



Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer

First off, thanks for taking the time to read this important newsletter! I know it's a busy time for everyone, whether you are preparing for this coming year's crop, cleaning up after a long winter, or chasing around doing those important errands to stay one step ahead of the next project!

I hope you find this newsletter of value and 'spread the word' to your network of contacts. But, more importantly, let us know what we can do better to help you. The USDA, Farm Service Agency staff are here, hard at work and just from my short tenure here, are hugely dedicated to providing the highest level of assistance to Rhode Island's agricultural community.



Now, many of you may already know me from my 'past work life' and I look forward to getting 'reacquainted' with you in my 'new work life'. I look forward to meeting you (again) in the near future, in the field, at a meeting or whenever the opportunity arises.

For those of you who I have not met, let me introduce myself - here's is a short writeup:

"Eric Scherer was appointed by the Biden Administration to serve as the State Executive Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Rhode Island in April 2022.

Scherer has 37 years of federal service working for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in six states in various positions, including State Resource Conservationist and Assistant State Conservationist for field Operations in Warwick, Rhode Island.

Scherer was a USDA certified Technical Service Provider and Conservation Planner providing technical support to the public and private sectors on natural resource issues that include land use and environmental impact. He also helped agricultural producers with comprehensive nutrient management plans and grazing management plans for USDA program participation and the Rhode Island Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program. Prior to his work as a technical consultant, Scherer was the Executive Director of the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District.

Eric received his formal education from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, receiving a B.S in Agronomy with a major in Crop and Soil Science. He continued his formal education at the University of Hartford, CT, and

received a Master's in Public Administration with a focus in Organizational Development.

Scherer lives in Rhode Island with his wife Linda of 42 years. He enjoys sharing time with his three children and five grandchildren.”

Please have a healthy, happy, and productive Spring! - JES

Cover Crops Play a Starring Role in Climate Change Mitigation



On your own land, you've probably seen evidence that climate change is happening – things like extreme weather events or changes in growing seasons over the years. America's rural communities are on the frontlines of climate change, and now is the time for agriculture, forestry, and rural communities to act.

There are various ways to help mitigate the effects of climate change on your land and improve your bottom line at the same time. One very effective way is by planting cover crops.

Cover crops offer agricultural producers a natural and inexpensive climate solution through their ability to capture atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO²) into soils. But cover crops don't just remove CO² from the atmosphere, they also help make your soil healthier and your crops more resilient to a changing climate.

Healthy soil has better water infiltration and water holding capacity and is less susceptible to erosion from wind and water.

Cover crops also trap excess nitrogen – keeping it from leaching into groundwater or running off into surface water – releasing it later to feed growing crops. This saves you money on inputs like water and fertilizer and makes your crops more able to survive in harsh conditions.

USDA's Cover Crop Support

During the past year, USDA has made a number of strides to encourage use of cover crops. Earlier this month, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) formed a [new partnership with Farmers For Soil Health](#). We also launched a new Cover Crop Initiative in 11 states through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), targeted \$38 million to help producers mitigate climate change through adoption of cover crops.

In fiscal 2021, NRCS provided technical and financial assistance to help producers plant 2.3 million acres of cover crops through EQIP.

We've also recognized the importance of supporting cover crops through crop insurance. USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) recently provided \$59.5 million in premium support for producers who planted cover crops on 12.2 million acres through the new [Pandemic Cover Crop Program](#). Additionally, RMA recently updated policy to allow producers with crop insurance to [hay, graze or chop cover crops](#) at any time and still receive 100% of the prevented planting payment. This policy change supports use

of cover crops, which can help producers build resilience to drought. [Visit RMA's Conservation webpage to learn more.](#)

Working together, we can lead the way through climate-smart solutions that will improve the profitability and resilience of producers and foresters, open new market opportunities, and build wealth that stays in rural communities. Our support for cover crops are part of a much broader effort at USDA to address climate change. To learn more, read [USDA's January 18, 2022 news release.](#)

Cover crops are not only good for rural communities, but also for urban areas. Late last year, the [NRCS National Plant Materials Center planted cover crops](#) in the urban garden in front of USDA's Washington, D.C. Headquarters. See how cover crops are also great for the urban farmer or backyard gardener.

To learn more, visit farmers.gov/conserve/soil-health, watch our Conservation at Work video on cover crops, or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators



Producers can apply for a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. EZ Guarantee Loans use a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved, and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to \$100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations.

