



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rhode Island Service Center Newsletter - April 2023

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

In This Issue:

- [Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer](#)
- [USDA Announces Additional Assistance for Distressed Farmers Facing Financial Risk](#)
- [Rolling Out Revenue Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs](#)
- [Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers](#)
- [USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records](#)
- [Sign up by April 21 for Rhode Island Conservation Programs](#)
- [Rhode Island State Technical Team meeting to be held Tues., April 18, 2023](#)
- [USDA Seeking Applications to Expand Conservation Assistance to Underserved Producers](#)
- [USDA Announces Cooperative Agreements for Compost and Food Waste Reduction](#)
- [USDA's Modernized Soil Lab Data Mart Website Provides User-Friendly, State-of-the-Art Data](#)

Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer



“Keep your eyes on the stars, keep your feet on the ground.”

- Theodore Roosevelt Jr, 26th President of the United States of America

Over this past year I have been reflecting on Rhode Island agriculture. I came to Rhode Island in 1980 with USDA and during that time I recall some effort by the state in hiring an ‘expert’ from Texas, I believe, to assess the condition of agricultural in Rhode Island. If my memory serves me correctly, and my wife will tell you that

sometimes it doesn't, the bottom line of the recommendation for Rhode Island agriculture was, to paraphrase it, 'forget it, focus on tourism'.

Well, based upon the US Agricultural Census over the last forty years, Rhode Island Agricultural has not gone away, it has thrived. We have seen an increase in farm numbers, and the farm size may have shrunk some, but that is because we have many more small farmers, working full and part-time in agriculture. Looking at the table below from the Ag Census, you can see the make-up of Rhode Island agriculture over the last forty years (thank you for the Ag Census and for those of you who participated, its, as you can see, important for us to count!).

Table 1. Historical Highlights: 2012 and Earlier Census Years
 [For meaning of abbreviations and symbols, see introductory text.]

All farms	2012	2007	2002	1997	Not adjusted for coverage			
					1997	1992	1987	1982
Farmsnumber	1,243	1,219	858	994	735	649	701	728
Land in farmsacres	69,589	67,819	61,223	65,083	55,256	49,601	58,685	62,466
Average size of farmacres	56	56	71	65	75	76	84	86
Estimated market value of land and buildings ¹								
Average per farmdollars	786,093	936,229	658,290	401,259	442,402	481,783	420,279	237,141
Average per acredollars	14,041	16,828	9,225	6,128	5,885	6,304	4,748	2,760
Estimated market value of all machinery and equipment ²\$1,000	69,689	79,457	47,926	34,283	28,517	24,479	25,178	18,824
Average per farmdollars	56,065	65,343	57,882	34,490	38,799	37,718	35,918	25,893
Farms by size:								
1 to 9 acres	433	353	208	258	181	128	131	113
10 to 49 acres	451	484	305	369	257	237	250	273
50 to 179 acres	278	308	271	286	221	215	241	251
180 to 499 acres	70	67	63	66	61	57	66	82
500 to 999 acres	7	5	6	13	13	10	11	6
1,000 to 1,999 acres	1	-	4	1	1	2	2	3
2,000 acres or more	3	2	1	1	1	-	-	-

So, what is the future for Rhode Island agriculture? I would like to think its bright, especially when we look at the world around us, we are experiencing changes in weather patterns, too much rain, not enough, supply line disruptions, increased costs of fuel, fertilizer and just about anything that a farmer needs.

It's becoming more and more apparent to me that local agriculture needs to respond to the growing need of locally produced food. Our USDA agencies are working with our partners at the RI Division of Agriculture, Farm Fresh RI, URI, RI Farm Bureau, and over 20 other agricultural focused stakeholders to assist our farmers with programs, financial assistance and technical assistance. This newsletter is one of the ways we try to reach out to you. And if you know of any farmer, big or small, who is not connected to the many programs out there, please help connect them!

The Future of US Agriculture

By: Nick Bradford

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Share on LinkedIn](#)

Did you know?

The US agriculture sector produces over \$300 billion per year in commodities.

Weeds cause the largest loss in global crop production (34%), followed by insects (18%), and diseases (16%).

Plants require carbon dioxide to grow and could not survive without it. However, a warming climate resulting from increased emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere will make it more difficult for farmers to grow crops and raise animals in some places. A changing climate impacts agriculture directly through changes in the frequency and intensity of [extreme weather events](#), and indirectly through the spread of stressors such as weeds, diseases, and insect pests.

