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Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer

"Essentially, all life depends upon the soil... There can be no life without soil and no soil without life; they have evolved together."

— Charles E. Kellogg, USDA Yearbook of Agriculture, 1938

Recent heavy rains have had a devastating impact on farms throughout the Northeast region, including here in Rhode Island. Floods along the New England's major rivers has resulted in some of the most severe damage, but farms across all of the northeast have experienced crop losses due to swollen rivers and streams.

The floods are the latest in a series of challenges farmers have faced so far in 2023 (unseasonably mild temperatures followed by a deep freeze in February, a spring frost in May, and 'droughts' in



July), and some reports have been coming into our FSA County Office.

Getting assistance

The USDA encourages Rhode Island farmers affected by recent events to take the following steps to receive assistance:

- **Report your losses:** All impacted farmers should report their losses to our local USDA Farm Service Agency (contact information is below). The URI Cooperative Extension Service sent out a simple survey form to producers and stakeholders around the state to gather information on impacts to producers. This information will assist support our request for our federal agriculture disaster declaration from USDA. This declaration allows farmers to apply for assistance such as emergency loans. Please note: an agricultural disaster was recently declared for the May frost event, and farmers can apply for assistance through our local USDA Farm Service Agency.
- **For the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP),** producers will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For LFP, producers must provide a completed application for payment and required supporting documentation to their FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the grazing loss occurred.
- **For the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP),** producers should contact our FSA County Office for guidelines on submitting a notice of loss and filing an acreage certification.
- **Business support and stress relief resources:** If you are looking for other assistance in business support or are dealing with stress, you might contact the Land & Sea Together office at: | landandseatogether.org.

USDA Offers Disaster Program Flexibilities for Flood-Impacted Producers in the Northeast

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) have authorized policy flexibilities for key disaster assistance programs and crop insurance to aid Northeast agricultural operations that have been significantly impacted by recent flooding in 2023.

Farm Service Agency Policy Flexibilities

FSA has authorized policy exceptions in all flood-impacted counties in **Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.**

These flexibilities apply to the following commodity price support, crop and livestock disaster assistance and conservation programs:

- [Farm Storage Facility Loans \(FSFL\)](#) borrowers experiencing financial hardship can request an annual installment deferral which will extend the next installment due date

by one year. FSFL provides eligible producers with financing to build or upgrade farm storage and handling facilities.

- For livestock producers in need of alternative feed sources, FSA is authorizing emergency haying for up to 60 calendar days or emergency grazing for up to 90 calendar days on [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\)](#). CRP participants enter 10 to 15-year contracts and agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.
- For producers who have a [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) policy on crop for which federal crop insurance is not available, FSA has waived the 72-hour notification requirement for filing a notice of loss for hand-harvested and other applicable crops. NAP provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters. FSA has waived the 72-hour notification requirements for notice of loss for hand-harvested and other applicable crops.
- The deadline to file a 2023 notice of loss for [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#) assistance has been extended to Jan. 30, 2024. ELAP compensates eligible producers for hive loss, stored feed and grazing losses.
- The deadline for filing a notice of loss for the [Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#) has been extended through Jan. 30, 2024. LIP provides benefits to eligible livestock owners and contract growers who experience livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by specific adverse weather including floods.
- The deadline for qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to submit an application and supporting documentation for [Tree Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#) has been extended through Jan. 30, 2024. TAP provides financial cost-share assistance to replant or, where applicable, rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines lost by natural disasters.

Additionally, Producers who are experiencing financial hardships and find themselves behind on their FSA [Marketing Assistance Loan \(MAL\)](#) repayment should contact their USDA Service Center to discuss repayment concerns with FSA staff. MALs provide interim financing at harvest time to help agricultural producers meet cash flow needs without having to sell their commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows.

Exceptions for Acreage Reporting Requirements

FSA uses annual acreage reports, as provided by producers for all cropland on a farm to determine program payment eligibility. The recent extreme flooding in the Northeast created challenges for producers needing to timely file their 2023 crop acreage report by the July 17 deadline. To ensure producers have adequate time to file, FSA is offering the following acreage reporting flexibilities for producers in flood-impacted counties:

- **2023 Crop Year** – All acreage reports filed within 30 days after the acreage reporting date will be considered timely filed. *This policy does not impact 2022 late-filed acreage reports which can only be accepted through the 2023 reporting date.*
- **2024 Crop Year** – For any crop that has an acreage reporting date before August 1, 2023, all acreage reports filed within 30 days after the reporting date will be considered timely.

- Organic **Plans** – Extreme flooding has caused a delay in producers receiving organic certifications. Check with your local FSA office for extended dates to submit documentation.

Risk Management Agency Flexibilities

RMA is authorizing crop insurance companies to apply flexibilities to reporting requirements and the claims process for producers impacted by the recent flooding in **Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont**. This ensures that producers will get paid as soon as possible without unnecessary delays.

