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FSA Encourages Farmers and Ranchers to Vote in County Committee Elections

The 2024 Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections will begin on Nov. 6, 2023, when ballots are mailed to eligible voters. The deadline to return ballots to local FSA offices, or to be postmarked, is Dec. 4, 2023.

County committee members are an important component of the operations of FSA and provide a link between the agricultural community and USDA. Farmers and ranchers elected to county committees help deliver FSA programs at the local level, applying their knowledge and judgment to make decisions on commodity price support programs; conservation programs; incentive indemnity and disaster programs for some commodities; emergency programs and eligibility. FSA committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal laws.

To be an eligible voter, farmers and ranchers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program. A person who is not of legal voting age but supervises and conducts the farming operations of an entire farm, may also be eligible to vote. A cooperating producer is someone

who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation(s) but may not have applied or received FSA program benefits.

Eligible voters who did not receive a ballot are advised to contact their local FSA office.

Newly elected committee members will take office Jan. 1, 2024.

More information on county committees, such as the new 2024 fact sheet, can be found on the FSA website at fsa.usda.gov/elections or at a local USDA Service Center.

2024 Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program Closing Dates Post

[2024 NAP Application Closing Dates](#)

USDA Extends Deadline for Emergency Conservation Program Applications from California Producers

Funding Available to Help Restore Lands to Pre-Disaster Condition, Replace or Repair Fencing

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has extended the deadline for accepting [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) applications from California agricultural producers who need assistance to address damages from severe storms that occurred during December 2022 to April 2023. All counties in California were approved to implement ECP for damage caused by severe storms/flooding. The application deadline has been extended to December 29, 2023.

“We understand the extent of the damage caused by these severe storms and the catastrophic and widespread impacts of these disasters on California’s agricultural communities,” said Blong Xiong, State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in California. “This deadline extension will give producers more time to apply for emergency assistance and rebuild with resiliency.”

ECP provides financial assistance to producers to help them restore their farmland to pre-disaster conditions. Approved ECP applicants may receive up to 75% of the cost of an approved restoration activity. Limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and beginning farmers and ranchers may receive up to 90% cost-share. The payment limitation for ECP is \$500,000 per disaster event.

The approved ECP practices under this authorization for recovery include:

- Removing debris from farmland;

- Grading, shaping, releveling, or similar measures;
- Replacing or repairing permanent fences; and
- Restoring conservation structures and other installations

Producers with damage from such events must apply for assistance prior to beginning reconstructive work. They must also work with FSA to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and environmental compliance review process. before they begin reconstructive work. If a producer submits an ECP application after reconstructive work has been completed, their eligibility for program benefits may be adversely impacted.

FSA county committees will evaluate applications based on an applicant's estimate or measurement of the damaged land, taking into consideration the type and extent of the damage. On-site visits will be required for every ECP application. Applying for ECP assistance does not guarantee that cost-share funding will be provided.

The use of ECP funds is limited to activities to return the land to the relative pre-disaster condition. Conservation concerns that were present on the land prior to the disaster are not eligible for ECP assistance.

More Information

For more information on ECP, please contact your local FSA office or visit farmers.gov/recover. To find your local FSA office visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

Additional USDA disaster assistance can be found on farmers.gov, including the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance](#) fact sheet, and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Extends Application Deadline for Discrimination Financial Assistance Program to January 13

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is extending the deadline for the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program to January 13, 2024, to give eligible farmers, ranchers and forest landowners more time to apply for assistance. The original deadline was October 31, 2023.

This deadline extension is responsive to feedback from potential applicants, nongovernmental program administrators and community-based organizations working closely with USDA to inform and assist eligible individuals. The new deadline will allow more time to reach and help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners through direct, no-cost technical assistance and training sessions. The extension will also ensure everyone has adequate time to apply, including producers whose harvest season falls during the original application period.

