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## **A Message from the Ohio FSA State Office**

Happy New Year from Ohio FSA!

Late last week, the FSA began accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP) as signup started **on Jan. 12, 2024**. FSA encourages agricultural producers and landowners interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners. Additionally, producers participating in CRP can apply to re-enroll beginning Jan. 12, 2024, if their contracts will expire this year. To submit an offer, producers should contact their [County FSA office](#) by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by Oct. 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap,

FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

FSA recently announced the beginning of election and enrollment for the [Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage](#) commodity crop safety net programs. With the one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill, these programs will be available for the 2024 season. Please call your FSA county office and make an appointment soon to ensure your elections are made and contracts signed well ahead of the deadlines. I also would note the deadline for enrollment is **March 15, 2024**, even if you don't make any new elections. Staff can also work with producers via phone, email and through Box and OneSpan, our electronic options for sharing and signing FSA forms.

In late November, the USDA announced a waiver of the notice of loss reporting period for 2023 for the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) and [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). For producers who incurred ELAP eligible losses in 2023, producers will need to submit a notice of loss **by January 30, 2024**. For LIP, the payment application and notice of loss deadline is **February 29, 2024**, for the 2023 program year.

Did your specialty crop operation recently incur on-farm food safety program expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar year 2023? You may be eligible for financial assistance through FSA's [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program](#) (FSCSC). This program helps offset costs to comply with regulatory requirements and market-driven food safety certification requirements. FSCSC will cover a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing their certification, as well as a percentage of their related expenses. FSA will accept FSCSC applications for program year 2023 through **January 31, 2024**.

Most folks this time of year are reviewing their financing options for the next growing season. If you are having trouble securing commercial credit, or you are a youth, beginning farmer, member of an ethnic minority or a female producer, FSA has a number of farm loan program options that might be the right fit for you. FSA offers direct operating and ownership loans as well as guaranteed loans in partnership with your local lender. We encourage you to view the various [farm loan program options](#), and then call your [local FSA farm loan team](#) to begin the conversation.

FSA also launched an online application for Direct loan customers. The Online Loan Application (OLA) tool is interactive, guided, paperless, and provides customers with features such as an electronic signature option, the ability to attach documents such as tax returns, and to complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan. Visit [farmers.gov/loan-application](#). The OLA tool is only available to producers who will be, or are currently, operating their agricultural operation as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

Additional program details and more in-depth information is provided in our newsletter. Please don't hesitate to contact your [County FSA office](#) for questions about our programs, loans and information that is included in this newsletter edition.

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## **RMA's Livestock Roadshow has a virtual event scheduled for Jan. 17**

Have you 'herd?' RMA is holding a virtual informational session on crop insurance options for livestock producers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is hosting a virtual workshop in January for producers to learn about new and expanded livestock risk management products. The "Livestock Roadshow," hosted by USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), will highlight policy improvements based on feedback from America's livestock producers, part of the agency's broader outreach and education efforts. **The Livestock Roadshow virtual session is scheduled for January 17. [Learn more, get login information and add to your calendar.](#)**

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## Signup for 2023 Assistance for On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for Specialty Crop Growers

*Deadline for Calendar Year 2023 Applications is Jan. 31, 2024*

The USDA reminds specialty crop growers that assistance is available for producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification through the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program. Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2023 expenses **through Jan. 31, 2024.**

### Program Details

FSCSC assists specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses pertaining to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar year 2023. FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing its certification, as well as a portion of related expenses.

To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation; meet the definition of a small business or very small business; and have paid eligible expenses related to the 2023 certification.

Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:

- Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification.
- Maintaining or updating an existing food safety plan.
- Food safety certification.
- Certification upload fees.
- Microbiological testing for products, soil amendments and water.
- Training.

FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each category of eligible costs. A higher payment rate has been set for socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. Details about the payment rates and limitations can be found at [farmers.gov/food-safety](https://farmers.gov/food-safety).

### Applying for Assistance

The FSCSC application period for 2023 closes Jan. 31, 2024. FSA will issue payments after the application period closes. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application. The application, along with other required documents, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means.

Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist. Visit [farmers.gov/food-safety](https://farmers.gov/food-safety) for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

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## Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend Jan. 31 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 January 31 from 2-3 p.m. ET. [Register Here](#)

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## USDA Wetland Reserve Easement Application Deadline Approaching

***Apply By February 16, 2024***

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Ohio Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is urging landowners interested in restoring, enhancing, and protecting wetlands to apply to the Wetlands Reserve Easement Program (WRE). Applications are taken on a continuous basis, however landowners should apply by the February 16, 2024 deadline for fiscal year 2024 funding.