Key flexibilities include:

- Producers who were unable to report their acreage by the deadline of July 17 due to the flooding will not lose coverage. The crop insurance company will address these situations on a case-by-case basis.
- Once a loss is known, producers typically have 72 hours to report a loss to their crop insurance agent. These modified procedures allow crop insurance companies to waive this requirement on a case-by-case basis when producers are not able to report due to the flooding event impacting communication and related infrastructure.
- Approved Insurance Providers are authorized to provide additional time for policyholders to make payment of premium and administrative fees.
- Electronic communication such as phone, text, or email are authorized for the producer to report information to their agent, such as production or policy elections. Additionally, the crop insurance company may provide verbal consent to sell, destroy or move crops if sending written notification is not feasible.
- Crop insurance companies can determine flooded crops to be a total loss and start the loss adjustment process if the producer certifies the crop will be destroyed.

More Information

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA programs, contact the Rhode Island Farm Service Agency County Office at 401-828-3120 Option 1. For NRCS programs, contact the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service at 401-828-1300 or visit www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov.

Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 – Discrimination Financial Assistance Program

The application period is now open for a new financial assistance program under Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm



lending programs prior to January 2021. The application process will close on October 31. Borrowers will have the option to apply for assistance online via 22007apply.gov or through a paper-based form.

Details about the program, including an application and e-filing portal, are available at 22007apply.gov. The website includes an English and Spanish language application that applicants can download or submit via an e-filing portal, information on how to obtain technical assistance in-person or virtually, and additional resources and details about the program. Applicants can also call the free call center at 1-800-721-0970, or visit one of several dozen brick-and-mortar offices the program has set up around the country. Locations are provided on the program website and vendors will update the local events schedule with more information as it becomes available. It is important to note that filing an application is FREE and does not require a lawyer.

If you want to get weekly updates on the program's events and progress, you can go to <https://22007apply.gov>, and subscribe to a weekly newsletter.

Stay Prepared for the 2023 Hurricane Season

Hurricane season is officially underway, and it lasts until November 30. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicts that the 2023 hurricane season will be near normal in the Atlantic and produce 12 to 17 named storms, of which five to nine could become hurricanes, including one to four major hurricanes.

USDA is encouraging producers to take precautions to prepare and protect their family and agricultural operations.



1. **Develop an Emergency Plan** - Ensure your household and employees know your hurricane plan, including meeting points, emergency contact lists, and alternate evacuation routes in case infrastructure is damaged.
2. **Remove Debris and Secure Large Objects** - Clean out culverts, ditches, and other drainage areas, especially before and during peak hurricane season to reduce water damage. Most injuries to animals, people, or structures during a hurricane are caused by flying objects. To lessen the risk, minimize the presence of equipment, supplies, and debris that may become airborne during high winds or encountered in floodwaters.
3. **Secure Important Records and Documents**- Pre- and post-hurricane documentation is extremely important for insurance compensation and recovery assistance. You'll want to have thorough records of damages and losses sustained on your farm as well as documentation of your cleanup and recovery efforts.
 - o It is critical to document inventory of farm buildings, vehicles, equipment, and livestock before a disaster occurs. Take photos, videos, or make written lists with descriptions. Keep copies of this inventory in multiple places: computer, off-site in a safe location, and on a cloud-based server where information is transmitted and saved weekly.

4. **Know Your Insurance Options-** Regularly review your insurance policies with your agent to be sure you have adequate coverage, including flood insurance, for your facilities, vehicles, farm buildings, crops and livestock. Note, there are limitations on how soon insurance coverage will take effect. Generally, insurance policies will not cover damage if the policy was not in place before a disaster.
5. **Gather Supplies** - Have drinking water, canned food, a generator, batteries, a flashlight, and fuel available in case you lose power. For widespread outages, credit and debit cards may not work, so have cash handy.
6. **Access Real-time Emergency Information-** Download the FEMA app for free on the App Store and Google Play for safety tips on what to do before, during, and after disasters. Subscribe to our [text message and email service](#) to receive real-time, local operational and recovery information from the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Risk Management Agency.

On farmers.gov, the [Hurricane Webpage](#), [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA programs, contact the Rhode Island Farm Service Agency County Office at 401-828-3120 Option 1. For NRCS programs, contact the [Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) at 401-828-1300 or visit www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov.

USDA Reminds Producers of Fall Application Deadlines for Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

USDA Rhode Island Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers of approaching application deadlines for purchasing risk coverage for some crops through the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops impacted by natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevented crop planting.

NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available, including forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass and more.

The upcoming application deadline of **September 30, 2023**, for NAP Value Loss coverage in all Rhode Island Counties for the 2024 production season include:

- Aquaculture
- Oysters
- Turf Grass
- Christmas Trees
- Ginseng

- Mushrooms
- Floriculture (except Chrysanthemums)

The application deadline of **November 20, 2023**, for NAP crop coverage in all Rhode Island Counties for the 2024 production season include:

- Cranberries
- Grapes
- Peaches
- Grass
- Mixed Forage
- Alfalfa
- Perennial Forage

NAP basic coverage is available at 55% of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50% of expected production. Buy-up coverage is available in some cases. NAP offers higher levels of coverage, ranging from 50% to 65% of expected production in 5% increments, at 100% of the average market price. Producers of organic crops and crops marketed directly to consumers also may exercise the “buy-up” option to obtain NAP coverage of 100% of the average market price at coverage levels ranging between 50% and 65% of expected production. Buy-up coverage is not available for crops intended for grazing.

