|  |
| --- |
| US Department of Agriculture |
| **Maine USDA Service Center Newsletter** November 2023 |
|  |
| [**Farm Service Agency**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ffsa.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613044926188%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=X9x5xXuIZfM%2BYFfS6QE%2BE5pX260R%2BuZHfWagFAnjwMo%3D&reserved=0)**|**[**Natural Resources Conservation Service**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nrcs.usda.gov%2Fwps%2Fportal%2Fnrcs%2Fsite%2Fnational%2Fhome%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613044926188%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=PwDaBtIBy5R%2Fgf1OkGYXAxPZQm%2F1TM9Xgzsd80rvfE4%3D&reserved=0)**|**[**Risk Management Agency**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Frma.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613044926188%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=HiaDu%2BGbCMhrcfUwBQRZhs2tpfGfqtxeK1jhHf3fqDY%3D&reserved=0) |
| In This Issue:* [Dates to Remember](#link_7)
* [The Maine Message](#link_5)
* [Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend November Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#link_12)
* [Using FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans for Construction](#link_2)
* [2023 Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections Open This Week](#link_11)
* [Inflation Reduction Act Section 22006 Assistance for Distressed Borrowers](#link_10)
* [USDA to Provide More Than $3 Billion to Commodity and Specialty Crop Producers Impacted by 2022 Natural Disasters](#link_6)
* [USDA Offers Options for Signing and Sharing Documents Online](#link_1)
* [Applying for FSA Direct Loans](#link_4)
* [Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Farm Storage Facility Loans](#link_8)
* [SCORE Matches Producers to Mentors](#link_3)
* [Farmers.gov - Your Online Hub for Conducting Business with USDA](#link_9)

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Dates to Remember

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Nov 20** | [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2FAssets%2FUSDA-FSA-Public%2Fusdafiles%2FFactSheets%2F2023%2Ffsa_nap_noninsuredcropdisasterassistance_factsheet_2023.pdf%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613044926188%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=3IpvBrPyTFgHQUZInaj72wG3UJkSQ56E5nWHNL%2FaNMs%3D&reserved=0) Coverage Deadline for perennial fruits and vegetables including strawberries, asparagus, apples, peaches, etc. |
| **Nov 23**  | Offices Closed for Thanksgiving Day |
| **Dec 25** | Offices Closed for Christmas Day |
| **Dec 31** | Application Deadline [Inflation Reduction Act Assistance for Distressed Borrowers website](https://www.farmers.gov/loans/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) |
| **Dec 31** | [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2FAssets%2FUSDA-FSA-Public%2Fusdafiles%2FFactSheets%2F2023%2Ffsa_nap_noninsuredcropdisasterassistance_factsheet_2023.pdf%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613044926188%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=3IpvBrPyTFgHQUZInaj72wG3UJkSQ56E5nWHNL%2FaNMs%3D&reserved=0)  Coverage Deadline for Maple Sap and Honey |
| **Jan 1** | Offices Closed for New Years Day |
| **Jan 13, 2024** | Deadline to apply for [Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 – Discrimination Financial Assistance Program](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2F22007apply.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613044926188%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Tg4HSJ9GqcTvTsQDvm9sL9sWfdUMfu%2FaaaIQipFnyf0%3D&reserved=0) |
| **Jan 15, 2024** | Acreage reporting deadline for Apples and Blueberries |
| **Jan 30, 2024** | [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm Raised Fish Program (ELAP)](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Fdisaster-assistance-program%2Femergency-assist-for-livestock-honey-bees-fish%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=%2B4%2F50aam30Cb2suIVWVy%2BFFgq0ICT3ccuOv8YGf7ndo%3D&reserved=0) Notice of Loss and Application for Payment deadline  |