Heavier and more frequent [precipitation events](#) can damage plant roots and [erode soils](#), which can prevent crops from growing. Extreme flooding events also harm crops and reduce yields. For example, a flood along the Mississippi River in 2008 that occurred right before the harvest period for many crops caused an estimated \$8 billion loss for farmers.

Crops tend to grow faster in warmer temperatures, which reduces the amount of time that plants have to grow and mature. This can reduce crop yields when [soils are not able to provide nutrients](#) at the rates required for faster-growing plants. Excessive heat coupled with [drought](#) in some areas is also a challenge, as reduced water availability makes it more difficult to keep up with the water demands of some crops.

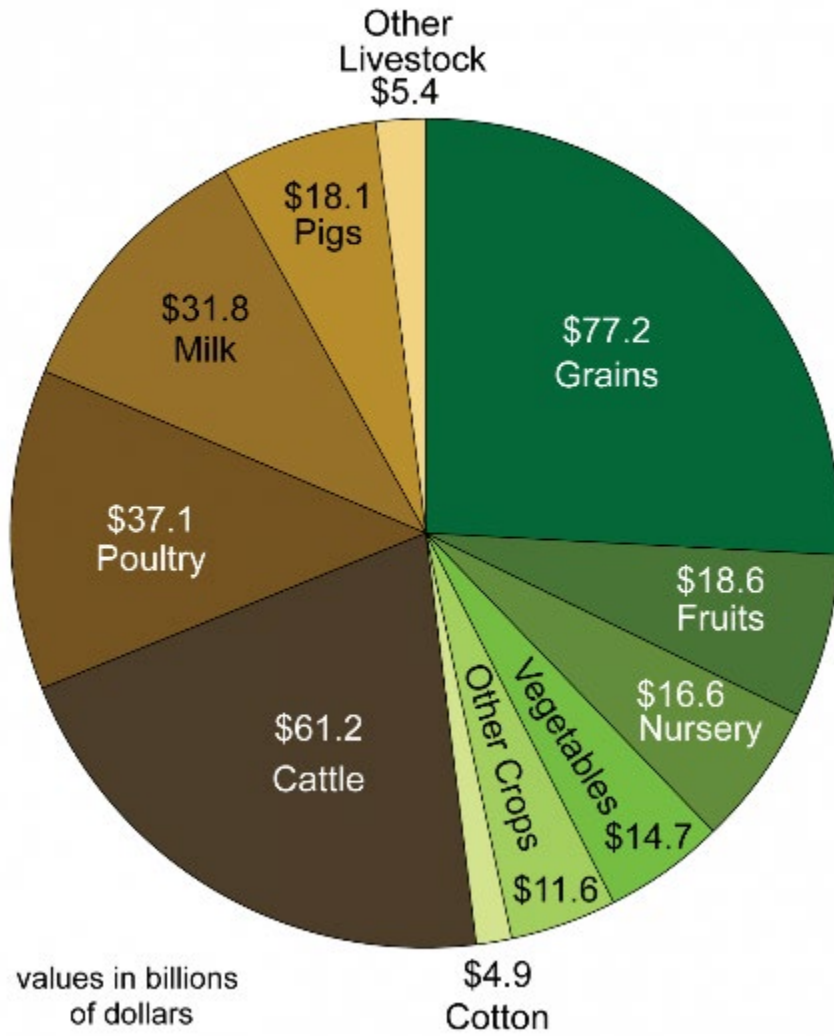
Agriculture production in the United States is also largely impacted by weeds, insects, and diseases. Controlling weeds alone costs the US more than \$11 billion per year. A climate with warmer temperatures, wetter conditions in some places, and increased carbon dioxide levels will increase the presence of weeds, pests, and fungi that thrive under these conditions. For example, the European corn borer pest has increased its reproductive rates in the northern and southern Corn Belt due to higher winter and summer temperatures.

Climate disruptions to agriculture, including extreme weather impacts and the spread of stressors, have increased over the past 40 years and are projected to continue increasing by mid-century and beyond. It is important for farmers to understand how changing climate patterns may impact their operations so that they can develop adaptation strategies to meet agricultural demands.

LEARN MORE

US agriculture includes 300 different commodities with a nearly equal division between crop and livestock products. This chart shows a breakdown of the monetary value of US agriculture products by category.

