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| US Department of Agriculture |
| **Maine USDA Service Center Newsletter**  May 2023 |
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| [**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/35ad4d8#link_6) * [Dates to Remember](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_7) * [USDA Offers Assistance to Help Organic Dairy Producers Cover Increased Costs with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP)](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_12) * [USDA Provides Payments of Nearly $800 Million in Assistance to Help Keep Farmers Farming](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_11) * [USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_9) * [Don’t Miss Your Opportunity to be Represented in Ag Census Data](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_5) * [USDA’s Organic Certification Cost Share Program Assists Organic Producers recover costs associated with organic certification.](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_8) * [USDA Seeks Members for Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_10) * [USDA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_4) * [Applying for NAP Payments](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_3) * [USDA Offers Livestock Disaster Program Flexibilities; Responds to Needs Expressed by Producers Hard-Hit by Natural Disasters](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_1) * [SCORE Matches Producers to Mentors](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins/35ad4d8#link_2)   **The Maine Message**  To wrap up the month of May, USDA has announced additional assistance to producers who suffered **revenue losses due to natural disaster events in 2022**.  Last year there were 18 disasters nationwide that caused more than $1 billion in damages EACH!  Hurricane Ian and Fiona, winter storms, tornadoes, drought and wildfires devasted the agricultural landscape from coast to coast.  The $3.7 billion in investments that USDA FSA will make through the implementation of **ERP and ELRP for 2022** will be instrumental in helping mitigate the financial stressors brought on by multiple years of catastrophic weather events.  Like the 2021 programs, this will be a fully automated process requiring no action from producers. Additional funds for 2021 ELRP are being reallocated and additional payments will soon be made to livestock producers who previously received payments for 2021 losses.  Also announced this week, beginning May 24 through July 26, 2023, FSA will begin accepting applications for the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP).  This program will help mitigate market volatility, higher input and transportation costs and unstable feed supply prices that have created unique hardships in the organic industry.  For more information, please check here: [Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2023/usda-offers-assistance-to-help-organic-dairy-producers-cover-increased-costs?utm_campaign=051923organicdairyassist&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)  On May 1, 2023, USDA announced additional assistance under the Inflation Reduction Act for distressed FLP borrowers who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment.  All FLP borrowers received a letter previously detailing the process for seeking this type of assistance.   This week, another **NEW OPPORTUNITY** to receive assistance was announced for FLP borrowers who took extraordinary measures to avoid a delinquency on their loans, such as taking on or refinancing more debt, selling property, or cashing out retirement or college savings accounts.  FLP borrowers will be receiving a letter regarding this opportunity within the next few weeks. Please contact your local county office of click here for more information: [https://www.farmers.gov/loans/inflation-reduction-investments/request-assistance](https://www.farmers.gov/loans/inflation-reduction-investments/request-assistance?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  In 2022 Governor Mills and the Maine Legislature established the Fund to Address PFAS contamination (or simply the “PFAS Fund”) to support farmers whose land and water are contaminated with per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The Legislature appropriated $60 million dollars from the General Fund for this purpose.  Maine DACF is required to administer the PFAS Fund in accordance with a plan that establishes funding priorities, administration, and oversight, and with the review and advice of an advisory committee which was established in October 2022. Per [7 MRSA § 320-L](https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/7/title7sec320-K.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) members of the PFAS Fund Advisory Committee will make recommendations to the DACF regarding administration of the Fund.  A public hearing to review the draft implementation plan will be held on July 12, 2023.  To attend this hearing, please register here:  [MAINE DACF PFAS Advisory Committee Public Hearing](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7C09fb0f24bf754a72337d08db58ad2277%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638201272854226035%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=vzuQIuuWtsyvbNZRXNJ9Cjnnr3L8wafCtfzWInhsTFc%3D&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmainestate.zoom.us%2Fwebinar%2Fregister%2FWN_TsOIpvJFTlOP9x3D5sDOdg%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  **If you are a producer and have questions regarding your farm and PFAS, please email**[**pfas.dacf@maine.gov**](mailto:pfas.dacf@maine.gov)**.