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USDA Extends Deadline For Emergency Conservation Program Applications For Maui 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 Maui agricultural producers who need assistance to address damages from wildfires and high winds that occurred August 2023. Maui County in Hawaii was approved to implement ECP for damage caused by wildfires and high winds. The application deadline has been extended to December 11, 2023.

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. If a producer submits an ECP application after reconstructive work has been completed, their eligibility for program benefits may be adversely impacted.

The Maui County FSA county committee 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 at 808-871-5500 ext 2 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](#).

Share Your Harvesting Experience for Farmers.gov's #Harvest2023 Campaign



As America's farmers harvest the crops that feed, clothe, and fuel our world, let's fill the [Farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov) social media feed with their stories about this year's harvest season. We'd also like to see how it's going for farmers that participated in our #Plant2023 campaign in the spring.

To share your experience on [@FarmersGov](#) social media, follow these steps:

- Collect photos of what's happening on your operation as you harvest.
- If you're comfortable, we'd love to see the people that make it happen, like friends and family.
- Write an email to FP.Social@usda.gov, attach your photos/video, and tell us:
 - Your name, the location of your operation, and the name of your operation
 - Your operation's Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter pages, if you have them.
 - What are you harvesting this year?
 - Where does your harvest go? How is it used?
 - What are your personal thoughts on this year's harvest season?

Please note that by submitting your photo/video, you are granting USDA permission to use these materials for outreach and education purposes.

Remember to follow [@FarmersGov](#) on [Facebook](#), [X](#) (formerly known as Twitter), and [Instagram](#), and we look forward to sharing your story!

Turning Your Feedback Into Action on the Inflation Reduction Act

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been given a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver \$19.5 billion in conservation funding through Conservation Technical Assistance, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and for measuring the climate benefits that all this work will achieve. While we have been hard at work in the first year of implementation, we wouldn't have been able to achieve our current level of success without the thoughtful feedback from our partners.

To that end, we released an Inflation Reduction Act Implementation Request for Information in November 2022. NRCS received over 450 comments that are helping improve our program delivery by removing administrative burdens, streamlining, and expediting program enrollment; building agency and partner capacity to deliver services more quickly; and providing more equitable services. We are using this feedback to expand climate-smart agriculture and forestry activities and refine our measuring, monitoring, reporting and verification of greenhouse gas reduction efforts.

These thoughtful suggestions have helped accelerate our implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act. So far in fiscal year 2023, NRCS is already implementing the majority of recommendations you submitted.

Your feedback and recommendations resulted in some quick wins for NRCS, including:

- Streamlining processes for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). The agency has begun an ongoing RCPP improvement effort, which includes program changes to improve our RCPP portal for partner use, simplifying agreements, and streamlining the reimbursement process. For ACEP, we raised the national appraisal review threshold and have added 22 new certified entities this year.

- Leveraging over \$140 million in agreements with partners to deliver increased boots on the ground results, through conservation districts, state agencies, and many other conservation-focused organizations.
- Expanding connections with retired employees through the Association of Retired Conservation Service Employees to provide mentoring to the incoming workforce and added additional senior experienced workers for more workforce capacity.
- Supporting a newly staffed Technical Service Provider (TSP) branch to expedite review of applications and enhance customer service.
- Investing in training staff to increase competency around diversity, equity and inclusion principles.
- Expanding our outreach, resulting in welcoming over 60,000 new customers this year.
- Reviewing NRCS' recognized Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry practices and developing an expanded list of practices based on available scientific research.

These changes based on your suggestions are a large part of the reason that NRCS is in such a strong position as we look ahead to the next year of increased funding in fiscal year 2024.

Of course, we recognize that there is more we can do to improve, and we are committed to continuing to do so with your feedback. Additional recommendations you submitted that will significantly improve our delivery of the Inflation Reduction Act will be implemented in the upcoming fiscal years. Be looking for more improvements related to our Technical Service Provider program; our Measuring, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification to quantify carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions from conservation investments; and our continuing efforts to streamline our programs.



State Committee Spotlight: Bobby Pahia, Hawaii Taro Farm LLC

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 this feature concludes our spotlight on State Committee Members. This month we introduce you to State Committee Member Bobby Pahia from Hawaii Taro Farm LLC, located in Kula, Maui.

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

My initial farming experience began on Oahu in 1973 as a laborer on a Plant Nursery that primarily grew flowers. In 1981 I moved to Maui and in March of 1986 I began working as a technician at the Kula Agricultural Research Station (CTAHR).

This is where I acquired a vast amount of knowledge in the agriculture industry. Nineteen years passed and in 2005 my wife and I decided to begin our farming operation full-time and Hawaii Taro Farm LLC was formed. We currently farm a variety of Hawaiian cultivars of kalo (taro), bananas, mangoes, avocados and ulu (breadfruit).