The Maine Message**Thanksgiving can have a different meaning for all, from a celebration of harvest to a time of giving thanks for the blessings of the past year.  As we gather with family and friends over the next few weeks please remember to thank our farmers who work hard to supply us with fresh, healthy food all year long!**On November 9th, Agriculture Deputy Secretary Torres Small announced that the USDA is initiating a new effort to further support the U.S. specialty crops sector and increase the competitiveness of its products as part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s efforts to build new, more and better markets that catalyze opportunity for American farmers.  For more information, please see press release here: [USDA Launches Initiative to Enhance Competitiveness of the U.S. Specialty Crops Industry](https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/11/09/usda-launches-initiative-enhance-competitiveness-us-specialty-crops?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)USDA has also created a new webpage/new web resources that can be found at [www.usda.gov/specialty-crops](http://www.usda.gov/specialty-crops?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to serve as a comprehensive guide to all available USDA resources relevant to the specialty crops industry. The webpage includes information on loans, grants, technical assistance, and much more.If you have experienced forage quality loss, please join UMaine at Witter farm for a discussion on feeding less than desirable forages due to the impact of the 2023 growing season. Speakers Dr. Sarah Allen, UNH and Dr. Juan Romero, UMaine will review feed quality and animal performance, and mitigating mycotoxins. Superintendent Patricia Henderson will discuss exciting and future plans for Witter farm dairy.  This event is free and open to all, lunch will be provided courtesy of Agri-Mark Inc.  [Feeding management with less than desirable forages meeting- Fall 2023](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fevents.r20.constantcontact.com%2Fregister%2Fevent%3Foeidk%3Da07ek1kg2ynd90b129f%26utm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery%26llr%3Dffuhvccabhttp%253A%252F%252Fevents.r20.constantcontact.com%252Fregister%252Fevent%253Foeidk%253Da07ek1kg2ynd90b129f%26llr%3Dffuhvccabhttp%253A%252F%252Fevents.r20.constantcontact.com%252Fregister%252Fevent%253Foeidk%253Da07ek1kg2ynd90b129f%26llr%3Dffuhvccab&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=AEsT47rDdzWD22C0bCNynIsrU%2FvJ06G2CjZjxUsCYIA%3D&reserved=0) As a reminder, the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program (DFAP) is authorized by Section 22007(e) of the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to 2021. Details about the program, including an application and e-filing portal, are available at [https://22007apply.gov/](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2F22007apply.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=gC%2Bf1PQo9%2BduY%2BTkRSILW5noIHnBFwLSsTABGDjt9cA%3D&reserved=0). Applicants can also call the free call center at 1-800-721-0970.  Filing an application is FREE and does not require a lawyer. **The application period is open and runs through January 13, 2024.** For additional information, links to the weekly “lunch and learn” webinars can be found here:  [Local Events Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 Program (22007apply.gov)](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2F22007apply.gov%2Flocal-assistance.html%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery%23local-events&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=0NWtrmfxzJ2u8kKPPbIVwMox1cG%2F1uAjq3lHp44yMCw%3D&reserved=0) Have a happy and healthy Thanksgiving!SED Signature     Sherry Hamel, SED

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend November Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production We’re inviting urban producers, innovative producers, and other stakeholders to virtually attend a public meeting of the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on November 29 from 1-3 pm. Learn more and register the Committee will deliberate and vote on proposed recommendations and address public comments during the meeting.USDA will share the agenda between 24 to 48 hours prior to the meeting on the [Committee’s webpage](https://www.usda.gov/partnerships/federal-advisory-committee-urban-ag?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). The virtual meeting will run from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Eastern on Nov. 29, 2023. To attend virtually, register by Nov. 29, 2023, on the [Committee’s webpage](https://www.usda.gov/partnerships/federal-advisory-committee-urban-ag?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Using FSA Direct Farm Ownership Loans for ConstructionThe USDA Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Ffarm-loan-programs%2Ffarm-ownership-loans%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=DxU2sLwgrVbME67mv%2BHa39JJ1K4xa75qQvGWlmuoq90%3D&reserved=0) are a resource to help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.There are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Ffarm-loan-programs%2Fmicroloans%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=72YyjiGomhOUhb13dcbYWGUkVX9RQJzXf3w20TtrnII%3D&reserved=0) option for smaller financial needs up to $50,000.Direct Farm Ownership Loans can be used to construct, purchase or improve farm dwellings, service buildings or other facilities, and to make improvements essential to an operation.Applicants must provide FSA with an estimate of the total cost of all planned development that completely describe the work, prior to loan approval and must show proof of sufficient funds to pay for the total cost of all planned development at or before loan closing. In some instances, applicants may be asked to provide certified plans, specifications or contract documents. The applicant cannot incur any debts for materials or labor or make any expenditures for development purposes prior to loan closing with the expectation of being reimbursed from FSA funds.Construction and development work may be performed either by the contract method or the borrower method. Under the contract method, construction and development contractors perform work according to a written contract with the applicant or borrower. If applying for a direct loan to finance a construction project, the applicant must obtain a surety bond that guarantees both payment and performance in the amount of the construction contract from a construction contractor.A surety bond is required when a contract exceeds $100,000. An authorized agency official determines that a surety bond appears advisable to protect the borrower against default of the contractor or a contract provides for partial payments in excess of the amount of 60 percent of the value of the work in place.Under the borrower method, the applicant or borrower will perform the construction and development work. The borrower method may only be used when the authorized agency official determines, based on information from the applicant, that the applicant possesses or arranges to obtain the necessary skill and managerial ability to complete the work satisfactorily and that such work will not interfere with the applicant’s farming operation or work schedule.Potential applicants should visit with FSA early in the initial project planning process to ensure environmental compliance.For more eligibility requirements and information about FSA Loan programs, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=l3BgIEz2Bfe4YLD44v4NI94Rm5Ju3GJDVHB73jCr%2BgE%3D&reserved=0).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