Wetland Reserve Easements include land development protection, critical wildlife habitat creation and water quality improvement. Many of the state's landowners can take advantage of this program, as eligible lands include farmed or converted wetlands that can successfully be restored; croplands or grasslands subject to flooding; and previously restored wetlands and riparian areas that connect protected wetland areas.

WRE enrollment options include permanent easements and 30-year easements. NRCS staff are available to help landowners plan and implement individual projects. The agency will pay a percent of the land's value as well as restoration costs for each easement option.

Find Ohio's ranking dates as well as other program information on the [Ohio NRCS WRE website](#) or contact Barbara Baker at [barbara.baker2@usda.gov](mailto:barbara.baker2@usda.gov). To learn more about other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit [Get Started with NRCS](#) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

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# USDA is Accepting Applications for the 1890 National Scholars Program

The application window for the 2024 [USDA 1890 National Scholars Program](#) is open.

This program provides educational and career opportunities for U.S. citizens seeking bachelor's degrees from an 1890 Land Grant University. The scholarship provides full tuition, fees, books, room and board to students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher pursuing degrees in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines. Scholars are also eligible for summer internships that may convert to full-time employment with USDA after graduation.

## Additional requirements for High School applicants:

- Have applied for or have been accepted at an 1890 Land-Grant University
- Have a high school diploma with an unweighted GPA of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate
- Minimum test scores: ACT 21 composite or SAT 1080 combined verbal/math
- Study food, agriculture, natural resource sciences, or other related disciplines
- Demonstrate leadership and community service

## Additional requirements for college applicants:

- Be a college freshman or sophomore
- Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better on a 4.0 scale
- Attend an 1890 Land-Grant University
- Study food, agriculture, natural resource sciences, or other related discipline
- Demonstrate leadership and community service

Please visit [USDA 1890 National Scholars Program](#) for more information or contact the USDA Office of Partnerships & Public Engagement at (202) 720-6350 or [1890init@usda.gov](mailto:1890init@usda.gov) with questions.

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## Producers Encouraged to Apply for USDA's Continuous Conservation Reserve Program

The FSA is now accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP). USDA's FSA encourages agricultural producers and landowners who are interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners. Additionally, producers participating in CRP can now apply to re-enroll if their contracts will expire this year.

To submit an offer, producers should contact their [County FSA office](#) by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by Oct. 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed

the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

Additionally, producers with acres enrolled in Continuous CRP set to expire Sept. 30, 2024, can now offer acres for re-enrollment. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring Sept.30, 2024.

FSA water quality practices, such as riparian buffers, prairie strips, grassed waterways, and wetlands, will receive an additional 20% incentive. Buffer practices have a positive impact on water quality. Additionally, the Climate-Smart Practice Incentive launched in 2021 is also available in the Continuous signup.

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## **Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs Receive 2018 Farm Bill One Year Extension, Farmers Can Now Enroll for the 2024 Crop Year**

The USDA recently announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting Dec. 18, 2023. **The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.**

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

### **2024 Elections and Enrollment**

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

### **Crop Insurance Considerations**

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

### **Web-Based Decision Tools**

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

### **More Information**

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their [County FSA office](#). Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

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## **USDA Makes Producer-Friendly Change to 2023 Notice of Loss Requirements for Two Livestock Disaster Assistance Programs**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has waived certain notice of loss requirements for 2023 for the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish](#) (ELAP) and [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). In an effort to streamline assistance to support access to critical 2023 natural disaster recovery assistance, USDA's FSA is waiving the requirement to submit ELAP or LIP notices of loss within a pre-determined number of days for 2023. Instead, producers have the flexibility to submit 2023 notices of loss as soon as possible, once losses are realized, following a natural disaster event or no later than the established annual program application for payment deadlines for each program. FSA county committees are also being asked to re-evaluate 2023 ELAP and LIP late-filed notices of loss to determine if the waiver applies.

### **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish**

ELAP provides recovery assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish losses due to an eligible adverse weather or loss condition, including blizzards, disease, water shortages and wildfires. ELAP covers grazing and feed losses, transportation of water and feed to livestock and hauling livestock to grazing acres. ELAP also covers certain mortality losses for livestock including honeybees and farm-raised fish as well as honeybee hive losses. ELAP is designed to address losses not covered by other FSA disaster assistance programs.

