetland areas (form AD 1026)

3. Check your eligibility
   - An official tax ID (Social Security number or an employer ID)
   - A property deed or lease agreement to show you have control of the property; and
   - A farm tract number.
4. NRCS will rank your application
5. Implement your plan after the 5-year contract is signed

Questions

- Does CSP consider the whole farm?
  Answer - Yes, CSP is a comprehensive, whole farm program. Applications must include all agricultural or private forest land in your operation that you will control for the 5-year term of the contract. You will need to identify all land in your operation when you meet with an NRCS representative.

- Why isn't the CSP perennial grain crop conservation rotation (E328O) offered in every state?
  Answer – CSP enhancements are offered for all states to adopt. However, states can decide which enhancements to adopt within their state.

- When is the CSP application deadline?
  Answer – CSP application deadlines vary by state, and application deadlines for 2023 funding are as early as January-February. Please contact your local office for your state-specific deadline.

- How can NRCS verify my cropping history?
  Answer – NRCS can verify your cropping history for CSP in several ways. Program staff may use crop certification, dated pictures, examine past field residue during a site visit, use soil testing documentation, etc. Verification isn't specifically set by policy, but there must be enough supporting documentation of prior crops.

- Will every office prioritize E328O?
  Answer – Due to staffing and resource constraints, NRCS staff use workload prioritization tools and local partners to determine local practice applicability and conservation practice priorities. The awareness and interest will vary by office, at least initially, depending on the local service center location and familiarity with intermediate wheatgrass.

- If I already have a Conservation Crop Rotation enhancement can I still enroll in E328O?
  Answer – CSP asks producers to take their conservation efforts one step further and assesses the entire operation. If a farm already has a Conservation Crop Rotation enhancement, that may disqualify participation in E328O for perennial grains.

- If I already grow Kernza am I ineligible for E328O?
  Answer – Just because you grow Kernza now does *not automatically* mean you are ineligible for this enhancement or won't be eligible for this enhancement in the future. For example, if a farmer has planted Kernza on 10 acres out of 40 total acres, they may contract the enhancement for the remaining 30 acres that have not yet seen Kernza and do not have an existing Conservation Crop Rotation. You still may be eligible for E328O enrollment on existing row crop acres or be eligible for other CSP enhancements, and NRCS would like to work with you to enhance your whole-farm conservation.

- Can I apply for this enhancement for rented farmland?
  Answer – Yes, only the tenant or operator is eligible to apply for CSP. Even under 50/50 crop share scenarios, the name at the top of FSA-156EZ Farm Record Form is the only person who can sign up for the program as the recognized person who assumes the risk in the crop. The landowner must sign a control of land form (The **CSP Control of Land and Practice/Enhancement Installation Approval Statement**), acknowledging that the tenant has control of the land for 5 years. The control of land form is not a contract, but acknowledges that a government contract is on property.

- What if I don't agree with the county office decision?
  Answer – If questions arise regarding the application of the policy when working with the local point of contact at the NRCS service center, farmers can **request that their local NRCS field office contact the CSP area office. This allows for the farmer to discuss eligibility at the area office level if the outcome is undesirable at the local service center level**. Local service center staff are excellent, but this is a new enhancement within the Conservation Practice Standard – so there's a learning curve for everyone.

- What are the DUNS number and SAM registration?
  The Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number is a unique nine-digit identifier for businesses. The System for Award Management (SAM) is a federal procurement database that is a pre-requisite for receiving a CSP contract.

3rd step is crop reporting and certification with the FSA, filing your farm's crop acreage reports *by the deadline*.

4th is developing and accessing crop insurance and risk management products with the FSA as we develop products with the RMA.

Resources for each step:

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

1. Farm registration

Getting started with FSA

https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/Outreach/pdfs/Brochures/4%20Steps%20to%20Assistance.pdf

FSA Service Center location

Find Your Local Service Center | Farmers.gov

2. Crop reporting and certification

Crop Acreage Reporting

https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/crop-acreage-reports

https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/2022/fsa_cropacreagereporting_factsheet_22.pdf

3. Crop insurance and risk management products

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program

https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/noninsured_crop_disaster_assistance_program-nap-fact_sheet.pdf
https://www.disasterassistance.gov/get-assistance/forms-of-assistance/4454

_____

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

4. Meet with NRCS conservation planner

NRCS Service Center location

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/

5. Conservation Stewardship Program

- Contact information
- How to get assistance
- Related news and events

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/csp-conservation-stewardship-program

System for Award Management (SAM)

https://sam.gov/content/home

Data Universal Number System (DUNS)

https://www.dnb.com/duns-number.html