

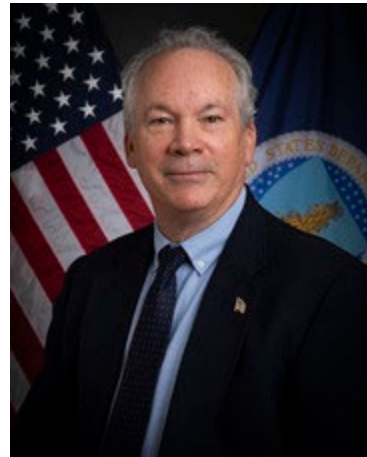
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Message from Rhode Island FSA State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer

"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



So, its 2024, and I am just getting used to writing 2024 on checks (well, I still do them once and a while, not as up to date on the newer methods of paying bills). I wanted to see what was being said out there for agriculture in the coming year and I found the following "Trends". I read through them and thought, well, these will not be a 'trends' in Rhode Island, but on closer look, I thought, maybe not today, but maybe tomorrow.

We will never get away from 'traditional' agriculture, preparing a seedbed, planting a seed and harvesting a crop, but how we do it will change. I will not stand behind this data, but I kind of recall that a number of decades ago it was said that we needed over 45 thousand acres of cropland to feed Rhode Islanders. This was of course never going to happen, with a conventional approach to agriculture. But today we are seeing more seasonal high tunnels, more Controlled Environment Agriculture (CES aka indoor agriculture for most of us), vertical farming, freight containers being used, roof top gardens, digital technology and GIS digital applications in the office vs. the field, and more innovations that will most likely involve AI and other technologies.

Things change, and I see our agency changing, with the introduction of kiosks in our county office to help clients, a new on-line loan application process, an electronic signature process and more. All of USDA is changing (see [USDA Announces Major Program Improvements, Progress, and Investments to Benefit American Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers](#)).

What I hope for in 2024 is a year of normal rainfall (when we need it), the right amount of growing degree days (and drying days for hay and harvesting of crops), fair prices for crops that provide a good return to farmers and a growing respect for our farmers and the land that they are stewards of.

Happy New Year!

Eric

From [Shaping Agriculture in 2024: Key Trends and Innovations \(agricolleges.com\)](#)

Trends for Shaping Agriculture in 2024:

Trend 1: AgriTech Integration

The integration of AgriTech is transforming traditional farming practices. From Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) devices to drones, technology optimises processes. [Agricolleges International](#), a pioneering online agricultural college, leads this shift by incorporating AI, IoT, and drones into its [curriculum](#). Students receive hands-on training, learn cost-benefit analysis, engage in interdisciplinary collaboration and understand the environmental impact of AgriTech integration.

Trend 2: Sustainable Practices

Sustainable agriculture gains momentum globally, and Agricolleges actively integrates eco-friendly farming methods into its courses. The “[Fundamentals of Good Agricultural Practices](#)” course goes beyond theory, emphasising practical applications of organic farming and biodiversity conservation. Their goal is to nurture environmentally conscious farmers ready to safeguard the planet’s future.

Trend 3: Data-Driven Farming

Data-driven farming revolutionises crop cultivation and resource management. Agricolleges equips students with skills in data collection, analysis, and application. The curriculum emphasises customisation of data solutions, cybersecurity awareness, collaboration with tech experts, continuous learning, and farm-level data interpretation.

Trend 4: Vertical Farming

[Vertical Farming](#) emerges as a solution to land scarcity, maximising space and reducing environmental impact. Agricolleges integrate principles like optimising vertical space, selecting suitable crops, investing in energy-efficient lighting, implementing water-conserving systems and educating on sustainable practices.

Trend 5: Global Agricultural Challenges

Climate change, food security, and globalisation present global challenges. Agricolleges prepare students for climate change with adaptive strategies and sustainable water management. The curriculum explores innovations to contribute to global food security and provides insights into navigating the global marketplace.

Rhode Island Farm Service Agency Announces County Committee Election Results

Rhode Island U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced that County Committee elections are over, and the ballots have been counted.

William Coulter has been elected to serve on the County Committee for LAA-3, Washington County.

Dawn Spears of Ashaway RI will serve as the first alternate and Michael Sullivan of Narragansett RI will serve as the second alternate.

County committee members are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA. They help deliver programs at the county level and work to serve the needs of local

producers. All recently elected county committee members will take office in January 2024 and will be joining the existing committee. Every FSA office is required to have a county committee, and they are made up of local farmers, ranchers and foresters who are elected by local producers.