**  Sherry Hamel signature file  ***Sherry Hamel, State Executive Director***   |  | | --- | |  |   **Dates to Remember**     |  |  | | --- | --- | | **May 26** | [**Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program/crp-grasslands-signup-overview/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Sign up Deadline | | **May 29** | Offices closed for Memorial Day | | **May 31** | [**Marketing Assistance Loans and Loan Deficiency Payments**](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/mal_ldp_fact_sheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Deadline for prior year harvested corn, soybeans and other oilseeds and pulse crops. | | **July 14** | [Emergency Relief Program (ERP) 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)   and  [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program](https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/documents/farmersgov-parp-factsheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) | | **July 15** | Acreage Reporting deadline for most crops | | **July 26** | [Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2023/usda-offers-assistance-to-help-organic-dairy-producers-cover-increased-costs?utm_campaign=051923organicdairyassist&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) (ODMAP) | | **Sept 30** | 2024 Non-Insurable Crop Disaster Assistance Program coverage  deadline for Perennial Forages and Value Loss Crops (Includes Aquaculture, Christmas trees, Turfgrass sod) | | **Oct 31** | Organic Certification Cost Share Program -[OCCSP](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) webpage | | **Ongoing** | [**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - Continuous**](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/crp-continuous-enrollment-period-factsheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Enrollment |      |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA Offers Assistance to Help Organic Dairy Producers Cover Increased Costs with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP)**  *ODMAP signup begins May 24th and runs through July 26, 2023*  The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), announces assistance for dairy producers with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP).  ODMAP is established to help mitigate market volatility, higher input and transportation costs, and unstable feed supply and prices that have created unique hardships in the organic dairy industry. Specifically, under the ODMAP, USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) is making $104 million available to organic dairy operations to assist with projected marketing costs in 2023, calculated using their marketing costs in 2022.  FSA will begin accepting applications for ODMAP on May 24, 2023. Eligible producers include certified organic dairy operations that produce milk from cows, goats and sheep.  **How ODMAP Works**  FSA is providing financial assistance for a producer’s projected marketing costs in 2023 based on their 2022 costs. ODMAP provides a one-time cost-share payment based on marketing costs on pounds of organic milk marketed in the 2022 calendar year.  ODMAP provides financial assistance that will immediately support certified organic dairy operations during 2023 keeping organic dairy operations sustainable until markets return to more normal conditions.  **How to Apply**  FSA is accepting applications from May 24 to July 26, 2023. To apply, producers 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). To complete the ODMAP application, producers must certify to pounds of 2022 milk production, how documentation of their organic certification, and submit a completed application form.  Organic dairy operations are required to provide their USDA certification of organic status confirming operation as an organic dairy in 2023 and 2022 along with the certification of 2022 milk production in hundredweight.  ODMAP complements other assistance available to dairy producers, including Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) and Supplemental DMC, with more than $300 million in benefits paid for the 2023 program year to date.  Learn more on the [FSA Dairy Programs webpage](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7C4199b8b5f0974970a31308db56dc66df%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638199276834802851%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=Azjr04Cn%2FwgA38c0CxBklpErgXJ894IyyNs4BhrzEpQ%3D&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fsa.usda.gov%2Fprograms-and-services%2Ffarm-bill%2Ffarm-safety-net%2Fdairy-programs%2Findex%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  **More Information**  To learn more about USDA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7C4199b8b5f0974970a31308db56dc66df%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638199276834802851%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=13kvwDnaTNnpIlP48SgNCpgytxEguPj%2BtOPQseqawmg%3D&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nrcs.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and other programs by [logging into their farmers.gov account](https://www.farmers.gov/account?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). If you don’t have an account, [sign up today](https://www.farmers.gov/account?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).   |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA Provides Payments of Nearly $800 Million in Assistance to Help Keep Farmers Farming**  USDA announced that distressed borrowers with qualifying USDA farm loans have already received nearly $800 million in assistance, as part of the $3.1 billion in assistance for distressed farm loan borrowers provided through Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The IRA directed USDA to expedite assistance to distressed borrowers of direct or guaranteed loans administered by USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) whose operations face financial risk.  This recent announcement in October 2022 kicks off a process to provide assistance to distressed farm loan borrowers using several complementary approaches, with the goal of keeping them farming, removing obstacles that currently prevent many of these borrowers from returning to farming, and improving the way that USDA approaches borrowing and servicing. Through this assistance, USDA is focused on generating long-term stability and success for distressed borrowers.  Work has already started to bring some relief to distressed farmers. As of Oct. 2022, over 13,000 borrowers have already benefited from the resources provided under the Inflation Reduction Act as follows:   * Approximately 11,000 delinquent direct and guaranteed borrowers had their accounts brought current. USDA also paid the next scheduled annual installment for these direct loan borrowers giving them peace of mind in the near term. * Approximately 2,100 borrowers who had their farms foreclosed on and still had remaining debt have had this debt resolved in order to cease debt collections and garnishment relieving that burden that has made getting a fresh start more difficult.   