

March 2021



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Louisiana FSA Newsletter

Louisiana Farm Service Agency **Upcoming Important Dates**

3737 Government Street
Alexandria, LA 71302

Acting State Executive Director:
Christine Normand

State Committee:
Ray Young, Chairperson
John Earles
Kristy Jones
Julie Richard
Donna Winters

Next State Committee Meeting:
To be determined

- **March 15** election and enrollment for ARC/PLC for 2021 deadline
- **March 15** deadline to purchase NAP for Hemp
- **April 8** ECP and EFRP signup deadline
 - **ECP eligible parishes:** Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, East Feliciana, Vernon and West Feliciana
 - **EFRP eligible parishes:** Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu and Vernon
- **CRP General signup** has been extended with no deadline date at this time

Louisiana FSA now offers SMS texting; receive text message alerts on your cell phone regarding important deadlines, reporting requirements and updates. Contact your local FSA Office for more information.

All USDA Service Centers in Louisiana are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, but Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or parish.

and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools.

To find contact information for your local office go to www.fsa.usda.gov/la

Call your Service Center to schedule an appointment. You can find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator.

USDA Offers Disaster Assistance for Producers Facing Inclement Weather

Most of the nation has faced unusually cold weather as a winter storm made its way from coast-to-coast recently. Winter storms create significant challenges and often result in catastrophic loss for agricultural producers, especially for those raising livestock, row crops and vulnerable crops like citrus.

Despite every attempt to mitigate risk, your operation may suffer losses. USDA offers several programs to help with recovery.

Risk Management

For producers who have risk protection through [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP), we want to remind you to report crop damage to your crop insurance agent or the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

If you have crop insurance, contact your agency within 72 hours of discovering damage and be sure to follow up in writing within 15 days. If you have NAP coverage, file a Notice of Loss (also called Form CCC-576) within 15 days of loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

Disaster Assistance

USDA also offers disaster assistance programs, which is especially important to livestock, fruit and vegetable, specialty and perennial crop producers who have fewer [risk management options](#).

First, the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP) and [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event— like these winter storms – or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage.

Next, the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) provides cost share assistance to rehabilitate and replant tree, vines or shrubs loss experienced by orchards and nurseries. This complements NAP or crop insurance coverage, which cover the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases.

For LIP and ELAP, you will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For TAP, you will need to file a program application within 90 days.

Documentation

It's critical to keep accurate records to document all losses following this devastating cold weather event. Livestock producers are advised to document beginning livestock numbers by taking time and date-stamped video or pictures prior to after the loss.

Other common documentation options include:

- Purchase records
- Production records
- Vaccination records
- Bank or other loan documents
- Third-party certification

Other Programs

The [Emergency Conservation Program](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

Additionally, FSA offers a variety of loans available including emergency loans that are triggered by disaster declarations and operating loans that can assist producers with credit needs. You can use these loans to replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, or refinance farm-related debts, and other needs.

Meanwhile, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial resources through its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes.

Additional Resources

Additional details – including payment calculations – can be found on our [NAP](#), [ELAP](#), [LIP](#), and [TAP](#) fact sheets. On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help you determine program or loan options.

While we never want to have to implement disaster programs, we are here to help. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center. All [USDA Service Centers](#) are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments because of the pandemic.

Let USDA Help You Prepare for Tax Season

If you participate in USDA programs, including our farm loan program, it's time to start preparing for tax season. USDA technical assistance is free, but it is important to not overlook USDA payments when calculating your taxes. USDA issues documentation for your taxes, including 1098 forms for USDA farm loans and 1099 forms for farmer payments. Whether you are filing your taxes on your own or working with a professional accountant or tax preparer, you have 24/7 access to your loan information through a new feature on [Farmers.gov](#).

The "My Financial Information" portal makes it easier for customers to track loan transactions and payments and saves trips to the USDA service center to obtain loan-related information. It enables you to view:

- Loans and financial information.
- Interest payments (including year-to-date interest paid for the past five years).
- Loan history.
- Paid-in-full and restructured loans, and alerts. For example, an account alert will be displayed if a loan is past due.