Nearly 7,800 FSA county committee members serve FSA offices nationwide. Each committee has 3 to 11 elected members who serve three-year terms of office. Approximately one-third of county committee seats are up for election each year. County committee members impact the administration of FSA within a community by applying their knowledge and judgment to help FSA make important decisions on its commodity support programs, conservation programs, indemnity and disaster programs, emergency programs and eligibility.

County committee members impact producers through their decision making and help shape the culture of a local FSA office. They also ensure the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties and are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. Members conduct hearings and reviews as requested by the state committee, ensure underserved farmers, ranchers and foresters are fairly represented, make recommendations to the state committee on existing programs, monitor changes in farm programs and inform farmers of the purpose and provisions of FSA programs. They also assist with outreach and inform underserved producers such as beginning farmers, ranchers and foresters, about FSA opportunities.

For more information, visit the FSA website at fsa.usda.gov/elections or contact the Rhode Island County FSA office at 401-828-3120 Option 2.

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 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today 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.

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 the Rhode Island FSA County Office at 401-828-3120 Option 1. Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

Reminder: Discrimination Financial Assistance Program Apply by Jan. 13, 2024

USDA continues to accept applications for assistance through the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program for Rhode Island farmers 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 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 a 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.

Several entities are involved in the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program, with varying roles and responsibilities. The National Administrator and Regional Hubs are responsible for conducting outreach, assisting with the financial assistance application process, processing applications, managing program call centers, and operating local offices. Additional outreach and application support is provided by trusted community groups. These groups include [AgrAbility](#), the [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#), [Farmers' Legal Action Group](#), [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#), [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#), [Land Loss Prevention Program](#), [National Young Farmers Coalition](#), and [Rural Coalition](#).

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.

USDA Reminds Specialty Crop Growers of Deadline to Apply for Assistance for 2023 On-Farm Food Safety Expenses

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (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

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.

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 for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

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](https://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.

Tax Resources for USDA Program Participants

Navigating filing taxes can be challenging, especially if you are new to running a farm business, participating in disaster programs for first time, or trying to forecast the farm's tax bill. Receiving funds from USDA through activities such as a conservation program payment or a disaster program is considered farm income that includes a tax liability for farm businesses. USDA technical assistance is free and creates no tax implications.

At the end of the tax year, USDA issues tax forms 1098 and 1099 forms for farm loans, conservation programs administered by the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service including the Conservation Reserve Program and Environmental Quality

Incentives Program, crop disaster payments, and the Market Facilitation Program. USDA also issues tax forms for recipients of assistance for distressed borrowers, including through Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act.

If you have received tax forms related to your operation, USDA cannot and does not provide tax advice but wants you to be aware of options that may help manage your tax liability. USDA has partnered with experts to provide resources to help you make the right tax decisions for your operation. Monthly webinars are available for registration and to view on demand at <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/taxes>.

The [Tax Estimator Tool](#) is an interactive spreadsheet that producers can download to estimate tax liability. It is for informational and educational purposes and should not be considered tax or legal advice. Producers may need to work with a tax professional to determine the correct information to be entered in the Tax Estimator Tool.

We encourage you to visit <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/taxes> for more information on how to find and work with a tax preparer as well as instructions on how to request copies of USDA documents and links to other helpful tax resources.

RMA's Livestock Roadshow has two virtual events scheduled for Jan. 8 and 17

A promotional banner for the USDA Risk Management Agency's Livestock Roadshow. The banner features the USDA logo and the text "USDA Risk Management Agency U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE" in the top left. The main text reads "JOIN US FOR RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY'S LIVESTOCK ROADSHOW". Below this, there are icons for a live webinar, a calendar, and a clock. The dates and times are listed as "JAN. 8, 2024 12PM (CST)" and "JAN. 17, 2024 7PM (PST)". The right side of the banner shows a photograph of several brown cows in a field.

USDA Risk Management Agency
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

JOIN US FOR
RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY'S
**LIVESTOCK
ROADSHOW**

LIVE WEBINAR

JAN. 8, 2024 12PM (CST)
JAN. 17, 2024 7PM (PST)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is hosting two virtual workshops 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 sessions are scheduled for January 8 and 17. [Learn more, get login information and add to your calendar.](#)**

Rhode Island Farm Service Agency

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County Office Main Line

401-828-3120 Option 1

Sheryl Michener, County Executive Director

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Farm Loan Team

401-828-3120 Option 2

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State Office Main Line

401-828-3120 Option 3

J. Eric Scherer, State Executive Director

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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).