



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rhode Island Service Center Newsletter - September 2023

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Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer

Farming is not easy. Period. This year, and the prior three years did nothing to make it easier to farm. Why do farmers continue on? I have heard many answers over the last 48 years I have been in or around agriculture. And there is no one answer, other than love of farming as a lifestyle.

As a public servant (and consultant) over all of these years, I know it's not an easy lifestyle, but I constantly see both new and older farmers continuing to want to farm. Working for USDA is a career choice and one that many of us stuck with because of the people we meet and serve.

We are a service department, with programs that we hope will continue to help producers stay in business, continuing the lifestyle that they have chosen. I would be hard pressed to find any other industry in the U.S. that has this kind of support. It's there for you to use. Take time to connect with us, whether FSA or NRCS.

You will see below in a news release that our phones may still be 'out' so we have listed numbers for you to call or email us. Not hearing from you has us concerned and you frustrated.

To close out this message I wanted to share with you one farm's 'response' on why they farm.



Why We Farm — Even Pull Farm (<http://www.evenpullfarm.com/why-we-farm>)

“WE FARM BECAUSE GROWING FOOD FOR OUR COMMUNITY MAKES SENSE. WE FARM OUT OF CARE. WE FARM OUT OF LOVE—FOR THE LAND AND FOR PEOPLE. WE FARM OUT OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

“We want to do good work that causes as little harm as possible to this beautiful planet we call home. We want to make our little corner more beautiful while we are here. We want to grow and flourish as human beings and share the experience of stretching and learning with the folks who work with us. We want to be an integral part of our community. We want to feed people who we know and love.

“Why do farmers farm? ...always the answer is: “Love. They must do it for love.”
— Wendell Berry

“We come to farming firstly out of a concern for the environment and a love for good food: from wanting to protect and take care of our earth, and to help all people have access to high quality, nutritious food. Farming also appeals to us because of its connection to food and eating. We know the power of sharing a meal has to build relationships & community and believe that strong communities are a foundation that allows the individuals within them to flourish. We also personally value having access to the best, nutrient dense and fresh produce possible (we eat a lot of it) and recognize the power that eating well has to make us happier, more productive people. Plus, we love helping other people discover that eating food that is good for you is delicious! Pleasure is an aspect of food & eating that has been largely lost, and we think is worth rediscovering, one bite at a time.

“We also believe strongly that our work should be meaningful, contributing something positive to the world of humans & to nature. As large and interconnected as our world is

today, it is easy to be paralyzed by the problems you see. I read once that an individual's sphere of influence is small and most powerful in their immediate place--in the community where you live, among the people you know, and on the land where you stand daily. We find this deeply hopeful: we have found our place and our community, and here is where we will do our work. Plus, seeing the smiles on our friends' faces as they tote away their veggies and flowers each week brings us so much joy!

The work of farming is challenging, urgent, surprising, subject to weather and a million other factors that are out of our control, exhausting, beautiful, concrete, fulfilling, and never-ending. Despite all the challenges, plants want to grow, and abundance is a deep experience for us: picture rows of sweet carrots, tomatoes dripping off of the vine, flower beds in bloom and buzzing with bees. We are exhausted at the end of the day, but also know exactly what we accomplished, spent it in the open air and sunshine (or rain), and gathered something beautiful to eat at the end of the day. That is a truly amazing thing."

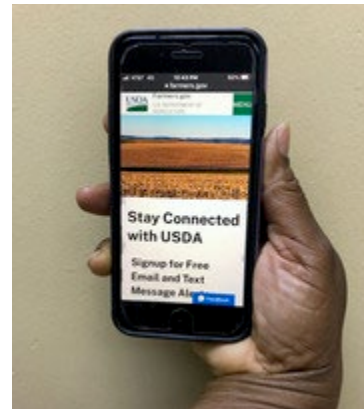
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Rhode Island USDA Service Center Phone Lines Down

Phone lines for the Rhode Island USDA Service Center agencies (FSA, RD & NRCS) are currently having network issues. If you cannot get through to us on our landlines, please call us on our government cell phones or visit us online!

Farm Service Agency

- County Office & Programs: 401-222-0821
- Loan Office: 401-215-5875
- Website: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Rhode-Island/>



Natural Resources Conservation Service

- Eastern RI Field Office (Ghyllian Alger, DC): 401-255-6210
- Northern RI Field Office (Kate Bousquet, DC): 401-255-6212
- Southern RI Field Office (Jameson Long, DC): 401-793-0230
- Outreach & Public Affairs (Julie Wright): 401-786-3884
- Employee Directory: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/state-office-contacts/rhode-island-state-office>

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Financial Assistance Application Process Opens for USDA Farm Loan Borrowers Who Have Faced Discrimination

USDA announced the opening of the financial assistance application process for eligible farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) directs USDA to provide this assistance. Since the law's passage, USDA has worked diligently to design the program in accordance with significant stakeholder input.



