

...USDA policy changes

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Farmers and ranchers can choose to make interest-only payments in the first year, providing flexible repayment terms that can increase profitability and build working capital reserves and savings.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) said the changes announced by FSA follow a conversation the national organization held with Ducheneaux about the importance of USDA loans to young and beginning farmers and ranchers.

"American Farm Bureau welcomes the concept of USDA's changes, and we look forward to diving into the details of the rule. We will, certainly, provide feedback to the agency on what adjustments, if any, are necessary to make sure farm and ranch families can continue farming," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said.

FSA also simplified the application process for loans, making it easier for farmers and ranchers to access and complete applications. Additional details on those changes are available from USDA.

The farm loan policy changes will take effect Sept. 25, 2024.

2024 wildfire response no small feat

By Shannon McIntire

Earlier this year, the Texas Panhandle was engulfed in the largest wildfire in the state's history, setting ablaze more than 1 million acres and prompting a rapid response from TxDOT crews in the area.

The inferno forced the evacuation of several small towns, while setting the region's major city on edge as flames crept closer.

TxDOT's Amarillo District staff sprang into action immediately, helping city and county officials during the disaster while also providing support to impacted communities in its aftermath.

"Our employees provided fuel, barricades and traffic control for the firefighters during the fires," Kimmell said. "Wes Kimmell, director of operations with the Amarillo District. The firefighters worked to stop the spread with water and firebreaks. TxDOT's rights of way are natural firebreaks and the firefighters often made a stand in our roadways trying to beat the fires."

The spreading fire prompted the evacuation of several towns — including Canadian and Pampa — while also threatening a nearby powerplant.

"They were sending people all over the place," Kimmell said. "U.S. 60 was closed so there were only a few ways out — the traffic was a challenge."

As the fire ran its course, the blaze crept near the Panhandle's biggest city.

It came close to Amarillo at one point, but the wind shifted, Kimmell said. Brent Lane, district

administrator. "The city was like an ash cloud. The smoke was everywhere. Pretty scary."

After containing the fire, city and county officials asked the local TxDOT team to help with cleanup efforts around the town of Fritch, where an estimated 100 homes had been reduced to rubble, according to Lane.

"The damage was devastating," he said.

Since TxDOT employees are prohibited from entering private property, the district worked with local and state authorities to plan rubble removal and communicate the action to residents.

"Everyone had to move the debris to the edge of the property line so we could haul it off," Kimmell said. "We also had to follow state guidelines for disposal."

Spanning two, 10-hour days

and half a day, the district's cleanup effort collected more than 13,000 cubic yards of debris or roughly enough for 1,300 dump truck loads.

"We had 128 employees participating in the project, which is a good chunk of the people in our office," Kimmell said. "We had 68 dump trucks, 14 loaders, an excavator and other equipment. It involved a lot of effort."

In addition, the district had its own damage to address. The fire burned guardrail posts, signs and other installations. Trees also burned and road blockages became more prevalent as the blaze spread.

"The fire jumped interstates," Kimmell said. "The winds were outrageous and spread the fire faster."

Following containment of the fire and the start of cleanup and recovery efforts, district

employees sprang into action.

"We are really proud of all our crew members," Lane said. "They are always ready to stand up and do what's necessary. They came in without question and took care of the job quickly. The people in town were great, too. They moved their debris to the edge of the right of way and helped us out a lot."

Amarillo District's response marked the first step in rebuilding the community.

"Our employees accepted the challenge of assisting with the cleanup even as we all faced this widespread destruction," Kimmell said. "It was impressive to be a part of it."

In the Beginning

By Tom Widlowski

Katie Phillips is old enough to remember the dark ages—when nightfall at her family's farm outside Coleman meant

navigating by the shadowy illumination offered by carbide and coal-oil lamps and lanterns. When much of the work on her dad's dairy farm—milking, separating and bottling—happened before sunrise and without the benefit of electricity.

"It's a hard life," says Katie, who turns 97 next month. For her and her brother and two sisters growing up in the 1930s, there wasn't much free time for fun, and before electricity, there was no reading or playing games at night.

Milking started every day at 3 a.m., and a few hours later, Katie's dad, Charlie Pitts, was making the first of his twice-daily deliveries of Oak Grove Dairy Farm milk to homes, stores and cafes around Coleman, south of Abilene, on the western Central Texas plains.