In addition to the automatic assistance already provided, USDA has also outlined steps to administer up to an additional $500 million in payments to benefit the following distressed borrowers:   * USDA will administer $66 million in separate automatic payments, using COVID-19 pandemic relief funds, to support up to 7,000 direct loan borrowers who used FSA’s disaster-set-aside option during the pandemic to move their scheduled payments to the end of their loans. * USDA is also initiating two case-by-case processes to provide additional assistance to farm loan borrowers. Under the first new process, FSA will review and assist with delinquencies from 1,600 complex cases, including cases in which borrowers are facing bankruptcy or foreclosure. The second new process will add a new option using existing direct loan servicing criteria to intervene more quickly and help an estimated 14,000 financially distressed borrowers who request assistance to avoid even becoming delinquent.   More details on each of the categories of assistance, including a downloadable fact sheet, are available on the [Inflation Reduction Act webpage on farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).  Similar to other USDA assistance, all of these payments will be reported as income and borrowers are encouraged to consult their tax advisors. USDA also has resources and partnerships with cooperators who can provide additional assistance and help borrowers navigate the process.  The announcement today is only the first step in USDA’s efforts to provide assistance to distressed farm loan borrowers and respond to farmers and to improve the loan servicing efforts at USDA by adding more tools and relaxing unnecessary restrictions. Additional announcements and investments in assistance will be made as USDA institutes these additional changes and improvements.  This effort will ultimately also include adding more tools and relaxing unnecessary restrictions through assistance made possible by Congress through the IRA. Further assistance and changes to the approach will be made in subsequent phases.  **Background**  USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans, which do not include farm storage facility loans or marketing assistance loans.  With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of IRA, USDA is taking action to immediately provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers whose operations are at financial risk while working on making transformational changes to how USDA goes about loan servicing in the long run so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations and remain in good financial standing.  In January 2021, [USDA suspended foreclosures](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2021/usda-temporarily-suspends-debt-collections-foreclosures-and-other-activities-on-farm-loans-for-several-thousand-distressed-borrowers-due-to-coronavirus?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) and other adverse actions on direct farm loans due to the pandemic and encouraged guaranteed lenders to follow suit. Last week, USDA reiterated this request to guaranteed lenders to provide time for the full set of IRA distressed borrower assistance to be made available before lenders take irreparable actions.  Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov/loans?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery#field-234) ([also available in Spanish](https://www.farmers.gov/spanish/loans/farm-loan-discovery-tool?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)) or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](http://www.farmers.gov/service-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). Producers can also call the FSA call center at 877-508-8364 between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. Eastern. USDA has tax-related resources available at [farmers.gov/taxes](http://www.farmers.gov/taxes?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).   |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service**   |  | | --- | | Apply NowThe 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). |  |  | | --- | |  |   **Don’t Miss Your Opportunity to be Represented in Ag Census Data**  Time is running out to respond to the 2022 Census of Agriculture! Thank you to the producers who have already completed the ag census. If you have not responded, there is still time. **By federal law, the ag census questionnaire needs to be completed by everyone who received it, including landowners who lease land to producers, those involved in conservation programs, even those who may have received the ag census and did not farm in 2022.**  Strong response means strong data; these data will inform decisions that will help shape the future of American agriculture for the next five or six years. By not responding, you risk being unrepresented and therefore underserved in farm programs and funding, crop insurance rates, rural development, disaster assistance, and more. Return your ag census by mail or fill it out online at [agcounts.usda.gov](https://portal.agcounts.usda.gov/portal/s/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). Learn more at [nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7C8a5afd6cf10c40e4d25d08db467f7005%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638181285643538705%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=4h0ApAyQzMNDWn3%2B2cBJRaU0ers3AEhmnr80Q%2BljseM%3D&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nass.usda.gov%2Fagcensus%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) and respond today. Learn more at [nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](https://www.nass.usda.gov/agcensus/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) and respond today.   |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA’s Organic Certification Cost Share Program Assists Organic Producers recover costs associated with organic certification.**  *OCCSP signup is open now until October 31, 2023*  The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will cover up to 75% of the costs associated with organic certification, up to $750 per category, through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) (OCCSP). USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and handlers to apply for OCCSP by Oct. 31, 2023, for expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023.   