U.S. Agriculture



USDA Announces Additional Assistance for Distressed Farmers Facing Financial Risk



New Assistance for Distressed Borrowers

FSA intends to provide the new round of relief starting in April to additional distressed borrowers. This will include approximately \$123 million in automatic financial assistance for qualifying Farm Loan Program (FLP) direct loan borrowers who meet certain criteria. Similar to the automatic payments announced in October 2022, qualifying borrowers will receive an individual letter detailing the assistance as payments are made. Distressed borrowers' eligibility for these new categories of automatic payments will be determined based on their circumstances as of today. More information about the new categories that make up the \$123 million in assistance announced today and the specific amount of assistance a distressed borrower receives can be found described in this fact sheet, [IRA Section 22006: Additional Automatic Payments, Improved Procedures, and Policy Recommendations](#).

To continue to make sure producers are aware of relief potentially available to them, all producers with open FLP loans will receive a letter detailing a new opportunity to receive assistance if they took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their FLP loans, such as taking on more debt, selling property or cashing out retirement accounts. The letter will provide details on eligibility, the specific types of actions that may qualify for assistance, and the process for applying for and providing the documentation to seek that assistance.

These steps are part of a process USDA announced along with the October payments that is focused on assisting borrowers unable to make their next scheduled installment. Earlier this year,

all borrowers should have received a letter detailing the process for seeking this type of assistance even before they become delinquent. Borrowers who are within two months of their next installment may seek a cashflow analysis from FSA using a recent balance sheet and operating plan to determine their eligibility.

Tax Resources

USDA will continue to work with the Department of Treasury to help borrowers understand the potential tax implications from the receipt of an IRA payment, including that options may be available to potentially avoid or alleviate any tax burden incurred as a result of receiving this financial assistance.

In early April, USDA will send a specific set of revised tax documents, educational materials and resources to borrowers that received assistance in 2022, including a link to a webinar hosted by a group of farm tax experts to provide education on the options available. USDA cannot provide tax advice and encourages borrowers to consult their own tax professional, but FSA is providing educational materials for borrowers to be aware of the options. USDA has tax-related resources available at farmers.gov/taxes.

Improved Procedures and Policy Recommendations

FSA is finalizing changes to its policy handbooks to remove unnecessary hurdles, improve loan making and loan servicing and provide more flexibility on how loans are structured to maximize the opportunities for borrowers. Additional details on those changes can be found in the [linked fact sheet](#) and are the start of a broader set of process enhancements. The fact sheet also provides information on the eight, no-cost legislative proposals included in the Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget that are designed to improve the borrower experience.

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 \(ERP\)](#) 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 \(PARP\)](#) 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).

Please contact the **Rhode Island FSA County Office at 401-828-3120 Option 1** for more information on ERP Phase Two, PARP and our full portfolio of conservation, prices support, safety-net, credit and disaster assistance programs.

Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers



A multi-agency guide for USDA assistance for underserved farmers and ranchers is now available. If you are a farmer or rancher and are a minority, woman, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producer, you can use this booklet to learn about assistance and targeted opportunities available to you. This includes programs offered through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. [Download the guide here.](#) The guide is also available in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese on farmers.gov/translations.

USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;

- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

[Farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov) now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

Sign up by April 21 for Rhode Island Conservation Programs



NRCS announces additional financial assistance opportunities for FY 2023 for Rhode Island farmers and forest landowners under the **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**, **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)**, and **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**. NRCS also has \$780K of additional funding available to help farmers and forest landowners apply climate-smart agriculture practices through the **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**.

The application ranking cut-off is April 21, 2023.

Program Options

NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy and habitats through voluntary conservation programs:

- **AMA-RMA** helps small farmers use conservation to manage risk and solve natural resource issues. NRCS administers the AMA conservation provisions while the Agricultural Marketing Service and Risk Management Agency implement other provisions under AMA.

