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**Deadline Extended to Sept. 29 for USDA's Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has extended the deadline to Sept. 29 for enrollment in the [Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program \(RTCP\)](#). The deadline for producers to provide supporting documentation is Nov. 3, 2023.

RTCP helps U.S. farmers and ranchers outside the 48 contiguous states who are at a competitive disadvantage when transporting agricultural products to market by offsetting a portion of the cost of transporting agricultural products over long distances.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 authorized \$4 million for RTCP and allows farmers and livestock producers in Alaska, Hawaii and insular areas including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Virgin Islands of the United States, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Republic of Palau, to recover costs to transport agricultural commodities or inputs used to produce an agricultural commodity. Nearly \$3 million was issued to almost 1,100 producers through the 2022 Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment program.

RTCP payments are calculated based on the costs incurred for transportation of agricultural commodities or inputs during a 12-month period, subject to an \$8,000 per producer cap per fiscal year. If claims for payments exceed the funds available from the program for a fiscal year, payments will be reduced on a pro-rata basis.

Farmers and livestock producers interested in participating in RTCP can obtain applications and other documents by [contacting their local FSA office](#).

To find their local FSA county office, producers can visit [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-center-locator).

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## NRCS Pacific Islands Area Announces Change in FY24 Application Deadlines

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Pacific Islands Area announces changes in application deadlines for its Fiscal Year 2024 programs assisting agricultural producers, private landowners and forest managers.

This year, all NRCS Pacific Islands Area program application deadlines will be on the same schedule, with the first application cut-off date on Nov. 3 and the second application cut-off date on March 8, 2024. This applies to the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP), [Agricultural Management Assistance](#) (AMA) program, [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP), [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP) and [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) (ACEP).

While NRCS generally accepts applications for these programs year-round, producers and landowners should apply by area-specific cut-off dates to be considered for the current fiscal year's funding. In the past, Pacific Islands Area application deadlines varied by program, and now applicants can focus their efforts on the two application deadlines offered for any of the key programs.

Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers and landowners make conservation improvements on their land that benefit natural resources, build resiliency, and contribute to the nation's broader effort to combat the impacts of climate change.

**Applying for Assistance** Producers, landowners, and forest managers interested in applying for assistance should contact NRCS at their local [USDA Service Center](#). Service

Center staff work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Contact your Service Center to set up an in-person or phone appointment. On [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov), you can create a secure account, apply for NRCS programs, electronically sign documents, and manage your conservation contracts.

Funding is provided through a competitive process. Applications received after ranking dates will be automatically deferred to the next funding period.

### Program Options

- EQIP provides financial assistance for producers to use 170-plus conservation practices to address a wide variety of resource concerns and is available to all producers in Hawai'i, Guam, CNMI, and American Samoa.
- The AMA program helps producers manage financial risk through diversification, marketing, or natural resources conservation practices. Hawai'i producers can apply for assistance to install High Tunnel Systems through AMA.
- ACEP protects the agricultural viability and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses which negatively affect agricultural uses and conservation values. It also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring or conserving eligible grazing land and protecting, restoring, and enhancing wetlands on eligible land.
- Other NRCS programs and initiatives available to producers in the Pacific Islands Area will be announced later and include the Conservation Stewardship Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program and Conservation Innovation Grant program.

**Historically Underserved Producer Benefits** USDA recognizes the need to be inclusive of all people and ensure equitable access to services. Special provisions -- including specific incentives, waivers, priorities, set asides, and other flexibilities -- are also available for [historically underserved producers](#). Historically underserved producers include producers who are beginning, socially disadvantaged, veteran, or of limited resource. For EQIP, historically underserved producers are eligible for advance payments to help offset costs related to purchasing materials or contracting services up front. In addition, historically underserved producers can receive higher EQIP payment rates (up to 90 percent of average cost).

**Conservation Practices and Climate** NRCS conservation programs play a critical role in USDA's commitment to partnering with farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and local communities to deliver climate solutions that strengthen agricultural operations and rural America. States or areas may prioritize a variety of voluntary conservation practices through these NRCS programs, including those that support climate-smart agriculture and forestry.

In fiscal year 2024, EQIP will provide targeted funding for climate-smart conservation practices, and Conservation Incentive Contracts will be available nationwide with an equal emphasis. Building on these efforts, NRCS will also prioritize climate investments through ACEP, RCPP, and CIG.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation's lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air, and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers, and private foresters.

Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, Territorial, and local governments. USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).