As part of USDA’s broader effort to support organic producers and in response to stakeholder feedback, this year FSA increased the cost share to the maximum amount allowed by statute.  **Cost Share for 2023**  The cost share provides financial assistance for organic certification, and producers and handlers are eligible to receive 75% of the costs, up to $750, for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and state organic program fees (California only).  Producers have until Oct. 31, 2023, to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.  **How to Apply**  To apply, organic producers and handlers should contact their local [USDA Service Center](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). As part of completing the OCCSP application, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses.  Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through department of agriculture. Additional details can be found on the [OCCSP](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) webpage.  **Opportunity for State Departments of Agriculture**  FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA will post a synopsis of the funding opportunity on grants.gov and will electronically mail the notice of funding opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture.  If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA County Offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. However, the producer or handler may only receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture.   |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA Seeks Members for Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production**   |  | | --- | | FAC Gov Delivery*Nominations are open until July 15*  USDA is seeking nominations for four positions on the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. Nominations will be open to public from May 15, 2023, to July 15, 2023. The 12-member Committee, which assembled in March 2022, is part of USDA’s efforts to increase support for urban agriculture and innovative production. Members of the committee provide input on policy development and to help identify barriers to urban agriculture as USDA works to promote urban farming and the economic opportunities it provides in cities across the country. |  |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023**  USDA announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin signing up for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) starting today and running through May 26, 2023. Among CRP enrollment opportunities, Grassland CRP is a unique working lands program, allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while conserving grasslands and promoting plant and animal biodiversity as well as healthier soil.  More than 3.1 million acres were accepted through the 2022 Grassland CRP signup from agricultural producers and private landowners. That signup—the highest ever for the program—reflects the continued success and value of investments in voluntary, producer-led, working lands conservation programs. The current total participation in Grassland CRP is 6.3 million acres, which is part of the 23 million acres enrolled in CRP opportunities overall.  Since 2021, USDA’s FSA, which administers all CRP programs, has made several improvements to Grassland CRP to broaden the program’s reach, including:   * Creating two [National Priority Zones](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/Conservation/PDF/national_grassland_crp_priority_zones_su203.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to put focus on environmentally sensitive land such as that prone to wind erosion. * Enhancing offers with 10 additional ranking points to producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers and military veterans. * Leveraging the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-enhancement/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)(CREP) to engage historically underserved communities within Tribal Nations in the Great Plains.   **How to Sign Up for Grassland CRP**  Landowners and producers interested in Grassland CRP, or any other CRP enrollment option, 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 the deadlines.  Producers with expiring CRP acres can enroll in the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter into a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.  **Other CRP Signups**  Under [Continuous CRP](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/crp-continuous-enrollment-period-factsheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery), producers and landowners can enroll 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. Continuous CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.  FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR30) Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states but has since been expanded nationwide, giving producers and landowners across the country the opportunity to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.   |  | | --- | |  |   **Applying for NAP Payments**  The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides financial assistance to you for crops that aren’t eligible for crop insurance to protect against lower yields or crops unable to be planted due to natural disasters including freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, flood, excessive heat and qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing), among others.  In order to participate, you must obtain NAP coverage for the crop year by the applicable deadline using form CCC-471 “Application for Coverage” and pay the service fee. Application closing dates vary by crop. Producers are also required to submit an acceptable crop acreage report. Additionally, NAP participants must provide:   * The quantity of all harvested production of the crop in which the producer held an interest during the crop year * The disposition of the harvested crop, such as whether it is marketable, unmarketable, salvaged or used differently than intended * Acceptable crop production records (when requested by FSA)   Producers who fail to report acreage and production information for NAP-covered crops could see reduced or zero NAP assistance. These reports are used to calculate the approved yield.  