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

I initially learned about FSA through outreach efforts by Buddy Nichols. I made his acquaintance at a Hawaii Farmers Union United event and in 2019 I made my first Farm Operating Loan.

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?

Since "taking office" I have learned about the FSA structure and the multitude of programs that support agriculture. Most importantly, I have met FSA employees that are committed to help producers succeed. I highly recommend that producers get to know their local FSA staff, learn about the different programs that is offered, and take advantage of resources that can help them succeed.

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

My 350 acre farming operation is unique because it is the host to many farming endeavors. Livestock operations consist of poultry, swine, sheep, and goats. We have regenerative farmers and conventional farmers that co-exist with one another. The farm has young and older individuals from different ethnic backgrounds and the beauty is that we all help one another to succeed.

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

Making farmland and water available at reasonable rates and creating incentives for the agriculture industry are three ways to accelerate agriculture in Hawaii.

However, the collective voices of our communities must demand that our policymakers and legislators invest in our islands food security.

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

The most gratifying part of being a farmer is supplying our community with fresh, locally grown produce that is nutritious and delicious.

FSA Encourages Farmers and Ranchers to Vote in County Committee Elections

The 2023 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:

- Be of legal voting age or, if not of legal voting age, supervise and conduct the farming operation of an entire farm.
- Have an interest in a farm or ranch as either:
 - An individual who meets one or more of the following:
 - Is eligible and capable to vote in one's own right.
 - Is a partner of a general partnership.
 - Is a member of a joint venture.
 - Participates or cooperates in any FSA program that is provided by law. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information to FSA about their farming or ranching operation(s) but may not have applied or received program benefits.

Eligible voters in Local Administrative Area (LAA) up for election who do not receive a ballot can obtain one from their local FSA county office. Customers can identify which LAA they or their farming operation is in by using our new GIS locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

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

The candidates in this year's election are:

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

Ramon Dela Cruz is nominated in LAA 2-3, Tinian County, to serve as COC member for a 3-year term beginning 01/01/2024.

Mr. Dela Cruz has been raising cattle for over 25 years.

Mr. Dela Cruz assisted with the formation of the farmers, fishermen, and cattlemen associations in Tinian and is currently an active member of the Cattlemen's Association.

Guam County

Michael Aguon is nominated in LAA 1-3, Guam County, to serve as COC member for a 3-year term beginning 01/01/2024.

Mr. Aguon has been a commercial farmer since 1990, growing a wide variety of fruits and vegetables but mainly watermelons, eggplants, hot peppers, bananas, and calamansi.

Mr. Aguon is an active member of the Farmer's Co-op Association of Guam and serves as the President; the Southern Soil and Water Conservation District and serves as the Chairman; Guam Association of Conservation district and serves as the president; National Association of Conservation Districts Executive Board Member Pacific Region.

Hawaii County

Michelle Galimba is nominated in LAA 1, Hawaii County, to serve as COC member for a 3-year term beginning January 1, 2024.

Honolulu County

Thoune Hongphao is nominated in LAA 1, Honolulu County, to serve as a COC member for a 3-year term beginning January 1, 2024. Hongphao grows sugar cane in Kunia for his sweet cane juice operation.

Kauai County

Kimberly Medeiros is nominated in LAA #1, Kauai County, to serve as COC member for a 3-year term beginning January 2024.

Medeiros resides in LAA#1 and has raised cattle and goats for many years. She is also an active member of the Cattleman's Association and serves on the Kauai County Board.

Maui County

Chauncy Monden is a fourth-generation farmer nominated in LAA 2.

He is the owner of Kula Country Farms, grower of Kula onions, strawberries and other crops. He also operates the Kula Country Farm Stand, where he welcomes the community to participate in various agricultural events, such as Pumpkin patch, strawberry u-pick and other seasonal agricultural activities.

More information on county committees can be found at fsa.usda.gov/elections or by contacting your [USDA County FSA office](#).

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 January 13, 2024. Borrowers will have the option to apply for assistance online via 22007apply.gov or through a paper-based form.

Details about the program, including an application and e-filing portal, are available at 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.

Dates to Remember

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

November 3, 2023 - Deadline to submit documentation for the [Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program \(RTCP\)](#)

December 4, 2023 - Due date for complete ballots to be returned/postmarked to County Office

December 11, 2023 - Deadline to sign up for Emergency Conservation Program for impacted producers in Maui County

December 31, 2023 - Deadline to apply for the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) for fruit, grass, honey and vegetable crops

October 2023 Interest Rates

Farm Operating – Microloan 5.250%
Farm Ownership – Direct 5.250%
Farm Ownership – Microloan 5.250%
Farm Ownership - Direct, Joint Financing 3.250%
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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USDA Farm Service Agency
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