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Message from Rhode Island FSA County Executive Director Sheryl Michener

“Wherever your day takes you, and however it ends, chances are it began with a farmer.” – Unknown

Thank you, All our RI Farmers.

The RI FSA staff would like to wish everyone a Joyous and Healthy 2023 Holiday Season. As we wrap up the harvest and turn towards the colder months, it’s a great time to check in with us at the county office. We have a swarm, a herd, a ton and piles of programs that you may qualify for.

Are you raising bees? Now that they’re tucked in for the winter, it’s the perfect time to report how many hives you have. The deadline is **January 2, 2024**. This will set you up well to take advantage of the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP), a program designed to lighten the blow of a loss in livestock due to weather events. For those that are already working with us, the deadline to request ELAP assistance for losses that occurred in 2023 is **January 30, 2024**. The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) also has a deadline of **February 29, 2024**, to request assistance for 2023 calendar year losses.



Acreage Reporting Deadlines

In order to maintain program eligibility and benefits, producers must timely file acreage reports. Failure to file an acreage report by the crop acreage reporting deadline may result in ineligibility for future program benefits. FSA will not accept acreage reports provided more than a year after the acreage reporting deadline.

Upcoming acreage reporting deadlines for Rhode Island are:

- January 2nd, Honey (beehive colonies) and Maple Sap
- January 15th, Apples Cranberries, Grapes and Peaches

For more information, please contact the Rhode Island Farm Service Agency County Office at 401-828-3120 Option 1.

FSA Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) Office Hours - Flower Hill Institute

The [Flower Hill Institute](#) provides outreach and technical assistance through a Cooperative agreement with the Farm Service Agency to assist with reaching underserved producers. One of the outreach events hosted each month is a zoom meeting. This Friday’s topic is [Livestock Indemnity Program](#). It should make for some interesting discussion.

Please [register](#) before the event. 3:00 CDT, Friday, December 8, 2023.

Questions, contact Loretta Hinton, Outreach & Education Manager at lhinton@flowerhill.institute.

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 Farm Service Agency (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.



More Information

The improvements to ELAP and LIP build on others made since 2021. This includes ELAP benefits for above normal costs for hauling feed and water to livestock and transporting livestock to other grazing acres during a qualifying drought. FSA also [expanded eligible livestock](#) under ELAP, LIP, and the Livestock Forage Disaster Assistance Program, and increased the LIP payment rate for beef, beefalo, bison, and dairy animals less than 250 pounds and most recently beef calves over 800 pounds. Learn about USDA disaster assistance programs on [farmers.gov](#).

On [farmers.gov](#), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine [disaster protection and recovery](#) program or loan options. For more information about FSA programs, contact the Rhode Island Farm Service Agency County Office at 401-828-3120 Option 1.

USDA Extends Application Deadline for Discrimination Financial Assistance Program to Jan. 13

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 January 13, 2024. 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.

Rhode Island is Eligible for Emergency Loans

Farmers in the following counties are eligible for [Emergency Loans](#) through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Secretarial Designation S5634

For Excessive Rain 07/01/2023-10/31/2023

Rhode Island Contiguous Counties: Bristol, Newport and Providence

Emergency Loan Application Deadline: **07/17/2024**

Secretarial Designation S5482

For Excessive Rain and Flooding 07/02/2023 and continuing

Rhode Island Contiguous Counties: Kent and Washington

Emergency Loan Application Deadline: **05/06/2024**

Secretarial Designation S5475

For Rain and Flooding 07/09/2023-07/16/2023

Rhode Island Contiguous Counties: Bristol, Newport and Providence

Emergency Loan Application Deadline: **03/31/2024**

Secretarial Designation S5450

For Frost and Freeze 05/18/2023-05/18/2023

Rhode Island Contiguous Counties: Kent, Providence and Washington

Emergency Loan Application Deadline: **03/25/2024**



Secretarial Designation S5446

For Freeze 05/17/2023-05/18/2023

Rhode Island Contiguous Counties: Bristol, Newport, Providence

Emergency Loan Application Deadline: **03/11/2024**

Emergency loans help you recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding and other natural disasters or quarantine.

You have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for emergency loan assistance. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. You can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of \$500,000.

For more information, please contact the Rhode Island FSA Farm Loan Team at 401-828-3120 Option 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) 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. This tool is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, improve customers service, and expand credit access.