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## **Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 – Discrimination Financial Assistance Program**

The application period is now open for a new financial assistance program under Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. The application process will close on October 31. Borrowers will have the option to apply for assistance online via [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov) or through a paper-based form.

Details about the program, including an application and e-filing portal, are available at [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov). The website includes an English and Spanish language application that applicants can download or submit via an e-filing portal, information on how to obtain technical assistance in-person or virtually, and additional resources and details about the program. Applicants can also call the free call center at 1-800-721-0970, or visit one of several dozen brick-and-mortar offices the program has set up around the country. Locations are provided on the program website and vendors will update the local events schedule with more information as it becomes available. It is important to note that filing an application is FREE and does not require a lawyer.

If you want to get weekly updates on the program's events and progress, you can go to <https://22007apply.gov>, and subscribe to a weekly newsletter.

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## **USDA Launches Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Program to Support Agricultural Employers and Farmworkers**

The Biden-Harris Administration today announced that agricultural employers can begin to apply for a pilot program designed to improve the resiliency of the food and agricultural supply chain

by addressing workforce challenges farmers and ranchers face. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in coordination with other federal agencies, is announcing up to \$65 million in grants available for the Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Program (FLSP Program).

The program will help address workforce needs in agriculture, promote a safe and healthy work environment for farmworkers, and aims to support expansion of lawful migration pathways for workers, including for workers from Northern Central America, through the Department of Labor's seasonal H-2A visa program. The program makes good on a commitment made and announced as part of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection and is funded by President Biden's American Rescue Plan.

The FLSP Program seeks to advance the following Administration priorities:

- Address current workforce needs in agriculture: Based on stakeholder input, USDA identified that agricultural employers have experienced increased challenges finding an adequate supply of workers, which threatens our domestic

capacity to produce a safe and robust food supply. This pilot program will help address these challenges by expanding the potential pool of workers, and enhancing employers' competitiveness by improving the quality of the jobs they offer.

- Reduce irregular migration, including from Northern Central America through the expansion of regular pathways: While U.S. agricultural operations seek additional workers, the Biden-Harris Administration has committed to promote the expansion of regular migration pathways, as part of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. The FLSP offers an opportunity to support this commitment, with economic benefits for foreign workers and their families, and professional and economic development opportunities for communities that send their workers to participate in the H-2A program.
- Improve working conditions for farmworkers: A stable and resilient food and agricultural sector relies on attracting and retaining skilled agricultural workers, and strong working conditions are critical to achieve that goal. Through this pilot program, USDA will support efforts to improve working conditions for agricultural workers, both U.S. and H-2A workers. The pilot will help ensure that workers know their rights and the resources available for them, and will promote fair and transparent recruitment practices.

#### Additional Information

Eligibility for this competitive grant program is limited to domestic agricultural employers who 1) anticipate meeting all Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulatory requirements for the H-2A program, including demonstrated effort to effectively recruit U.S.-based workers and hire all willing, able, and qualified U.S. workers; and 2) commit to, and indicate capacity to fulfill all Baseline Requirements, as well as any selected (supplemental) commitments that entail additive worker benefits and protections. Eligible employers include fixed-site employers, joint-employers, agricultural associations, and H-2A labor contractors.

The maximum award amount is \$2,000,000 and the minimum amount is \$25,000 per grant agreement (including any sub-awardees). Award amounts will be determined based on the projected number of full-time equivalent (FTE) agricultural employees, desired award level, as well as the competitive nature of the application. Consistent with the H-2A requirements, applicants must demonstrate insufficient availability of a U.S.-based workforce. The grant window for each recipient is 24 months, allowing producers to use the grant over the course of two agricultural production seasons.

Applications for the FLSP program must be received on or before 11:59 pm Eastern Time on November 28, 2023. More information about the application process can be found here: [www.ams.usda.gov/flsp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/flsp).

This announcement is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's Investing in America agenda to grow the American economy from the middle out and bottom up by rebuilding our nation's infrastructure, creating good-paying jobs, and building a clean energy economy to tackle the climate crisis and make our communities more resilient.

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## **State Committee Spotlight: Suzanne Shriner, Lions Gate Farms**

The state committee is appointed by USDA Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, and they are responsible for the oversight of farm programs and county committee operations, resolving program delivery appeals from the agriculture community, maintaining cooperative relations with industry stakeholders, keeping producers informed about FSA programs and operating in a manner consistent with USDA equal opportunity and civil rights policies.

The Hawaii & Pacific Basin FSA state committee is comprised of five members and over the next few months we'll be introducing you to each member. This month we introduce you to State Committee Member Suzanne Shriner from Lions Gate Farms located on the Kona coffee belt of Honaunau, Hawaii Island.