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Premiums apply for buy-up coverage.

If a producer has a Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification (form CCC-860) on file with FSA, it may serve as an application for basic coverage for all eligible crops beginning with crop year 2022. These producers will have all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage waived. These producers may also receive a 50% premium reduction if higher levels of coverage are elected on form CCC-471, prior to the application closing date for each crop.

To learn more about NAP visit fsa.usda.gov/nap or contact the Rhode Island FSA County Office at 401-828-3120 opt 1.

Rhode Island Conservation Districts take the Soil Your Undies Soil Health Challenge!



NRICD Soil Conservationist, Marina Capraro, displays microbe-eaten undies dug up from the lawn at Snake Farm in Johnston, RI, on August 10, 2023, for the RI Soil Your Undies Challenge.

Have you ever wondered how healthy your soil is? Take the Soil Your Undies Challenge and find out!

Just bury a pair of cotton underwear around May-June and dig it back up after at least 60 days. It's the quick and dirty way to test the microbial activity in your soil. The more the underwear is deteriorated, the healthier your soil!

Whether you're on crop, pasture or forestland, the quick and dirty way to test your soil health is by "planting" a pair of new, 100% cotton underwear in the site you're curious about. That's what Marina Capraro, a Soil Conservationist with the Northern RI Conservation District, did on May 30 at Snake Den Farm. We joined her on August 10 to dig up the undies - and found out just how healthy Snake Den's soils are!

Your undies won't break down in just any soil. Healthy soil contains billions of microbes that consume the cotton. In fact, one teaspoon of healthy soil contains more microbes than there are people on the planet. In addition to chowing down on organic matter like cotton, microbes also help soil resist erosion, cycle nutrients, and store water.

Soil microbes are your best friends. The hungry microbes in your soil need food, shelter, and variety in order to thrive, just like us!

You can take care of your microbial friends by following these four steps:

1. **Avoid soil disturbance** wherever and whenever possible.
2. **Maximize soil cover** with living plants and residue.

3. **Maximize biodiversity** by growing a variety of plants and managed integration of livestock.
4. **Maximize living roots** in the soil throughout the year.

[Learn more...](#)

NRCS Helps Farmers & Communities Prepare for and Recover from Disasters



The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is investing in watershed infrastructure across Rhode Island to help communities recover from and prepare for natural disasters. NRCS is currently managing three Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) projects in East Providence, Middletown, and Narragansett resulting from last year's hurricane IDA. These projects include streambank stabilization and flood prevention. We are also managing watershed restoration planning and design projects in nine separate watersheds in response to extreme weather events.

EWP offers vital recovery options for local communities to help reduce hazards to life and property caused by floodwaters, droughts, wildfires, earthquakes, windstorms and other natural disasters.

NRCS encourages Ocean State communities and farmers to engage with local project sponsors, participate in developing a sound conservation plan that serves to protect and preserve local watersheds, and connect with your [local NRCS office](#) to learn more about Watershed Program assistance.

NRCS will continue to review requests for assistance from farmers and communities and compile another round of watershed funding as funds are available. Fact sheets, trainings and other resources are available online at www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov.

Restoring Wetlands on Private Lands Helps Wildlife & Communities

Wetlands, such as swamps, marshes, bogs and bottomland hardwood forests, are among the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world. This diversity makes wetlands extremely important to wildlife. Wetlands provide a productive habitat offering water, food, cover and nesting and feeding areas. On agricultural landscapes, wetlands are often the only refuge for animals.



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help you create or manage wetland habitat for wildlife through a practice called wetland wildlife habitat management. These practices help you increase populations of many different wildlife species, by creating a more favorable habitat.

Wetlands also help clean up water by keeping nutrients and sediment from flowing downstream, improving groundwater recharge, sequester carbon to help reduce greenhouse gases and providing recreational opportunities. They also help diminish flooding and damage downstream by providing areas where flood water can collect and slowly drain.

Not sure how to construct or improve a wetland for wildlife? Contact the Rhode Island NRCS office at 401-828-1300 or visit www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov.

Rhode Island NRCS Offices Closed Sept. 7

NRCS Rhode Island is committed to recognizing the strengths of all employees by providing training, tools, and support to demonstrate how diversity and inclusion lead to high performance and productivity.

On September 7th our RI NRCS offices will be closed while staff participate in our 2023 Diversity Day training hosted by our Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC). This year's program focuses on the theme of "A Sense of Place" – learning about other cultures, genders, and individuals to enable us to recognize and respect each person's sense of place and to understand that belonging can help build better relationships with customers and coworkers.



Please contact us at 401-828-1300 to schedule an appointment or visit us online at www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov for more information on our programs and services, and our efforts to become a more equitable organization.



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).