- **CSP** helps farmers and forest landowners to maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. Participants receive annual CSP payments and earn additional practice payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.
- **EQIP-IRA** and **CSP-IRA** helps farmers and forest landowners apply climate-smart practices to improve their operations' resiliency and productivity. Investments in practices like cover crops, conservation tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting, forage and hay planting, and livestock waste management benefit the environment, and the producer's bottom line, by conserving water, improving soil health and wildlife habitat, and reducing runoff.
- **RCPP** provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and forestland owners to address natural resource concerns through an array of conservation practices.
 - The **Rhode Island Statewide Natural Systems Demonstration RCPP Project** has three focus areas:
 - *Eastern RI (Bristol and Newport counties)* – Funding for natural system-based approaches including floodplain restoration and riparian buffer restoration to reduce erosion, sediment transport and nutrient loading into surface waters.
 - *Northern RI (Providence County)* – Funding for natural systems-based approaches including green infrastructure improvements, riparian buffers, and stream corridor restoration to protect water quality in an inland, forested watershed.
 - *Southern RI (Kent and Washington counties)* – Funding for natural system-based approaches including green infrastructure to protect water quality in a coastal saltwater pond.
 - The **Rhode Island Farm Conservation Implementation Partnership RCPP** focuses on smaller farms within the **Scituate Reservoir Watershed**. To qualify, applicants need a completed comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP) in addition to a Farm Conservation Plan from the RI DEM Farm, Forest & Open Space Program.

Applying for Assistance

Funding is provided through a competitive process. NRCS accepts applications for its conservation programs year-round but sets state-specific ranking dates to evaluate applications for funding. These dates account for producer needs, staff workload and ensure potential participants have ample opportunity to apply. Interested participants should apply by **April 21, 2023**, to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Applications received after this ranking date will be

automatically deferred to the next funding period. Call your local NRCS Field Office or Conservation District Office, or visit www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov for more info or to apply.

[^ back to top](#)

Rhode Island State Technical Team meeting to be held Tues., April 18, 2023



Notice to all Rhode Island residents:

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, R. Phou Vongkhamdy, invites our NRCS conservation partners and clients to participate in a **virtual State Technical Team** meeting on Tuesday, **April 18, 2023**, from **9:00 to 11:00 a.m.**

The [State Technical Team](#) is an advisory committee to NRCS. Many important decisions about conservation programs are made at the state level, and NRCS professionals give strong consideration to Team recommendations. Team meetings are conducted as open discussions, and are focused on USDA programs and activities.

The meeting is open to the public, but registration is required so that participants can be provided with a link to access the meeting. To register or to send agenda items, contact Jermaine Jenkins at 401-822-8824 or Jermaine.jenkins@usda.gov.

People with disabilities who wish to participate in the meeting and require special accommodation, please contact Allie Brown in advance at allie.brown@usda.gov or 401-822-8841.

[^ back to top](#)

USDA Seeking Applications to Expand Conservation Assistance to Underserved Producers



USDA is seeking applications for projects that will improve outreach to underserved producers and underserved communities about conservation programs and services and opportunities for students to pursue careers in agriculture, natural resources and related sciences. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering up to \$70 million in cooperative agreements with entities for two-year projects that encourage participation in NRCS programs, especially in underserved communities and among urban and small-scale producers. Applications must be received by **April 27, 2023**. See the [grants.gov announcement](#) for details and application instructions. [Learn more...](#)

[^ back to top](#)

USDA Announces Cooperative Agreements for Compost and Food Waste Reduction



USDA announces the availability of up to \$9.5 million nationwide for **Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CFWR) pilot projects** for fiscal year 2023. The cooperative agreements support projects that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans. Eligible entities in Rhode Island are encouraged to apply by **June 15, 2023**. [Learn more...](#)

[^ back to top](#)

USDA's Modernized Soil Lab Data Mart Website Provides User-Friendly, State-of-the-Art Data



The newly updated [Lab Data Mart website](#) brings valuable soil data to the public's fingertips through a user-friendly, state-of-the-art interactive map and database. Architects, educators,

engineers, farmers, landowners, researchers, scientists, and anyone looking to learn more about their soil can access the latest data to make more informed decisions and reduce potential soil risks and hazards. Understanding your specific soil and its dynamic properties – which can change over time due to human impacts, land management, and climate change – can be invaluable. [Learn more...](#)

[^ back to top](#)



Rhode Island USDA

60 Quaker Lane
Warwick, RI 02886

RI FSA County Office:	401-828-3120 Option 1
RI FSA Farm Loan Team:	401-828-3120 Option 2
RI FSA State Office:	401-828-3120 Option 3
RI NRCS Field Offices:	401-828-1300
RI NRCS State Office:	401-822-8813
Risk Management Agency:	919-875-4880

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