It never escaped Pitts' notice that just 4 1/2 miles east, in town

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS BUDGET AND PROPOSED TAX RATE

The Robert Lee Independent School District will hold a public meeting at 5:00 pm, August 28, 2024 in 1323 Hamilton St. Conference Room 119. **The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the school district's budget that will determine the tax rate that will be adopted. Public participation in the discussion is invited.**

The tax rate that is ultimately adopted at this meeting or at a separate meeting at a later date may not exceed the proposed rate shown below unless the district publishes a revised notice containing the same information and comparisons set out below and holds another public meeting to discuss the revised notice.

Maintenance Tax	\$0.666900/\$100 (proposed rate for maintenance and operations)
School Debt Service Tax	\$0.420000/\$100 (proposed rate to pay bonded indebtedness)
Approved by Local Voters	

Comparison of Proposed Budget with Last Year's Budget

The applicable percentage increase or decrease (or difference) in the amount budgeted in the preceding fiscal year and the amount budgeted for the fiscal year that begins during the current tax year is indicated for each of the following expenditure categories.

Maintenance and operations	-5.78 % decrease
Debt Service	-26.03 % decrease
Total Expenditures	-13.89 % decrease

Total Appraised Value and Total Taxable Value (as calculated under Section 26.04, Tax Code)

	<u>Preceding Tax Year</u>	<u>Current Tax Year</u>
Total appraised value* of all property	\$392,822,736	\$459,713,340
Total appraised value* of new property**	\$3,252,735	\$5,390,165
Total taxable value*** of all property	\$348,318,676	\$415,764,170
Total taxable value*** of new property**	\$3,033,875	\$4,960,525

*Appraised value is the amount shown on the appraisal roll and defined by Section 1.04(8), Tax Code.
 ** "New property" is defined by Section 26.012(17), Tax Code.
 *** "Taxable value" is defined by Section 1.04(10), Tax Code.

Bonded Indebtedness

Total amount of outstanding and unpaid bonded indebtedness* \$13,161,747

*Outstanding principal.

Comparison of Proposed Rates with Last Year's Rates

	<u>Maintenance & Operations</u>	<u>Interest & Sinking Fund*</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Local Revenue Per Student</u>	<u>State Revenue Per Student</u>
Last Year's Rate	\$0.738000	\$0.420000	\$1.158000	\$18,799	\$5,152
Rate to Maintain Same Level of Maintenance & Operations Revenue & Pay Debt Service	\$0.677650	\$0.230610	\$0.908260	\$16,930	\$3,864
Proposed Rate	\$0.666900	\$0.420000	\$1.086900	\$20,541	\$4,381

*The Interest & Sinking Fund tax revenue is used to pay for bonded indebtedness on construction, equipment, or both. The bonds, and the tax rate necessary to pay those bonds, were approved by the voters of this district.

Comparison of Proposed Levy with Last Year's Levy on Average Residence

	<u>Last Year</u>	<u>This Year</u>
Average Market Value of Residences	\$86,059	\$84,793
Average Taxable Value of Residences	\$6,333	\$6,263
Last Year's Rate Versus Proposed Rate per \$100 Value	\$1.158000	\$1.086900
Taxes Due on Average Residence	\$73.34	\$68.07
Increase (Decrease) in Taxes		\$-5.27

Under state law, the dollar amount of school taxes imposed on the residence homestead of a person 65 years of age or older or of the surviving spouse of such a person, if the surviving spouse was 55 years of age or older when the person died, may not be increased above the amount paid in the first year after the person turned 65, regardless of changes in tax rate or property value.

Notice of Voter-Approval Rate: The highest tax rate the district can adopt before requiring voter approval at an election is \$1.0869. This election will be automatically held if the district adopts a rate in excess of the voter-approval rate of \$1.0869.

Fund Balances

The following estimated balances will remain at the end of the current fiscal year and are not encumbered with or by a corresponding debt obligation, less estimated funds necessary for operating the district before receipt of the first state aid payment.

Maintenance and Operations Fund Balance(s)	\$669,420
Interest & Sinking Fund Balance(s)	\$682,743

A school district may not increase the district's maintenance and operations tax rate to create a surplus in maintenance and operations tax revenue for the purpose of paying the district's debt service.

Visit [Texas.gov/PropertyTaxes](https://www.texas.gov/PropertyTaxes) to find a link to your local property tax database on which you can easily access information regarding your property taxes, including information about proposed tax rates and scheduled public hearings of each entity that taxes your property.

The 86th Texas Legislature modified the manner in which the voter-approval tax rate is calculated to limit the rate of growth of property taxes in the state.