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| |  | | --- | | US Department of Agriculture | | **Maine USDA Service Center Newsletter** March 2023 | |  | | [**Farm Service Agency**](https://fsa.usda.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)**|**[**Natural Resources Conservation Service**](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)**|**[**Risk Management Agency**](https://rma.usda.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) | | **In This Issue:**   * [The Maine Message](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_6) * [Dates to Remember](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_7) * [USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_9) * [USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_5) * [USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_4) * [Ask the Expert: A Q&A on Farm Storage Facility Loans](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_3) * [FSA Offers Loan Servicing Options](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/34f0ec6#link_2)   **The Maine Message**  **Welcome Spring 2023 and Happy National Agriculture Day!**  National Agriculture Day is a day to recognize the producers who are the best stewards of our land.  As America's producers you are not only providing food, forage, and fiber for today - you are also investing in climate solutions that will ensure a prosperous agricultural future for generations to come and we are growing a climate for tomorrow, for our state, our nation, and our world.  On National Agriculture Day and every day, USDA is committed to ensuring our programs and investments reach all producers, including underserved producers who haven’t always had the opportunity to benefit from the many resources USDA has to offer. We are committed to ensuring producers have the tools and resources they need to be part of the climate solution.  THANK YOU to all our producers!  FSA wishes you a happy National Agriculture Day!  There is still time for your voice to be heard!  The Census of Agriculture allows producers to tell the story of U.S. agriculture.  Census data inform decisions about policy, farm and conservation programs, disaster assistance, infrastructure and rural development, research, education, and more. The stronger the response, the stronger the data. Since data collection began last fall, over a million producers across the country have returned their questionnaires. USDA will continue to collect completed 2022 ag census forms through the spring to ensure all producers have the chance the be represented in these widely used data.  **The Census of Agriculture is your voice, your future, and your opportunity.**If you have not yet done so, you can respond online at  [agcounts.usda.gov](https://portal.agcounts.usda.gov/portal/s/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  Please review the upcoming program deadlines listed below and reach out to your local FSA office if you have any question or would like further information.  As always, if you are aware of any agricultural event where you would like to have FSA representation, please reach out to me or your local FSA Office.  Sherry Hamel signature file  **Sherry Hamel, State Executive Director**    **Dates to Remember**     |  |  | | --- | --- | | March 31 | Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP) 860 deadline extended | | March 31 | Survey to Help USDA Improve Programs | | April 7 | Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – General Signup | | April 30 | 2022 Census of Agriculture  https://portal.agcounts.usda.gov/portal/s/ | | June 2 | Pandemic Assistance Recovery Program (PARP) Signup  [Pandemic Assistance Relief Program (PARP)](https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/documents/farmersgov-parp-factsheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) | | June 2 | Emergency Relief Program (ERP 2) Phase Two Signup  [Emergency Relief Program (ERP 2) Phase Two](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/2023/fsa_erp_factsheet_22.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) | | July 15 | Crop Acreage Reporting deadline for most crops |     **USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service**   |  | | --- | | round baleThe U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a simplified direct loan application to provide improved customer experience for producers applying for loans from the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The simplified direct loan application enables producers to complete a more streamlined application, reduced from 29 to 13 pages. Producers will also have the option to complete an electronic fillable form or prepare a traditional, paper application for submission to their local FSA farm loan office. The paper and electronic versions of the form will be available starting March 1, 2023.  Approximately 26,000 producers submit a direct loan application to the FSA annually, but there is a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. Coupled with the Loan Assistance Tool released in October 2022, the simplified application will provide all loan applicants access to information regarding the application process and assist them with gathering the correct documents before they begin the process. This new application will help farmers and ranchers submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete, rejected, or withdrawn applications.  In October 2022, USDA launched the Loan Assistance Tool, an online step-by-step guide that provides materials to help an applicant prepare their farm loan application in one tool. Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting [farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool](http://www.farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) and clicking the ‘Get Started’ button. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser. A version compatible with mobile devices is expected to be available by the summer. It does not work in Internet Explorer.  The simplified direct loan application and Loan Assistance Tool are the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:   * An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns. * An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.   USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA took action in October 2022 to [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/10/18/usda-provides-payments-nearly-800-million-assistance-help-keep?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.  Soon, all direct loan borrowers will receive a letter from USDA describing the circumstances under which additional payments will be made to distressed borrowers and how they can work with their FSA local office to discuss these options. Producers can explore all available options on all FSA loan options at [fsa.usda.gov](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7Cd30f6c5695cb4a802bf208db09200454%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638113805350234603%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=%2BPs4yNzetnZVG%2BrlysrhFZ0b5B3IFF5n5EHRloQ5M7U%3D&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](http://www.farmers.gov/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). |   **Rolling Out Revenue Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs**  Beginning January 23, 2023, agricultural producers can begin to apply for two new important programs for revenue losses, from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. Both programs equitably fill gaps in earlier assistance.  First, you may be eligible for assistance through the [Emergency Relief Program (ERP)](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/emergency-relief/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Phase Two if you experienced revenue losses from eligible natural disasters in 2020 and 2021.  You may also be eligible for the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP)](https://www.farmers.gov/coronavirus/pandemic-assistance/parp-relief/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) if you experienced revenue losses in calendar year 2020. PARP is addressing gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.  Applications for both new programs are due June 2, 2023, and you can apply for both programs during your same appointment with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA).  