“USDA knows it must earn the trust of the farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who are eligible for this program. That makes transparency in the administration of the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program crucial,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “In that spirit, after receiving feedback from organizations that have been supporting producers throughout the application process, we have made the decision to extend the deadline. We believe this is the appropriate action to take to ensure all eligible individuals wishing to apply are adequately informed about the program and have the opportunity to receive any necessary assistance.”

Since the opening of the financial assistance application process on July 7, the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program team has embarked on a nationwide outreach campaign and quickly opened 30 local offices across 26 states. Regional administrators have held well over 600 virtual and in-person events across the country. Cooperators have also held dozens of virtual and in-person events to complement these efforts while also educating their specific networks. Advertising on digital, print and radio channels targeting potentially eligible individuals and rural communities has also been deployed. These efforts have successfully allowed program staff to reach many potential applicants and will be further increased with the new, extended deadline.

This program delivers on Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides financial assistance for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. Congress provided a total of \$2.2 billion for this program. The amount of money awarded to individuals through this program will depend on the number of eligible applicants and the consequences of the discrimination. Eligible individuals have the option to apply online or by submitting paper-based forms via mail or in-person delivery to local program offices. Applicants are not required to retain an attorney and should take precautions to protect themselves from [potential scams](#).

In addition to the application deadline change, the deadline to request records from USDA’s Farm Service Agency for use in applications has been extended to Friday, Nov. 3, 2023. The application process was designed so that FSA records are not required, though relevant records may be attached to an application as additional evidence if they are available.

To learn more about the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program or receive assistance in English or Spanish, visit www.22007apply.gov, email info@22007apply.gov or contact the national call center at 1-800-721-0970 from 8 a.m. ET to 8 p.m. PT, every day except federal holidays. If you use sign language to communicate, you can use the 711 relay service to call. You may also email or contact the national call center if you have a disability and need another accommodation. Information about the program, resources, recent office openings and local events across the country is also available through a [weekly e-newsletter](#).

USDA’s commitment to equity spans the Department’s mission areas and agencies. We are actively working to build a USDA that ensures none of our customers are ignored or left behind. The Discrimination Financial Assistance Program is just one of many programs helping USDA rebuild trust, address systemic issues and improve service to people who may have been underserved by USDA in the past. To learn more about USDA’s equity work and resources, visit www.usda.gov/equity.

Milk Loss Program Assistance Deadline is Oct. 30

The U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) is extending the application deadline for the [Milk Loss Program \(MLP\)](#) to Monday, Oct. 30, 2023, allowing more time for eligible dairy farmers to apply for much-needed, weather-related disaster recovery assistance.

Administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), MLP compensates dairy producers who, because of qualifying weather events, dumped or removed milk without compensation from the commercial milk market in calendar years 2020, 2021 and 2022. Eligible causes of loss also include consequences of these weather events, such as power outages, impassable roads and infrastructure losses. FSA opened MLP enrollment on Sept. 11, 2023; the original MLP deadline was Oct. 16, 2023.

How to Apply

To apply for MLP, producers must submit:

- FSA-376, *Milk Loss Program Application*
- Milk marketing statement from the:
 - Month prior to the month milk was removed or dumped.
 - Affected month.
- Detailed written statement of milk removal circumstances, including the weather event type and geographic scope, what transportation limitations occurred and any information on what was done with the removed milk.
- Any other information required by the regulation.

If not previously filed with FSA, applicants must also submit all the following items within 60 days of the MLP application deadline:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet*.
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable).
- Form FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs* (if applicable).
- Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, (if applicable).
- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELIC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*) for the MLP producer and applicable affiliates.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have these required forms already on file. But those who are uncertain or want to confirm the status of their forms can contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Announces Additional Program Payment for Rice Producers in California

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that rice producers will receive an additional payment through the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Rice Production Program](#), which provides up to \$250 million in assistance to rice farmers based on 2022 rice acres.

"While increased input costs have impacted many agricultural producers, record high increases in 2022 had a disproportionate economic impact on rice producers," said Blong Xiong, State Executive Director for FSA in California. "I am pleased that Congress authorized the funding needed to not only provide one payment to State's rice producers, but also sufficient funding to now provide an additional payment. This financial assistance provides a much-needed capital inject for rice production."