For 2023, FSA is waiving the regulatory requirement for producers who are eligible for ELAP to file a notice of loss with FSA within 30 calendar days from when the loss first became apparent for livestock and farm-raised fish and 15 calendar days for honeybees. Under this waiver, notices of loss are to be completed by the eligible producer and submitted to FSA no



later than the annual program application deadline of January 30 following the program year in which the loss occurred. Therefore, producers who incurred ELAP-eligible losses in 2023, will need to submit a notice of loss by Jan. 30, 2024.

### **Livestock Indemnity Program**

LIP provides disaster recovery assistance to livestock owners and contract growers who experience livestock deaths, in excess of normal mortality caused by eligible loss conditions including adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law, including wolves and avian predators. LIP also helps livestock owners who must sell livestock at a reduced price because of an injury from certain loss conditions.

For 2023, FSA is waiving the regulatory requirement for producers who are eligible for LIP to file a notice of loss within 30 calendar days from when the loss first became apparent. Under this waiver, producers are still required to complete and submit the notice of loss to FSA no later than the annual program payment application date, which is 60 calendar days following the program year in which the loss occurred. The LIP payment application and notice of loss deadline is Feb. 29, 2024, for the 2023 program year.

### **2023 Disapproved Applications**

FSA county committees will review all notices of loss for both ELAP and LIP that were previously disapproved for the 2023 program year due to late filing and re-evaluate them to determine if the waiver applies. To receive ELAP and LIP benefits, producers will still need to file an application for payment by the established program deadline for the 2023 program year. Producers who are unsure about the status of their notice of loss or application for payment, should contact their local FSA county office as soon as possible.

### **Supporting Documentation**

Accurate records and loss documentation are critical following disaster events and are required when filing notices of loss with FSA. Acceptable loss documentation includes:

- Documentation of the number, kind, type, and weight range of livestock that have died, supplemented, if possible, by photographs or video records of ownership and losses.
- Rendering truck receipts by kind, type, and weight - important to document prior to disposal.
- Beginning inventory supported by birth recordings or purchase receipts.
- Documentation from Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Department of Natural Resources, or other sources to substantiate eligible death losses due to an eligible loss condition.
- Documentation that livestock were removed from grazing pastures due to an eligible adverse weather or loss condition.
- Costs of transporting livestock feed to eligible livestock, such as receipts for equipment rental fees for hay lifts and snow removal.
- Feed purchase receipts if feed supplies or grazing pastures are destroyed.
- Number of gallons of water transported to livestock due to water shortages.



For more information about FSA programs, contact your [County FSA office](#).

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## USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online

FSA has launched an [online application for Direct Loan customers](#). More than 26,000 customers who submit a Direct Loan application each year can now use an online, interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan.

The online farm loan application replicates the support an applicant would receive when completing a loan application in person with an FSA Farm Loan Officer, while continuing to provide customers with one-on-one assistance as needed. This tool and other process improvements allow farmers and ranchers to submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete and withdrawn applications.

Through a personalized dashboard, borrowers can track the progress of their loan application. It can be accessed on [farmers.gov](#) or by completing FSA's Loan Assistance Tool at [farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool](#). To use the online loan application tool, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). For the initial stage, the online application tool is only available for producers who will be, or are currently, operating their farm as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

### Farm Loan Improvement Efforts

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate Farm Loan Program customer-facing business processes. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a Direct Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool on farmers.gov](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the Direct Loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.

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## USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Partners with Ohio to Award \$12.4 Million to Strengthen Food Supply Chain Infrastructure

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) today announced it has a cooperative agreement with Ohio under the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI). Through this agreement, USDA and Ohio are working together to offer \$12.4 million in competitive grant funding for projects designed to build resilience across the middle of the supply chain. Ohio is accepting applications for this Infrastructure Grant funding through March 15, 2024.

In May 2023, [USDA announced](#) the availability of up to \$420 million through RFSI to strengthen local and regional food systems. Through this program, AMS has entered into cooperative agreements with state agencies, commissions, or departments responsible for agriculture, commercial food processing, seafood, or food system and distribution activities or commerce activities in states or U.S. territories. RFSI is authorized by the American Rescue Plan.