1. What is your farmer/rancher history? When did you start farming/ranching? What were you producing?

I joined my parents' coffee and macadamia nut agribusiness back before e-commerce was a viable way for small farmers to compete in the marketplace. They were looking to retire and potentially sell the farm. I was working as an engineer in Guam and my parents told me, "Don't go into coffee, you'll never make any money". Thankfully, I didn't listen to them.

2. How did you initially learn about FSA? What was the first FSA Program you enrolled in? What year?

It's hard to remember my first program! But I do remember the most important program: the 2013 FSA loan that allowed us to upgrade our coffee operation. We went from a 1943 traditional-style mill to modern equipment with higher throughput and easier maintenance. The added capability allowed us to grow significantly, with a better quality product. The boost also helped pay off our loan early.

3. What new information that you have learned since taking office would you share with fellow farmers and ranchers that you think would impact their operation?

The number of farmer-support programs from the FSA is really great. RTCP, loans, and disaster relief have all helped my farm business out in difficult times. But to see it from the inside is inspiring. I didn't realize the depth of USDA support until I spent time with the staff who get it done.

4. All Hawaii and Pacific Basin producers are unique, what makes your operation unique?

We rode the changing times, from farm-gate producer to value-added retailer. We did it with small steps and a relentless focus on quality in both product and customer service. The shifts have been significant and not always easy. We now have 4 generations on three farms. My grandkids may not appreciate farm life now, but I think they will look back fondly on pulping coffee and cracking macadamia nuts.

5. What are 3 things that you think could be done to accelerate agriculture in Hawaii?

Direct market access is a huge accelerator for small growers. But to get there, growers need to invest in mechanization to create labor efficiencies and get value-added products to market. Small equipment investments can pay big dividends. We also need better research for our tropical crops. For example, the last coffee fertilizer studies were done in the 1960's and are woefully out of date. Farm inputs are expensive and profit margins are slim so we need to do it right. Lastly, growers need to keep educating our politicians on the realities of farm life. Farmers never stopped working during the pandemic, yet many of the state economic roundtables neglected to include Ag voices in the restructuring of the local economy. What we grow circulates money directly back into our communities.

6. What is the most gratifying part of being a farmer or rancher?

Knowing that people wake up craving the Kona coffee I send to them. It's nice to have a job that makes people happy every day.

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## Avoid Scams Related to USDA Financial Assistance for Farmers Facing Discrimination

The Inflation Reduction Act provides \$2.2 billion in financial assistance for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA's farm lending programs prior to January 1, 2021.

USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about this process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information.

Application forms for this program **are not yet available** and the **application filing period has not started**. Before the application process opens, USDA will publish a list of trusted community organizations located across the country that will provide **FREE** help completing applications.

Please beware of organizations seeking to file your application for a fee. Filing an application for the program will be **FREE**. You **will not** need a lawyer to file an application for this program. If you feel the need for legal advice, seek the assistance of a trusted, licensed attorney.

Beware of solicitations by mail, email, or phone calls from individuals claiming to be connected to USDA. **USDA will not solicit you for information.**

The most up-to-date information on this program will be posted at [www.farmers.gov/22007](http://www.farmers.gov/22007), a USDA website. Please check there for any concerns or reach out to your local FSA office. To find your local office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](http://farmers.gov/service-locator).

If you believe there is an organization conducting a scam related to this process, please contact the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) or any other appropriate authorities. The USDA OIG hotline can be accessed online at <https://usdaoig.oversight.gov/hotline> and by phone at (800) 424-9121.

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## Dates to Remember

**September 29, 2023** - Deadline to sign up for the Reimbursement of Transportation Cost Payment Program (RTCP)

**September 30, 2023** - Deadline for Floriculture, Aquaculture & Christmas Tree producers to apply for the 2023 Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

**October 17, 2023** - Deadline to sign up for Emergency Conservation Program for impacted producers in Maui County

**November 1, 2023** - Deadline to apply for [Organic Certification Cost Share Program \(OCCSP\)](#) for fiscal year 2023

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## September 2023 Interest Rates

Farm Operating - Direct	5.125%
Farm Operating - Microloan	5.125%
Farm Ownership - Direct	5.000%
Farm Ownership - Microloan	5.000%
Farm Ownership - Direct, Joint Financing	3.000%
Farm Ownership - Down Payment	1.500%
Emergency Loan - Amount of Actual Loss	3.750%



USDA website: <https://www.usda.gov/>  
Farmer.gov website: <https://www.farmers.gov/>

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