If your NAP-covered crops are affected by a natural disaster, notify your FSA office by completing Part B of form CCC-576 “Notice of Loss and Application for Payment.” This must be completed within 15 calendar days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 days of the final harvest date. For hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops, you must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes apparent.  To receive benefits, you must also complete Parts D, E, F and G of the CCC-576 “Notice of Loss and Application for Payment” within 60 days of the last day of coverage for the crop year for any NAP covered crops. The CCC-576 requires acceptable appraisal information. Producers must provide evidence of production and note whether the crop was marketable, unmarketable, salvaged or used differently than intended.  Eligible crops must be commercially produced agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops.  For more information on NAP, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov/nap](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).   |  | | --- | |  |   **USDA Offers Livestock Disaster Program Flexibilities; Responds to Needs Expressed by Producers Hard-Hit by Natural Disasters**  *Program Application Deadlines Extended to June 2*  USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) has provided additional flexibilities and further enhanced disaster recovery assistance provided by the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP)](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/emergency-assist-for-livestock-honey-bees-fish/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery), [Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/livestock-indemnity/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) and [Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP)](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/livestock-forage/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) in response to needs expressed by livestock producers across the U.S. who have experienced significant feed, forage and animal losses from natural disasters. These livestock disaster program policy enhancements include an extended June 2, 2023, deadline to submit notices of loss and applications for payment for 2022 losses. The deadline extension and program flexibilities are available to eligible producers nationwide who incurred losses from a qualifying natural disaster event.  LIP and ELAP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died because of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed, and forage. LFP provides benefits for grazing losses due to a qualifying drought or wildfire. For fire, losses must occur on federally managed lands. ELAP provides benefits for grazing losses not covered under LFP.  **New Program Applications for 2022**  FSA is accepting 2022 LIP notices of loss and applications for payment through June 2, 2023, for all covered livestock that may have been eligible in 2022.  Producers who did not sign up for ELAP assistance for hauling livestock, forage and feedstuff hauling or other losses covered under ELAP in 2022 can also apply through June 2, 2023.  FSA will accept LFP applications for only newly eligible covered livestock through June 2, 2023.  All required supporting documentation must be received and on file in the county office by the established deadline.  **Revising 2022 Applications**  Producers who have a 2022 ELAP, LIP or LFP application on file with FSA as of the program deadline or were placed on an approved register, may revise their application with the newly updated eligible livestock no later than June 2, 2023.  **Filing a Notice of Loss for ELAP due to 2022 and 2023 Drought**  To support program access for counties that do not currently have a 365-day grazing season, FSA is waiving the 30-day timeframe for producers to submit a notice of loss for the 2023 ELAP program year due to qualifying drought in calendar years 2022 or 2023. Producers can now submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent, as far back as Jan. 1, 2023, for 2022 eligible losses and 2023 eligible losses that occur before June 2, 2023.  For counties that have a 365-day grazing season, producers must have a qualifying drought in the 2023 calendar year to be eligible for 2023 livestock, water and feed hauling in 2023.  **More Information**  Livestock producers must provide evidence that livestock death was due to an eligible adverse weather event or loss condition. In addition, livestock producers should bring supporting evidence, including documentation of the number and kind of livestock that died, photographs or video records to document the loss, purchase records, veterinarian records, production records and other similar documents. Owners who sold injured livestock for a reduced price because the livestock were injured due to an adverse weather event, must provide verifiable evidence of the reduced sale of the livestock.  Producers can apply for ELAP, LFP and LIP benefits at their local FSA county office. For more information or to submit a notice of loss or an application for payment, please contact your [local FSA office](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) or visit [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov/recover?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://www.score.org/usda?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).   |  | | --- | |  |   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. |
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| |  | | --- | | A white line drawing of a map  Description automatically generated with low confidence |   **Maine /USDA Service Center**  967 Illinois Avenue Bangor, ME  04401     |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Farm Service Agency**  Sherry Hamel, 207-990-9140  State Executive Director  sherry.hamel@usda.gov  Website:  www.fsa.usda.gov/me | **Natural Resources Conservation Service**  Matt Walker, 207- 990-9585  State Conservationist [matt.walker@usda.gov](mailto:matt.walker@usda.gov)  Website:  [www.me.nrcs.usda.gov](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=04%7C01%7C%7Cecf13b99f97a4d0461ef08d95e52a382%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637644531287399906%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&reserved=0&sdata=k%2FGUSE%2BxyQzc6mcY5FvrM%2FFlsnwWF9VVXRug3AOENBE%3D&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.me.nrcs.usda.gov%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |