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## Precipitation, Markets Critical as Producers Make Decisions for 2013

**By Mary Jane Buerkle**  
 Many High Plains producers have seen more rain and snow in the first two months of this year than during the same time in 2011 or 2012, but by no means does that signal plentiful soil moisture going into the 2013 crop – at this point, anyway.

Precipitation totals for 2013, according to the West Texas Mesonet, range from less than an inch in several areas along the Texas/New Mexico border to almost three inches in other parts of the PCG service area.

However, observing what seems to be a more consistent pattern of rainfall than in recent years gives area producers even more of a reason to be optimistic about the upcoming cotton crop.

“If we keep seeing these little rains over the next couple of months, it could add up and put us in better shape than we’ve been in going into the past two crops,” PCG Executive Vice President Steve Verett said.

Precipitation and the cotton market have the potential to be game-changers when it comes to planted acreage on the High Plains. Cotton prices currently are trending higher, with December futures over 80 cents, while grain prices have been trending downward.

February is a critical month for the market, as the projected crop insurance price for High Plains cotton for 2013 is calculated using the average closing price of the December 2013 contract for the month of February. Barring any market crashes, that price should be above 80 cents for counties with March 15 crop insurance sales closing dates.

“We know that producers currently are making decisions for the 2013 crop and what they plan to grow, but there still is a lot of time between now and when any seed goes into the ground,” Verett said. “There undoubtedly will be some acreage shift on the High Plains into grain, but only time will tell just how much.”

## Seed Cost Calculator Now Available

**By Shawn Wade**  
 The 2013 version of the Plains Cotton Growers, Inc. Seed Cost Calculator is ready and available for download from the PCG website at <http://www.plainscotton.org>.

The PCG seed cost calculator is an interactive Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that allows producers to calculate an estimated cost per acre, for both seed and technology, based on published suggested retail prices. The calculator has become a popular tool among producers interested in comparing seed and technology prices as they work to finalize their cotton variety selections.

The 2013 version of the spreadsheet includes listings for 98 conventional, Roundup Ready FLEX, GlyTol, Bollgard II and Widestrike varieties, including numerous stacked gene versions of these technologies that will be available for sale in West Texas in 2013.

## Women, Hispanic farmers reminded of approaching deadline

WASHINGTON, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently reminded Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers who allege discrimination by the USDA in past decades that there are 45 days remaining in the filing period closing March 25, 2013.

“Hispanic and women farmers who believe they have faced discriminatory practices in the past from the USDA have 45 days left to file a claim in order to have a chance to receive a cash payment or loan forgiveness,” said Secretary Vilsack. “USDA urges potential claimants to contact the Claims Administrator for information and mail their claim packages on or before March 25, 2013.”

The process offers a voluntary alternative to litigation for each Hispanic or female farmer and rancher who can prove that USDA denied his or her application for loan or loan servicing assistance for discriminatory reasons for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000. As announced in February 2011, the voluntary claims process will make available at least \$1.33 billion for cash awards and tax relief payments, plus up to \$160 million in farm debt relief, to eligible Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers. There are no filing fees to participate in the program.

The Department will continue reaching out to potential Hispanic and female claimants around the country to get the word out to individuals who may be eligible for this program so they have the opportunity to participate.

Call center representatives can be reached at 1-888-508-4429. Claimants may register for a claims package (by calling the number or visiting the website) or may download the forms from the website. All those interested in learning more or receiving information about the claims process and claims packages are encouraged to attend meetings in your communities about the claims process and contact the website at any time or call center telephone number Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

Website: [www.farmerclaims.gov](http://www.farmerclaims.gov)

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 Claims Period: September 24, 2012 - March 25, 2013.  
 Independent legal services companies will administer the claims process and adjudicate the claims. Although there are no filing fees to participate and a lawyer is not required to participate in the claims process, persons seeking legal advice may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider.