Historically, FSA programs have been designed to make direct payments to producers based on a single disaster event or for a single commodity loss. For many of you, this may be the first revenue-based program that you’ve applied for with FSA.  ***Why revenue-based programs?***  ERP Phase Two and PARP take a much more holistic approach to disaster assistance, ensuring that producers not just make it through a single growing season but have the financial stability to invest in the long-term well-being of their operations and employees.  In general, ERP Phase Two payments are based on the difference in allowable gross revenue between a benchmark year, representing a typical year of revenue for the producer and the disaster year – designed to target the remaining needs of producers impacted by qualifying natural disasters and avoid duplicative payments. ERP Phase Two revenue loss is based on tax years.  For PARP, an agricultural producer must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a decrease in revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to a typical year. PARP revenue loss is based on calendar years.  ***How to Apply***   In preparation for enrollment, producers should gather supporting documentation including:   * Schedule F (Form 1040); and * *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 for ERP and for calendar years 2018, 2019 and 2020 for PARP.   Producers should also have, or be prepared to have, the following forms on file for both ERP and PARP program participation:   * Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet* (as applicable to the program participant); * Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity; * Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable); and * Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification.* * Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, as certain existing permanent and ad-hoc disaster programs provide increased benefits or reduced fees and premiums.   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 should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  ***Yes, FSA is stepping outside of the box.***  FSA is a big proponent of agricultural producers having a say in the design, implementation and delivery of the programs that directly impact their livelihoods. We also believe that some of the most creative and useful ideas for program and process improvements come from the FSA employees who administer this assistance through our network of more than 2,100 county offices. We want to thank producers across the country, along with the entire FSA workforce, for not just thinking outside of the box but also providing their input to make sure that we can improve and enhance our programs and our approach to assistance to better and more efficiently serve all producers who need our help.  Please visit your local USDA Service Center for more information on ERP Phase Two, PARP and our full portfolio of conservation, prices support, safety-net, credit and disaster assistance programs.    **USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service**  The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new online tool to help farmers and ranchers better navigate the farm loan application process. This uniform application process will help to ensure all farm loan applicants receive equal support and have a consistent customer experience with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) regardless of their individual circumstances.  USDA experiences a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, particularly among underserved customers, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. The Loan Assistance Tool is available 24/7 and gives customers an online step-by-step guide that supplements the support they receive when working in person with a USDA employee, providing materials that may help an applicant prepare their loan application in one tool.  Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting [farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool](http://www.farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)  and clicking the ‘Get Started’ button. From here they can follow the prompts to complete the Eligibility Self-Assessment and start the farm loan journey. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.  The Loan Assistance Tool is the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements and tools that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:   * A streamlined and simplified direct loan application, reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages. * An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns. * An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.   **Background**  USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA is taking action to immediately [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/10/18/usda-provides-payments-nearly-800-million-assistance-help-keep?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) whose operations are at financial risk while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.  **USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023**  **USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023**  Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup starting **February 27 through April 7, 2023.** CRP is a cornerstone voluntary conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris administration’s effort to address climate change and help agricultural communities invest in the long-term well-being of their land and natural resources.  Producers and landowners enrolled more than 5 million acres into CRP through signups in 2022, building on the acceptance of more than 3.1 million acres in the [largest Grassland CRP signup in history](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2022/usda-accepts-more-than-3-1-million-acres-in-grassland-crp-signup?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). There are currently 23 million acres enrolled in CRP, with 1.9 million set to expire this year. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) is aiming to reach the 27-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2023.  **General CRP**  General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.  **Continuous CRP**  Under Continuous CRP, producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.  FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR30), the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watershed, has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices. Under this administration, FSA also moved SAFE practices back to the Continuous CRP signup, giving producers and landowners more opportunities to participate in the initiative. Through the FWP, producers and landowners can enroll land in CRP as part of their efforts to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, to improve both vegetation and water flow.  This administration has also made significant improvements to CREP, which leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific State, regional or nationally significant conservation concerns. Specifically, USDA made significant improvements to CREP to reduce barriers and make the program more accessible to a broad range of producers and new types of partners.  These updates included flexibility for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, along with an investment in additional staff to work directly with partners. Through CREP, for the first time ever, three Tribal Nations are now partnering with USDA to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.  **Grassland CRP**  FSA will announce the dates for Grassland CRP signup in the coming weeks. Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands.  Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.  **How to Sign Up**  Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.  Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.  **More Information**  Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.  **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).  **FSA Offers Loan Servicing Options**  There are options for Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan customers during financial stress. If you are a borrower who is unable to make payments on a loan, contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager to learn about your options.  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. | |  | |  | |