A new category of lenders will join traditional lenders, such as banks and credit unions, in offering USDA EZ Guarantee Loans. Microlenders, which include Community Development Financial Institutions and Rural Rehabilitation Corporations, will be able to offer their customers up to \$50,000 of EZ Guaranteed Loans, helping to reach urban areas and underserved producers. Banks, credit unions and other traditional USDA-approved lenders, can offer customers up to \$100,000 to help with agricultural operation costs.

EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent.

For more information about the available types of FSA farm loans, contact the Rhode Island Farm Loan Team at 401-828-3120 Option 3 or visit fsa.usda.gov/farmloans.

RMA Makes Improvements to Whole-Farm Revenue Protection



Organic and aquaculture producers can soon benefit from updates to the USDA Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) plan. USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is revising the plan of insurance to make it more flexible and accessible to producers beginning in crop year 2022.

Changes to WFRP include:

- Increasing expansion limits for organic producers to the higher of \$500,000 or 35 percent. Previously, small and medium size organic operations were held to the same 35 percent limit to expansion as conventional practice producers.
- Increasing the limit of insurance for aquaculture producers to \$8.5 million. Previously aquaculture producers were held to a \$2 million cap on expected revenue, this change allows more aquaculture producers to participate in the program.
- Allowing a producer to report acreage as certified organic, or as acreage in transition to organic, when the producer has requested an organic certification by the acreage reporting date. This allows organic producers more flexibility when reporting certified acreage.
- Providing flexibility to report a partial yield history for producers lacking records by inserting zero yields for missing years. Previously, missing a year of records would cause the commodity's expected value to be zero, meaning past revenue from the commodity would contribute nothing to the insurance guarantee.

WFRP provides a risk management safety net for all commodities on the farm under one insurance policy and is available in all counties nationwide. This insurance plan is tailored for any farm with up to \$8.5 million in insured revenue, including farms with specialty or organic commodities (both crops and livestock), or those marketing to local, regional, farm-identity preserved, specialty, or direct markets.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA Agent Locator](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov

2022 Application Ranking date set for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in Rhode Island



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) encourages farmers and forestland owners to sign up for conservation assistance through the [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#), a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers and forestland owners to address natural resource concerns through an array of conservation practices.

There are currently two funding opportunities in Rhode Island:

1. **Farm Conservation Implementation Partnership Project**

The Farm Conservation Implementation Project is focused on small livestock operations located within the **Scituate Reservoir Watershed**. To qualify for the financial assistance offered through this program, an applicant will need a completed comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP) in addition to a Farm Conservation Plan through the Farm, Forest and Open Space Program. Funding will be used to implement small scale composting operation and other conservation practices or improvements to protect water quality and resources in the watershed.

2. **Rhode Island Statewide Natural Systems Demonstration Project.**

This demonstration project will have three focus areas:

Eastern Rhode Island (Bristol and Newport counties) – Funding will be used to implement a suite of natural system-based approaches including floodplain restoration and riparian buffer restoration to reduce impacts, erosion, sediment transport and nutrient loading into surface water.

Northern Rhode Island (Providence County) – Funding will be used to implement a suite of natural systems-based approaches including green infrastructure improvements, riparian buffers, and stream corridor restoration to protect water quality in an inland, forested watershed.

Southern Rhode Island (Kent and Washington counties) – Funding be used to implement a suite of natural system-based approaches including green infrastructure to protect water quality in a coastal saltwater pond

Applications may be submitted at any time during the year, however, interested producers should submit applications to their local NRCS office by **June 10, 2022** to ensure their application is considered in the 2022 fiscal year ranking period. For more information on available programs, the application process, and natural resource priorities, visit the Rhode Island NRCS website at www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov.

“Through the RCPP program, NRCS and our partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas,” said **Phou Vongkhamdy**, State Conservationist for NRCS in Rhode Island. “Assistance is available to support private landowners and managers in addressing farm, field, forest, and/or water, management issues.”

RCPP encourages partner organizations to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales. Partner’s leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved.

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, contact your local conservation district or NRCS at:

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

Northern RI Conservation District
Serving Providence County
401-934-0840

Southern RI Conservation District
Serving Kent and Washington counties
401-500-0422

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
60 Quaker Lane, Suite 46
Warwick, RI 02886
www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov
NRCInfo@ri.usda.gov
401-822-8848



Rhode Island USDA

60 Quaker Lane

Warwick, RI 02886

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

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9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).