On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law H.R. 2617, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, which provided the authority and funding for USDA to make payments to rice producers based on data already on file with USDA, including planted acres and acres prevented from being planted.

Payments

As part of FSA's efforts to streamline and simplify the delivery of additional Rice Production Program benefits, producers are not required to submit a new application for the additional Rice Production Program payment. Rice producers having a previously approved Rice Production Program application and who received an initial program payment, will receive an additional payment of .28 cent per pound based on previously reported data.

FSA made an initial payment to eligible producers at a reduced payment rate of one cent per pound, making the total overall payment rate \$1.28 cent per pound.

Payment Limitation

The payment limitation for the program is set by statute and is higher if the farmer's average adjusted gross farm income (income from activities related to farming, ranching or forestry) is more than 75% of their average adjusted gross income (AGI). Specifically, a person or legal entity with an average AGI of less than 75% of their average AGI cannot receive, directly or indirectly, more than \$125,000 in payments. Farmers who derive 75% or more of their average AGI from farming qualify for a \$250,000 payment limit. AGI is based on the three taxable years preceding the most immediately preceding complete tax year.

In advance of the initial payment, rice farmers were to visit their local county office to submit the appropriate form and certification (FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs*) by Sept. 8, 2023, if they were requesting the higher payment limit.

More Information

For more information, view the [Rice Production Program fact sheet](#) or [contact your local USDA service center](#).

Community Alliance with Family Farmers Offers Small Farm Tech Hub



How can technology help expand market opportunities and increase business efficiencies for small farms?

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) Tech Hub is here to Help!

Free Consultation services available to small scale farmers, food hubs and farmers markets operating out of California.

Request an appointment at www.caff.org/techsupport

For any questions email Techhub@caff.org or visit www.caff.org/techhub

A Q&A on Choosing a Tax Professional

If you participate in USDA programs, it's time to start preparing to file your taxes. In this Ask the Expert, Dr. Tamara Cushing answers questions about choosing a tax professional. Dr. Cushing is an Extension Forest Business Specialist from the University of Florida who works to educate landowners, foresters and tax professionals about the economics of growing trees, tax interactions with forestry and landowner succession.

What Qualifies Someone to Complete Your Tax Return?

- Here are some qualifications to look for: A degree in accounting and possibly in taxation; maybe a law degree.
- Certification by a state licensing body or the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This may include CPA, Licensed Tax Consultant (LTC), Licensed Tax Preparer (LTP), Enrolled Agent (EA), and tax attorney. Also, some Certified Financial Planners (CFP) can provide tax services. Some states require paid preparers to have specific qualifications to complete state tax returns and some don't. Qualified, licensed and or certified tax preparers may be found through various locations some of which will be discussed later in this Q&A.
- Some preparers may not hold educational or other professional credentials but are IRS-authorized. These preparers will have a PTIN (Preparer tax identification number) and complete continuing education courses required by the IRS and or state regulatory agency.
- All preparers should have a PTIN.

To read the full blog visit <https://www.farmers.gov/blog/ask-the-expert-qa-on-choosing-tax-professional-with-tamara-cushing>.

USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

Farmers can use USDA farm ownership microloans to buy and improve property. These microloans are especially helpful to beginning or underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013.

Microloans can also help with farmland and building purchases and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

To learn more about the FSA microloan program, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

Free Farm Manager Apprenticeship Training

Farmers, are you searching for your future manager or supervisor? Whether you have a current employee who could use some additional training, or are seeking to hire a new team member, The Beginning Farm and Ranch Management Apprenticeship provides a structured pathway for aspiring farm managers to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful on your farm. The Center for Land-Based Learning covers all tuition for coursework and provides support for farmers and apprentices. To learn more about training an apprentice, visit <https://landbasedlearning.org/apprentice-farmer-mentor>

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