2023 Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections Open This Week

|  |
| --- |
| Election DeadlineDecember 4 is the Last Day to Return BallotsThe U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will begin mailing ballots this week for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) [county and urban county committee elections](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fnews-room%2Fcounty-committee-elections%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=0C%2F8lrwkqJDjWZkjSYBWhvDWLCc8uq1cDlKTRVSAaHM%3D&reserved=0) to all eligible agricultural producers and private landowners across the country. Elections are occurring in certain Local Administrative Areas for these committee members who make important decisions about how Federal farm programs are administered locally. Producers and landowners must return ballots to their local FSA county office or have their ballots postmarked by Dec. 4, 2023, for those ballots to be counted.     Producers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program to be eligible to vote in the county committee election. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Additionally, producers who are not of legal voting age, but supervise and conduct farming operations for an entire farm, are eligible to vote in these elections.    For purposes of FSA county committee elections, every member of an American Indian Tribe is considered an agricultural landowner if the land on which the tribal member’s voting eligibility is based is tribally owned or held in trust by the U.S. for the Tribe, even if the individual does not personally produce a crop on that land. Tribal agricultural landowners 18 years and older can contact their local FSA county office to register to vote. Each committee has from three to 11 elected members who serve three-year terms, and at least one seat representing a Local Administrative Area is up for election each year. Committee members help ensure inclusive representation on committees and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their jurisdiction.Ballots must be postmarked or delivered in person by close of business Dec. 4, 2023, to be counted. Newly elected committee members will take office Jan. 1, 2024. Producers can find out if their Local Administrative Area is up for election and if they are eligible to vote by contacting their local FSA county office. Eligible voters who do not receive a ballot in the mail can request one from their local FSA county office.  Visit [fsa.usda.gov/elections](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fnews-room%2Fcounty-committee-elections%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=0C%2F8lrwkqJDjWZkjSYBWhvDWLCc8uq1cDlKTRVSAaHM%3D&reserved=0) for more information on county committee elections.     |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Inflation Reduction Act Section 22006 Assistance for Distressed Borrowers The Inflation Reduction Act provided $3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with certain Farm Service Agency (FSA) direct and guaranteed loans and to expedite assistance for those whose agricultural operations are at financial risk.Since October 2022, USDA has provided approximately $1.5 billion in immediate assistance to more than 25,000 financially distressed direct and guaranteed FSA loan borrowers.FSA is currently accepting and reviewing individual requests for assistance from borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans and those who missed a recent installment or who are unable to make their next scheduled installment.FSA direct loan borrowers with qualifying farm loans who are unable to pay their upcoming installments or have already missed a recent installment payment can request a cash flow analysis from FSA using a recent balance sheet and operating plan to determine their eligibility. This assistance is currently limited to installments due Aug. 1, 2022, through Jan. 15, 2024. Assistance is also available for borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures between Feb. 28, 2020, through Oct. 18, 2022, to avoid delinquency on their loans, such as monetizing long term or essential assets, incurring additional non-FSA debt, or deferring other essential payments, resulting in reduced farm and household viability.All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](http://www.farmers.gov/service-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) or visit [farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance](http://www.farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