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

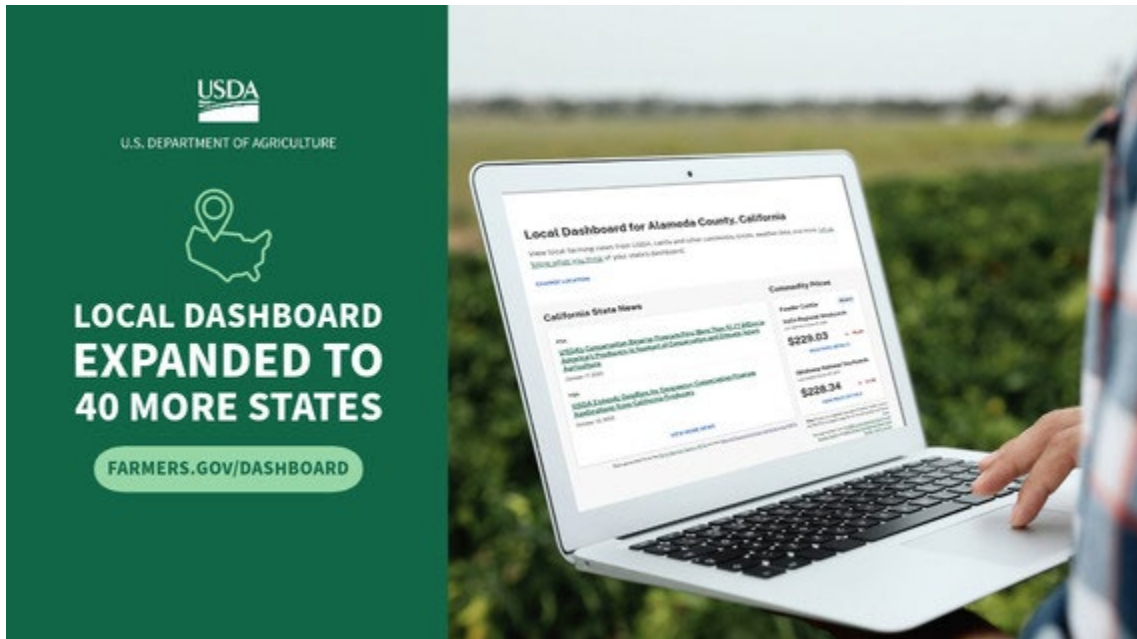
Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- 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.

More Information

FSA continues to accept and review individual requests for assistance from borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans or those who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact the RI FSA Farm Loan Team at 401-828-3120 Option 2 or visit farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance.

Farmers.gov Local Dashboard Now Available for Producers in Rhode Island



Farmers in Rhode Island can now access county specific farming data and USDA resources all in one place via the new [farmers.gov local dashboard](#). Your new farmers.gov local dashboard includes farming data and USDA resources including USDA news, commodity pricing, weather forecasts, historical climate data, past storm events, USDA service center locator and additional state resources for Rhode Island. The dashboard transforms complex

data sets into easy-to-read charts and graphs to help you quickly find information that matters to you.

Vegetable Seed Production Course and Mentorship Available to Growers Throughout the Northeast

To increase the number of growers able to produce high quality regionally adapted vegetable, herb, and flower seed in the northeast a group of educators, experienced seed producers, and regional seed companies is working together to offer a training in seed production and connect participants to markets for their seed. Last year 65 commercial growers participated in the course, and we are inviting another 65 to participate this season. The course is **free** through generous support of a Northeast SARE Research and Education grant, but we expect participants to fully engage in the course and to share their experiences with us at the end of the course.



The online course, which starts January 10th and runs for 10 weeks, is designed to help growers determine whether seed production is a good choice for their farm and then to guide them in selecting an initial seed crop to grow for sale, on-farm, or community use. Each week will feature guest speakers with expertise in seed production, plant pathology, seed economics, and more. During the course participants will form learning cohorts and will work with a mentor throughout the 2024 growing season to successfully produce a quality seed crop. The cohorts will have monthly group check-ins via Zoom and one-on-one access to a grower mentor experienced in producing their chosen seed crop. At the end of the season, participants can sell their marketable seed crops back to the companies that provided stock seed.

The grower mentors for this course bring substantial experience in seed production and will help participants deepen their understanding of how to cultivate vegetables to produce the highest quality seed. Amirah Mitchell has worked in agriculture and food justice since 2007. She founded her business, Sistah Seeds in Emmaus, PA, to connect black and brown growers to culturally important seeds. She primarily grows vegetable, herb and grain seeds from across the African diaspora, with a focus on African American, Afro-Caribbean, and West African cultural crops.

Our other commercial mentor for this project, Heron Breen, owns and operates Fruits of our Labors Farm in Saint Albans, Maine. His experience has been as a market farmer who has become almost solely a seed grower. He had the added benefit of working for a seed company (Fedco Seeds) for his "day" job or seasonal income. After 22 years in the seed trade, he is glad to be farming full-time, and with a near exclusive focus on seed growing.

If you are interested in being a part of the seed education cohort, please fill out our quick intake form by visiting this

link: https://cornell.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0DK2oimZ1gPcYnQ If you have any

questions about the project, you can reach Crystal at cls263@cornell.edu. For more information about the course, please reference the [course syllabus](#).

Rhode Island Farm Service Agency

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County Office Main Line 401-828-3120 Option 1

Sheryl Michener, County Executive Director 401-822-8862

sheryl.michener@usda.gov

Farm Loan Team 401-828-3120 Option 2

Matthew Richter, District Director 401-822-8855

matthew.richter@usda.gov

State Office Main Line 401-828-3120 Option 3

J. Eric Scherer, State Executive Director 401-822-8802

eric.scherer@usda.gov

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to discuss or apply for FSA programs, should contact Sheryl Michener at 401-822-8862.

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).