“This partnership between USDA and Ohio is allowing critical funding to reach areas of the supply chain that need it most,” said USDA Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Jenny Lester Moffitt. “The projects funded through this program will create new opportunities for the region’s small and midsize producers to thrive, expand access to nutritious food options, and increase supply chain resiliency.”

Using RFSI funding, the Ohio Department of Agriculture will build resilience in the middle-of-the-supply-chain and strengthen local and regional food systems by creating new revenue streams for Ohio producers. Funded projects will address challenges getting agricultural products through the supply chain by focusing on areas such as increasing ambient and refrigerated storage, expanding processing infrastructure, and increasing the competitiveness of smaller businesses. The state’s priorities are informed by stakeholder engagement and outreach to underserved producers to better understand their needs.

“A strong Ohio depends on a strong agriculture community,” said Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Brian Baldrige. “The RFSI grant program will help ensure we’re thoroughly investing in local producers and supporting Ohio’s food system. These grants create more economic opportunities for our communities and the farmers who help feed our state.”

Those interested in receiving a subaward should apply directly through the [Ohio Department of Agriculture](#) by March 15, 2024. AMS encourages applications that serve smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and underserved communities.

For more information, visit the AMS [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure webpage](#).

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## January 2024 Loan and Interest Rates

Farm Operating Loans, Direct	-- 5.625%
Farm Ownership Loans, Direct	-- 5.875%
Limited Resource Loans	-- 5.000%
Farm Ownership Loans, Down Payment	-- 1.875%
Farm Ownership – Joint Financing	-- 3.875%
Emergency Loans	-- 3.750%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 3 year	-- 4.375%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 5 year	-- 4.125%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 7 year	-- 4.250%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 10 year	-- 4.125%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 12 year	-- 4.250%
Sugar Storage Facility Loans, 15 year	-- 4.375%
Commodity Loans	-- 6.125%

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# Dates to Remember

**January 16** ----- **Deadline** to report apples and grapes to FSA.

**January 17** ----- Application **deadline** to submit an application for the [Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act, Discrimination Financial Assistance Program](#).

**January 30** ----- **Deadline** to file a notice of loss and application for payment for ELAP. The 30-calendar-day (livestock and farm-raised fish) and 15-calendar-day (honeybees) timeframes to submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent for the 2023 and subsequent program years, has been waived. The new deadline for filing a notice of loss under ELAP will be the same as the final date to submit an application for payment, which is 30 calendar days following the program year of which the loss occurred.

**January 30** ----- **Deadline** for the 2023 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) Application and all supporting documentation.

**January 31** ----- **Final** loan and LDP availability for 2023 LDPs for wool and unshorn lamb pelts.

**January 31** ----- The [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops](#) (FSCSC) application deadline for 2023.

**February 20** --- George Washington's Birthday. **USDA Service Center is Closed.**

**February 29** --- **Deadline** to file a notice of loss and application for payment for LIP. The 30-calendar-day timeframe to submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent for the 2023 and subsequent program years has been waived. The new deadline for filing a notice of loss under LIP will be the same as the final date to submit an application for payment, which is 60 calendar days after the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred.

**March 1** --- Primary Nesting Season begins.

**March 15** - Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) election and enrollment application **deadline** for 2024 crop season.

**March 15** - **Deadline** to obtain 2024 NAP coverage on spring planted crops.

**March 15** - **Deadline** to purchase NAP coverage for hemp. NAP will be available for 2024 to provide insurance-type coverage due to adverse weather conditions. NAP provides coverage against loss for hemp grown for fiber, grain, seed, or cannabidiol (CBD) for the 2024 crop year where no permanent federal crop insurance program is available.

**March 31** - **Final Availability** for 2023 crop wheat, barley, oats, honey loans and LDPs.

## **Ongoing Reminders:**

**ERP 2022** signup started Oct. 31, 2023. The application deadline has not yet been determined and will be announced at a later date.

Reports of Failed Acreage must be filed with the FSA County Office before disposition of the crop.

Reports of Prevented Planting Acreage must be filed with the FSA County Office no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date for that county and producers of hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes apparent.

Contact FSA right away for notice of loss deadlines and disaster program requirements.

FSA is continually receiving new applications for loan programs.

Inform the office of bank account changes.

Inform FSA if you have picked up or dropped any farm(s).

Inform FSA of farm and cropland boundary changes.

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## Ohio FSA State Office

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Visit the Ohio FSA website at: [www.fsa.usda.gov/oh](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/oh)

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### Ohio FSA State Committee Members

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