USDA to Provide More Than $3 Billion to Commodity and Specialty Crop Producers Impacted by 2022 Natural Disasters The U. S Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide more than $3 billion to commodity and specialty crop producers impacted by natural disaster events in 2022. Eligible impacted producers can apply for financial assistance through the [Emergency Relief Program (ERP) 2022](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Femergency-relief%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bURBF3iaFhjCWNMgult%2BXxPtYeCShFlSKQ%2Bkkl7DZ0A%3D&reserved=0). The program will help offset the financial impacts of crop yield and value losses from qualifying disasters occurring in 2022.**Background**On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328) that provides about $3.7 billion in financial assistance for agricultural producers impacted by eligible natural disasters that occurred in calendar year 2022.  ERP 2022 covers losses to crops, trees, bushes and vines due to qualifying, calendar year 2022 natural disaster events including wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture, qualifying drought and related conditions. ERP 2022 program benefits will be delivered to eligible producers through a two-track process. FSA intends to make both tracks available to producers at the same time. This two-track approach enables USDA to:* Streamline the application process.
* Reduce the paperwork burden on producers.
* Proactively include provisions for underserved producers who have not been well served by past emergency relief efforts.
* Encourage producer participation in existing risk management programs to mitigate the impacts of future severe weather events.

It’s important to note that disaster-impacted producers may be eligible for ERP 2022 assistance under one or both tracks. To avoid duplicative benefits, if a producer applies for both tracks, the Track 2 payment calculation will take into account any payments received through Track 1.  **ERP 2022 Application Process – Track 1**ERP 2022 Track 1 leverages existing federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments for eligible crop producers who received indemnities through these risk management programs.Although FSA is sending pre-filled ERP 2022 Track 1 application forms to producers who have crop insurance and NAP data already on file with USDA, producers indemnified for losses resulting from 2022 natural disasters do not have to wait to receive the application before requesting ERP 2022 assistance. Effective Oct. 31, 2023, producers can apply for ERP 2022 benefits whether they have received the pre-filled application or not. Receipt of a pre-filled application is not confirmation that a producer is eligible to receive an ERP 2022 Track 1 payment. USDA estimates that ERP Track 1 benefits will reach more than 206,000 producers who received indemnities for losses covered by federal crop insurance and more than 4,500 producers who obtained NAP coverage for the 2022 crop year.   **ERP 2022 Application Process – Track 2**Track 2 is a revenue-based certification program designed to assist eligible producers who suffered an eligible decrease in revenue resulting from 2022 calendar year disaster events when compared with revenue in a benchmark year using revenue information that is readily available from most tax records. In cases where revenue does not reasonably reflect a normal year’s revenue, Track 2 provides an alternative method for establishing revenue. Likewise, Track 2 affords producers of crops that are used within an operation and do not generate revenue from the sale of the crop a method for establishing revenue for the purpose of applying for ERP 2022 benefits. Producers are not required to submit tax records to FSA unless requested by the County Committee if required for an FSA compliance spot check.Although not required when applying for ERP 2022 Track 2, applicants might find the following documents useful to the process:* Schedule F (Form 1040)
* Profit or Loss from Farming or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

Track 2 targets gaps in emergency relief assistance for eligible producers whose eligible losses were not covered by crop insurance or NAP including revenue losses too small (shallow loss) to be covered by crop insurance.Producers interested in applying for ERP 2022 Track 2, should contact their local FSA county office.  Additional reference resources can be found on FSA’s [emergency relief website](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Femergency-relief%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bURBF3iaFhjCWNMgult%2BXxPtYeCShFlSKQ%2Bkkl7DZ0A%3D&reserved=0).**Additional Required Forms**For both ERP 2022 tracks, all producers must have certain required forms on file with FSA within 60 days of the ERP 2022 deadline. Producers can apply for ERP 2022 starting Oct. 31, 2023. The application deadline has not yet been determined and will be announced at a later date. If not already on file, producers can update, complete and submit required forms to FSA at any time.Required forms:* 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, for the 2022 program year.
* A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification) for the ERP producer and applicable affiliates.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have these required forms on file. However, those who are uncertain or want to confirm the status of their forms can contact their local FSA county office.  **Future Insurance Coverage Requirements** All producers who receive ERP 2022 payments must purchase crop insurance, or NAP coverage where crop insurance is not available, in the next two available crop years as determined by the Secretary. Purchased coverage must be at the 60/100 coverage level or higher for insured crops or at the catastrophic coverage level or higher for NAP crops. **More Information**ERP 2022 eligibility details and payment calculation factor tables are available on the [emergency relief website](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Femergency-relief%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bURBF3iaFhjCWNMgult%2BXxPtYeCShFlSKQ%2Bkkl7DZ0A%3D&reserved=0), in the [ERP Track 1](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2FAssets%2FUSDA-FSA-Public%2Fusdafiles%2Femergency-relief-program%2Fpdfs%2Ffsa_erp_2022_track_1_factsheet.pdf%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=mV8qHND8E%2BVD69VxZnMLol9YgAnvAf54KK0GuN%2FWzNs%3D&reserved=0) and [ERP Track 2](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2FAssets%2FUSDA-FSA-Public%2Fusdafiles%2Femergency-relief-program%2Fpdfs%2Ffsa_erp_2022_track_2_factsheet.pdf%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=qFJ6Y5pZTRhF8%2F%2Bm%2FFMlvN2dJpuMs1eMOPXsepEZrUk%3D&reserved=0) fact sheets and through your local [FSA county office](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

USDA Offers Options for Signing and Sharing Documents OnlineFarmers and ranchers working with USDA’s Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service can now sign and share documents online in just a few clicks. By using Box or OneSpan, producers can digitally complete business transactions without leaving their homes or agricultural operations. Both services are free, secure, and available for multiple FSA and NRCS programs.Box is a secure, cloud-based site where FSA or NRCS documents can be managed and shared. Producers who choose to use Box can create a username and password to access their secure Box account, where documents can be downloaded, printed, manually signed, scanned, uploaded, and shared digitally with Service Center staff. This service is available to any FSA or NRCS customer with access to a mobile device or computer with printer connectivity.OneSpan is a secure eSignature solution for FSA and NRCS customers. Like Box, no software downloads or eAuthentication is required for OneSpan. Instead, producers interested in eSignature through OneSpan can confirm their identity through two-factor authentication using a verification code sent to their mobile device or a personalized question and answer. Once identity is confirmed, documents can be reviewed and e-signed through OneSpan via the producer’s personal email address. Signed documents immediately become available to the appropriate Service Center staff.Box and OneSpan are both optional services for customers interested in improved efficiency in signing and sharing documents with USDA, and they do not replace existing systems using eAuthentication for digital signature. Instead, these tools provide additional digital options for producers to use when conducting business with FSA or NRCS.USDA Service Center staff are available to help producers get started with Box and OneSpan through a few simple steps. Please visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://www.farmers.gov/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to find your local office and let Service Center staff know you’re interested in signing and sharing documents through these new features. In most cases, one quick phone call will be all that is needed to initiate the process.Visit [farmers.gov/mydocs](https://www.farmers.gov/mydocs?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to learn more about Box and OneSpan, steps for getting started, and additional resources for conducting business with USDA online.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Applying for FSA Direct LoansFSA offers direct farm ownership and direct farm operating loans to producers who want to establish, maintain, or strengthen their farm or ranch. Direct loans are processed, approved and serviced by FSA loan officers.Direct farm operating loans can be used to purchase livestock and feed, farm equipment, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance, and other costs including family living expenses. Operating loans can also be used to finance minor improvements or repairs to buildings and to refinance some farm-related debts, excluding real estate.Direct farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, enlarge an existing farm, construct and repair buildings, and to make farm improvements.The maximum loan amount for direct farm ownership loans is $600,000 and the maximum loan amount for direct operating loans is $400,000 and a down payment is not required. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.Please contact your local FSA office for more information or to apply for a direct farm ownership or operating loan.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Farm Storage Facility Loans**In this Ask the Expert, Toni Williams answers questions about how Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFLs) provide low-interest financing to help producers build or upgrade commodity storage facilities. Toni is the Agricultural Program Manager for FSFLs at the Farm Service Agency (FSA).**Toni has worked for FSA for more than 32 years and is responsible for providing national policy and guidance for Farm Storage Facility Loans.**What are Farm Storage Facility Loans?**Farm Storage Facility Loans provide low-interest financing for eligible producers to build or upgrade facilities to store commodities.The FSFL program was created in May 2000 to address an existing grain shortage. Historically, FSFLs benefitted grain farmers, but a change in the 2008 Farm Bill extended the program to fruit and vegetable producers for cold storage. An additional change extended the program to washing and packing sheds, where fresh produce is washed, sorted, graded, labeled, boxed up, and stored before it heads to market. Since May 2000, FSA has made more than 40,000 loans for on-farm storage.Eligible facility types include grain bins, hay barns, bulk tanks, and facilities for cold storage. Drying and handling and storage equipment including storage and handling trucks are also eligible. Eligible facilities and equipment may be new or used, permanently affixed or portable.To read the full blog visit [farmers.gov/blog/ask-the-expert-qa-on-farm-storage-facility-loans-with-toni-williams](https://www.farmers.gov/blog/ask-the-expert-qa-on-farm-storage-facility-loans-with-toni-williams?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

SCORE Matches Producers to Mentors  If you are a farmer or rancher, or have agricultural or business experience, join us in supporting the next generation and in investing in your local community. Your experiences and knowledge as a business owner, agricultural professional, or farmer can provide vital support to your community. SCORE – score.org - the nation's largest network of volunteer, expert business mentors, is looking to expand the field of available agricultural mentors and provide free business mentoring to farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural and rural business owners.   SCORE is currently looking for volunteers with experience in an agriculture-related field who would like to become part of an extended field of volunteers. The organization’s Orientation and Mentoring Certification program provides volunteers with everything needed to be a successful volunteer. Training includes background about SCORE’s mission and services, as well as guidance on how to be a business mentor, including enhancement of listening, interviewing and problem-solving skills.  Current mentors have backgrounds in finance, accounting, marketing, operations, business and financial planning. The mentors provide local expertise and free one-on-one business mentoring to new and existing farmers and business owners. Together they work through the process of starting or maintaining agricultural and rural businesses. No matter what stage a business is in, SCORE volunteer mentors can help in developing business plans, navigating financing and legal issues, identifying new markets, and other topics, in order to help their clients succeed.   Learn more and sign up to become a mentor today at [score.org/usda](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.score.org%2Fusda%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045082456%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=qt5XKuZchQ2FHz31qVxJL7ZMz2VVfTqWix69t7izyaQ%3D&reserved=0).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Farmers.gov - Your Online Hub for Conducting Business with USDA**Farmers.gov** gives you one place to do business with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), including accessing your farm records, maps, and common land units. You can create a farmers.gov account for the farmers.gov authenticated site, where you can access self-service features through a secure login.In addition to the self-service features farmers.gov website also has information on USDA programs, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance.**What can you do with your farmers.gov account?*** View FSA Farm loans including loan information, interest payments, loan advance and payment history, paid-in-full restructured loans, and account alerts.
* View NRCS Disbursements and Farm Loans financial activity from the past 180 days.
* View, print and export detailed farm records and farm/tract maps.
* Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI and GeoJSON file types.
* Import precision agriculture planting boundaries, create labels containing crop information, and print both on farm tract maps.
* Use the draw tools to determine acres in an area of interest that can be printed on a map and provided to a third party or exported as a feature file for use in other geospatial applications.
* View, upload, download and e-sign NRCS documents.
* Request conservation and financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
* Access information on current and past conservation practices, report practice completion and request practice certification
* View detailed information on previous and ongoing contracts, including the amount of cost- share assistance received and request contract modifications.

**How to create a farmers.gov account?**To create a farmers.gov account you will need:* A USDA individual customer record - A customer record contains information you have given to USDA to do business with them, like your name, address, phone number, and any legal representative authority relationships.
* A login.gov account – Login.gov is a sign-in service that gives people secure online access to participating government programs.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in any meeting/event/function should contact Mary Anne Coffin at 207-990-9140 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

 |
|  |
|

|  |
| --- |
| Icon  Description automatically generated |

Maine /USDA Service Center967 Illinois AvenueBangor, ME  04401

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Farm Service Agency**Sherry Hamel, 207-990-9140State Executive Director sherry.hamel@usda.govWebsite:  [www.fsa.usda.gov/me](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/me) |  **Natural Resources Conservation Service**Matt Walker, 207- 990-9585State Conservationist matt.walker@usda.govWebsite:  [www.me.nrcs.usda.gov](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.me.nrcs.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&data=05%7C01%7Cmaryanne.coffin%40usda.gov%7Ce2c4d33c8f8645d33bdf08dbe50c1ada%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638355613045239762%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=KW1kk9VVXQdfq90n7g5xWgsxata6pyZCBXGJcoR6M7A%3D&reserved=0)  |
|   |   |
|   |   |
|   |   |

  |