Under Secretary Vilsack’s leadership, USDA has instituted a comprehensive plan to strengthen the Department as a model service provider and to ensure that every farmer and rancher is treated equally and fairly as part of “a new era of civil rights” at USDA. In February 2010, the Secretary announced the Pigford II settlement with African American farmers, and in October 2010, he announced the Keepseagle settlement with Native American farmers. Both of those settlements have since received court approval. Unlike the cases brought by African American and Native American farmers, the cases filed by Hispanic and women farmers over a decade ago were not certified as class actions. The claims process provides a voluntary alternative to continuing litigation for Hispanic and female farmers and ranchers who want to use it.

## Cultivating Big Dreams on a Small Scale

### Microloan Gains Popular Footing; Answers Need for Faster, Easier Credit

Throughout my tenure as Acting State Executive Director for the Texas Farm Service Agency (FSA), I have met several small and beginning farmers and ranchers, military veterans and disadvantaged producers interested in making a living in production agriculture. For many, the high cost of purchasing land and equipment can be prohibitive, compelling newcomers and those struggling against odds to take risks to finance their dreams by relying on credit cards and personal loans with high interest rates. I am keenly aware, too, that the average age of our farmers and ranchers is increasing. I am concerned about where the next generation of farmers and ranchers will come from.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture understands the needs of these small, beginning and specialty crop producers. Through the Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Farm Loan Programs division, the department responded to their needs by developing a new microloan program that will provide up to \$35,000 to help bolster these producers during their start-up years. Likewise, it will assist small, established producers who find themselves in extenuating financial circumstances.

Microloans are like other operating loans. They can be used to purchase livestock, equipment, feed, seed, fertilizer and related supplies. And here’s a real benefit when compared to those credit cards and personal loans; the current interest rate for a microloan is 1.125%.

It is imperative that we use solutions like the microloan to provide access to credit to those just starting out or those producing on a smaller scale in order to grow American agriculture. It’s important because Agriculture can provide new jobs that will build our economy and ensure a safe and affordable food supply at home and abroad. In addition, these loans keep people living in our rural communities, sending their children to our local schools and doing business in our local shops.

But here is how microloans are unlike traditional FSA loans. Applying for them is a simpler, more flexible process. By reducing the application form from 17 pages to eight and modifying requirements for experience, it’s easy and far more convenient for both our customers and our employees.

Although some production experience is necessary, there are many producers who may not meet the managerial requirements for traditional loans but may be eligible for a microloan. FSA will consider an applicant’s small business experience, experience with a self-guided apprenticeship and specialized education to meet the prerequisite.

As the country moves toward more local food sources and joins the farm-to-table movement, there is an increasing number of people going back to the farm and selling their products through farmers markets and community supported agriculture. Microloans are perfect for those who want to grow niche crops to sell directly to ethnic markets, farmers markets or consumers.

Young future farmers and ranchers also will benefit. Prospects that previously used an FSA Youth Loan to finance an agricultural endeavor, successfully repaid the debt and are of the “age of majority” according to state law, are eligible for microloans. The microloan graduates producers to a new level and further prepares them for larger FSA operating loans or commercial loans through the FSA Guaranteed Loan Program.

By expanding access to credit, FSA continues to help grow the industry on which our country was built — Agriculture. Through FSA, more than 128,000 loans totaling \$18 billion have been issued. The number of loans to beginning farmers and ranchers has increased from 11,000 in 2008 to 15,000 in 2011. More than 40 percent of USDA’s farm loans now go to beginning farmers, while lending to socially disadvantaged producers has increased nearly 50 percent since 2008.

At FSA, we aim for ways to help farmers and ranchers achieve their dreams, to be part of the American population that feeds the world whether they are large-scale or small-scale operations. By supporting America’s growers, we help all Americans. We provide a secure, low-cost food supply and make a major contribution to the U.S. economy. And we do these things while nourishing millions.

Respectfully submitted,  
 James B. Douglass  
 State Executive Director  
 USDA – Farm Service Agency

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