



Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer

“The farther we get away from the land, the greater our insecurity.”

- Henry Ford, Entrepreneur and founder of The Ford Motor Company

When it rained, it poured, when it did not, it was DRY! I am not telling any of you who make a living from the soil that it was a record dry growing season. We are still working on our details for a disaster response to the drought, its government, and neve as simple as we would like, but we are working on it. If you were impacted by the drought, we can provide you with some preliminary information to help you understand if you are eligible for drought assistance, so don't wait, use the contact information at the end of this newsletter to give our County Office a call.



Every year we struggle in our small state, as do our neighbors to the north and west to show the nation (and our Department and Agency) that farming in Rhode Island is important. But without supporting data that comes from the Ag Census, we have a very hard time making the point – too few farms reporting their acreage, types of crops and livestock. Many of the USDA benefits you and others depend upon are linked to Ag Census data. This Ag Census comes around every five years.

Please refer to the Ag Census pocket card that can be accessed at (https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/Partners/2022/Census22_Pocket_Card_Large_v2.pdf) and check out other helpful links on this site: [Partners Tools](#) | [Census of Agriculture](#) | [USDA/NASS](#).

Don't let this one pass you by, get counted!

Please take time to read the articles below as you may find an opportunity for you to take part in!

Stay safe!

Eric Scherer

RI State Executive Director, USDA, FSA

USDA announces details for the upcoming Census of Agriculture

America's farmers and ranchers will soon have the opportunity to be represented in the nation's only comprehensive and impartial agriculture data for every state, county and territory. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will mail the 2022 Census of Agriculture to millions of agriculture producers across the 50 states and Puerto Rico this fall.

The 2022 Census of Agriculture will be mailed in phases, starting with an invitation to respond online in November followed by paper questionnaires in December. Farm operations of all sizes, urban and rural, which produced and sold, or normally would have sold, \$1,000 or more of agricultural product in 2022 are included in the ag census.

Collected in service to American agriculture since 1840 and now conducted every five years by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census of Agriculture tells the story and shows the value of U.S. agriculture. It highlights land use and ownership, producer characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures, among other topics. Between ag census years, NASS considers revisions to the questionnaire to document changes and emerging trends in the industry. Changes to the 2022 questionnaire include new questions about the use of precision agriculture, hemp production, hair sheep, and updates to internet access questions.

To learn more about the Census of Agriculture, visit nass.usda.gov/AgCensus or call 800-727-9540. On the website, producers and other data users can access frequently asked questions, past ag census data, [partner tools](#) to help spread the word about the upcoming ag census, special study information, and more. For highlights of these and the latest information on the upcoming Census of Agriculture, follow USDA NASS on twitter [@usda_nass](#).

USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new online tool to help farmers and ranchers better navigate the farm loan application process. This uniform application process will help to ensure all farm loan applicants receive equal support and have a consistent customer experience with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) regardless of their individual circumstances.

USDA experiences a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, particularly among underserved customers, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. The Loan Assistance Tool is available 24/7 and gives customers an online step-by-step guide that supplements the support they receive when working in person with a USDA employee, providing materials that may help an applicant prepare their loan application in one tool.

Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button. From here they can follow the prompts to complete

the Eligibility Self-Assessment and start the farm loan journey. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

The Loan Assistance Tool is the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements and tools that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:

- A streamlined and simplified direct loan application, reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

Background

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA is taking action to immediately [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](#) whose operations are at financial risk while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.

Farmers Can Now Make 2023 Crop Year Elections, Enroll in Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs

Agricultural producers can now change election and enroll in the [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage](#) programs for the 2023 crop year, two key safety net programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Signup began Monday, and producers have until March 15, 2023, to enroll in these two programs. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has started issuing payments totaling more than \$255 million to producers with 2021 crops that have triggered payments through ARC or PLC.

2023 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 2023 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2023, they must sign a new contract.

If producers do not submit their election by the March 15, 2023 deadline, their election remains the same as their 2022 election for crops on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the farm.

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 and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA announces conservation funding opportunities for Rhode Island farmers and forest owners

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing fiscal year 2023 assistance opportunities for agricultural producers and private landowners for federal conservation programs. While NRCS accepts applications for these programs year-round, producers and landowners should apply by the following state-specific ranking dates to be considered for this year's funding.

Program ranking dates

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – **December 16, 2022**
- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) – **December 16, 2022**
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – **December 16, 2022**
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – **December 16, 2022**
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) – **December 16, 2022**
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Oyster Reef Restoration – **December 16, 2022**
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Renewals FY 2024 – **March 17, 2023**

Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers and landowners make conservation improvements on their land that benefit natural resources, build resiliency, and contribute to the nation's broader effort to combat the impacts of climate change.

"NRCS conservation programs are good for Rhode Island's natural resources and for your operation's bottom line," said Phou Vongkhamdy, NRCS State Conservationist in Rhode Island. "Whether this is your first time working with NRCS or you want to take conservation to

the next level on your land, we encourage you to contact your local NRCS field office to learn more.”

Applying for assistance

Funding is provided through a competitive process. NRCS accepts applications for its conservation programs year-round. NRCS 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. Producers should apply by their state’s ranking dates to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Applications received after ranking dates will be automatically deferred to the next funding period.

Program options

The **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)** helps agricultural producers use conservation to manage risk and solve natural resource issues through natural resources conservation. NRCS administers the AMA conservation provisions while the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Risk Management Agency implement other provisions under AMA.

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against increasing weather volatility.

The **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. There are two distinct paths for land protection under ACEP. There are:

- **Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)** to help private and tribal landowners, land trusts, and other entities such as state and local governments protect croplands and grasslands on working farms and ranches by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land through conservation easements
- **Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE)** to help private and tribal landowners protect, restore, and enhance wetlands which have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses.

Historically underserved producer benefits

Special provisions are also available for historically underserved producers. For EQIP, historically underserved producers are eligible for advance payments to help offset costs related to purchasing materials or contracting services up front. In addition, historically underserved producers can receive higher EQIP payment rates (up to 90 percent of average cost). NRCS sets aside EQIP and CSP for historically underserved producers.

Conservation practices and climate

NRCS conservation programs play a critical role in USDA's commitment to partnering with farmers, ranchers, forest landowners and local communities to deliver climate solutions that strengthen agricultural operations and rural America. States may prioritize a variety of voluntary conservation practices through these NRCS programs, including those that support climate-smart agriculture and forestry (CSAF).

NRCS is a federal agency that works hand-in-hand with conservation districts and the people of Rhode Island to improve and protect soil, water and other natural resources.

For more information and to apply for NRCS programs, contact your local conservation district or NRCS at:

Eastern RI Conservation District *Serving Newport and Bristol counties* Conservation District Office: 401-934-0842

Ghyllian Alger, NRCS District Conservationist 401-822-8835 Ghyllian.alger@usda.gov

Northern RI Conservation District *Serving Providence County* Conservation District Office: 401-934-0840

Cassius Spears, NRCS District Conservationist 401-822-8833 Cassius.Spears@usda.gov

Southern RI Conservation District *Serving Kent and Washington counties* Conservation District Office: 401-661-5761

Jameson Long, NRCS District Conservationist 401-822-8847 Jameson.Long@usda.gov

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service 60 Quaker Lane, Suite 46 Warwick, RI 02886 www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov NRCSInfo@ri.usda.gov

NRCS is a federal agency that works hand-in-hand with conservation districts and the people of Rhode Island to improve and protect soil, water and other natural resources. For more information, visit www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov.



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 Office: 401-828-1300

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).