To access your loan information, visit farmers.gov and sign into the site's authenticated portal, available on the menu at the top right of the site. To use the portal, you will need a Level 2 USDA eAuthentication account. If you do not have a Level 2 USDA eAuthentication account, [you can sign up for one here](#).

Loan information retrieved from the "My Financial Information" portal should be compared to your records and reviewed with your tax preparer if you are working with one. Contact your [local USDA Service Center](#) if you have questions about the information on My Financial Information.

Currently, only producers doing business as an individual can view information. Entities, such as an LLC or Trust, or producers doing business on behalf of another customer cannot access the portal at this time, but access is being planned. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

As you are preparing your taxes, here is a checklist of things to do or consider:

- Gather all 1098, 1099 and other tax forms issued by USDA.
- If you have a Farm Loan, visit the self-service website at the top right corner of farmers.gov to view your loan information, history, and payments.
- Crop insurance proceeds must be included in your farm income.
- Farmers can deduct certain conservation-related expenses. According to the IRS, you may deduct up to 25 percent of your gross farm income for conservation expenses.

Keeping good expense records will help you and your tax preparer determine the tax deductions you may claim. Here are some helpful websites to help you compile the record

- <https://www.irs.gov/publications/p225> (Publication 225 (2019), Farmer's Tax Guide)
- <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/taxes> (New farmer resources from USDA)
- <https://ffsc.org> (Record keeping assistance)

The "My Financial Information" portal on [Farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov) is just one of many features designed to help you manage your loans. The USDA team building farmers.gov prioritized this feature based on feedback from USDA field-level staff and customers. Being able to access loan information and payment history online will help you with this year's taxes, and future features will continue to expand your self-service opportunities.

USDA Encourages Completion of Cash Rents and Leases Survey

You may have received a *Cash Rents and Leases* survey from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). This survey provides the basis for estimates of the current year's cash rents paid for irrigated cropland, non-irrigated cropland, and permanent pasture. Please complete your Cash Rents and Leases survey by June 21. This survey can be completed and returned by mail, over the phone, or at accounts.usda.gov.

Information from this survey is used in the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as an alternative soil rental rate prior to finalizing new rates each year. Survey responses from as many localities as possible help calculate more accurate rental rates. Completion of the survey ensures cash rental rates accurately represent your locality. Survey results will also give you a useful tool in negotiating your rental agreements, and financial planning for your agricultural operation.

In accordance with federal law, survey responses are kept confidential. Survey results will be available in aggregate form only to ensure that no individual producer or operation can be identified. NASS will publish the survey results on August 27 at quickstats.nass.usda.gov/.

If you have any questions about this survey, please call 888-424-7828, or visit: [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide to NASS Surveys/Cash Rents by County/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide%20to%20NASS%20Surveys/Cash%20Rents%20by%20County/index.php).

Be on the Lookout: New Form Required for Some NRCS Customers

If you are a producer or landowner who participates in USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) may be reaching out by mail with information about a form you'll need to fill out.

Starting this year, all producers and landowners participating or applying to participate in certain NRCS conservation programs must complete form CCC-902, Farm Operating Plan. Historically, to participate in these programs, legal entities could file either the CCC-901, Member Information or the CCC-902, while individuals were not specifically required to file the CCC-902 with FSA. Now, to ensure FSA and NRCS are properly determining payment eligibility and maximum payment limitations, all customers must have a CCC-902 on file to establish eligibility.

These changes will not affect participants who already have a Form CCC-902 with a "determined" status recorded with FSA. Customers that do not have a CCC-902 on file with FSA will be sent a letter in the mail in the coming weeks with detailed information on what is needed and how to file the form. The letter requests that the form be completed within 30 days of receiving the letter.

For added convenience, USDA is offering options for remote or in-person submission of the CCC-902. Fiscal year 2021 is considered a transition year to ensure all NRCS program participants can meet this updated filing requirement. Beginning in FY 2022, if form CCC-902 is not on file your payments may be impacted.

We can help: NRCS and FSA staff are available at [USDA Service Centers](#) nationwide to provide information and assistance to walk you through meeting this filing requirement. For more information, see the [NRCS National Bulletin 300-21-7](#) or [FSA Notice PL-293](#).

Loan Maturity for Marketing Assistance Loans

Typically, Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) mature on demand, but no later than the last day of the 9th calendar month after the month the MAL is disbursed. However, with the passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, agricultural producers now have additional time to repay MALs.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 provides an extension of the MAL maturity to 12 months. This extension is applicable to nonrecourse loans for all commodities except seed cotton and sugar. Eligible open loans must be in good standing with a maturity date on or after July 31,

2021. New crop year loans (2021) requested by September 30, 2021, will also be eligible for the twelve-month maturity.

All current, active loans will automatically be extended the additional three months. Producers who prefer a nine-month loan maturity will need to notify their local FSA county office. Loans that are requested after September 30, 2021, will have a nine-month maturity.

MALs have a maximum loan maturity term of 12 months, therefore loans that had the maturity extended through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stability Act of 2020 (CARES Act) are not eligible for an additional extension.

Eligible commodities include barley, chickpeas (small and large), corn, cotton (upland), dry peas, grain sorghum, honey, lentils, mohair, oats, peanuts, rice (long and medium grain), soybeans, unshorn pelts, wheat, wool (graded and nongraded); and other oilseeds, including canola, crambe, flaxseed, mustard seed, rapeseed, safflower, sunflower seed, and sesame seed. Seed cotton and sugar are not eligible.

For more information on MALs, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming

Are you a military veteran interested in farming? USDA offers resources to help you:

- **Fund Your Operation:** USDA's Farm Service Agency offers a variety of [funding opportunities](#) to help agricultural producers finance their businesses. Certain funds are targeted for veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Conserve Natural Resources:** USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers [conservation programs and expert one-on-one technical assistance](#) to strengthen agricultural operations now and into the future. Veterans may be eligible for a cost share of up to 90 percent and advance payments of up to 50 percent to cover certain conservation practices.
- **Manage Risks:** USDA is here to help you prepare for and recover from the unexpected. Veterans who are beginning farmers may be eligible for reduced premiums, application fee waivers, increased insurance coverage, and other incentives for multiple [USDA programs that support risk management](#).

USDA wants to ensure that veterans transitioning to agriculture have the resources needed to succeed. While USDA offices are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus. If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to your [state Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator](#).

FSA Implements Set-Aside Loan Provision for Customers Impacted by COVID-19

Set-Aside Delays Loan Payments for Borrowers

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will broaden the use of the Disaster Set-Aside (DSA) loan provision, normally used in the wake of natural disasters, to allow farmers with USDA farm loans

who are affected by COVID-19, and are determined eligible, to have their next payment set aside. In some cases, FSA may also set aside a second payment for farmers who have already had one payment set aside because of a prior designated disaster.

FSA direct loan borrowers will receive a letter with the details of the expanded Disaster Set-Aside authorities, which includes the possible set-aside of annual operating loans, as well as explanations of the additional loan servicing options that are available. To discuss or request a loan payment Set-Aside, borrowers should call or email the farm loan staff at their local FSA county office.

The set-aside payment's due date is moved to the final maturity date of the loan or extended up to twelve months in the case of an annual operating loan. Any principal set-aside will continue to accrue interest until it is repaid. This aims to improve the borrower's cashflow in the current production cycle.

FSA previously announced it was relaxing the loan-making process and adding flexibilities for servicing direct and guaranteed loans to provide credit to producers in need. Direct loan applicants and borrowers are encouraged to contact their local FSA county office to discuss loan making and servicing flexibilities and other needs or concerns. Customers participating in FSA's guaranteed loan programs are encouraged to contact their lender. Information on these flexibilities, and office contact information, can be found on farmers.gov/coronavirus.

FSA will be accepting most forms and applications by facsimile or electronic signature. Some services are also available online to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and certain program applications and payments. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in.

Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally-funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, the request will be denied. Although there are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies, it's important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions.

Applications cannot be approved until FSA has copies of all permits and plans. Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

Current Interest Rates for March

- Farm Operating Loans — Direct 1.375%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 2.750%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher — 1.50%
- Emergency Loans — 2.375%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years) — 0.250%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) — 0.500%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) — 0.875%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) — 1.125%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) — 1.375%
- Sugar Storage Facility Loans (15 year term) — 1.500%
- Commodity Loans — 1.125%

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).