The program website, 22007apply.gov, is now open. 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.

To apply, borrowers have the option to apply via the e-filing portal at 22007apply.gov or submit paper-based forms via mail or in-person delivery to the program's local offices. The application process closes October 31, 2023. Under the planned timeline, applications will be reviewed in November and December, with payments reaching recipients soon thereafter. Importantly, applicants should know that the application process is not on a first come, first served, basis. All applications received or postmarked before the October 31 deadline will be considered.

For more information, read our [fact sheet about the program timeline and ways to protect against possible scams](#).

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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.

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Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early

The Farm Loan team in Rhode Island is already working on operating loans for 2024 and asks potential borrowers to submit their requests early so they can be timely processed. The farm loan team can help determine which loan programs are best for applicants.



FSA offers a wide range of low-interest loans that can meet the financial needs of any farm operation for just about any purpose. The traditional **farm operating and farm ownership loans** can help large and small farm operations take advantage of early purchasing discounts for spring inputs as well expenses throughout the year.

Microloans are a simplified loan program that will provide up to \$50,000 for both Farm Ownership and Operating Microloans to eligible applicants. These loans, targeted for smaller and non-traditional operations, can be used for operating expenses, starting a new operation, purchasing equipment, and other needs associated with a farming operation. Loans to beginning farmers and members of underserved groups are a priority.

Other types of loans available include:

Marketing Assistance Loans allow producers to use eligible commodities as loan collateral and obtain a 9-month loan while the crop is in storage. These loans provide cash flow to the producer and allow them to market the crop when prices may be more advantageous.

Farm Storage Facility Loans can be used to build permanent structures used to store eligible commodities, for storage and handling trucks, or portable or permanent handling equipment. A variety of structures are eligible under this loan, including bunker silos, grain bins, hay storage structures, and refrigerated structures for vegetables and fruit. A producer may borrow up to \$500,000 per loan.

For more information, contact the Rhode Island FSA Farm Loan Team at 401-828-3120 Option 2.

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Message from RI State Conservationist, Pooh Vongkhamdy

NRCS helps Ocean State farmers and forest landowners make conservation work for them. The system of practices we promote helps improve production, reduce input costs, and conserve natural resources for the future. We also provide financial resources to help with the cost of getting conservation on the ground.

In fiscal year 2023, NRCS processed 360 financial assistance applications for the Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). To date we have obligated over \$3.7 million for 210 contracts to help apply conservation practices on over 9,500 acres in Rhode Island. Over 50% of this year's contracts were awarded to beginning, limited resource or socially disadvantaged farmers, 8% of our participants were women and 1% were Asian American. We are looking forward to next year when we will potentially have increased funds and will expand our outreach efforts to new, urban and underserved farmers.



This year NRCS approved up to ~\$11 million in federal funds to purchase floodplain easements and restore land damaged by Tropical Storm Ida in East Providence, Middletown and Narragansett. The funding was obtained and the steps toward property acquisition are in process in 2023. This federal assistance will safeguard lives and property from imminent hazard of flooding, severe erosion and infrastructure loss in future storms. An additional project on the Woonasquatucket River in Johnston was initiated after a storm in the spring exacerbated erosion of a large river embankment slightly downstream of the Manton Dam. EWP program funding will be used to stabilize the slope and provide safety to those who utilize the area for recreation.

This federal funding was requested through the [Emergency Watershed Protection \(EWP\)](#) program. EWP authorizes NRCS to purchase permanent easements on eligible lands and restore the floodplain functions in the easement area to their natural conditions. Participation is voluntary. Restoration may include both structural and non-structural measures to revive floodplain functions such as water storage and flow, control erosion, and establish native vegetation.

NRCS is committed to empowering our employees by providing training, tools, and support to demonstrate how diversity and inclusion lead to high performance and productivity. To that end we supported Diversity Day Training (see below) for our staff and partners to improve and expand our efforts in our Ocean State.

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NRCS MA & RI Hold Joint Diversity Day Training



Left to right: NRCS staff work with Jackson Katz to define the key attributes of Leadership; Dawn Spears discusses the merits of her various heirloom tomato varieties with RI State Biologist, Melissa Hayden; and Annawon Weedon performs his First Light Flashback history of the Wampanoag people.

On Thursday, September 7th, our Massachusetts and Rhode Island NRCS staff and partners gathered together at the Pakachaug Center in Auburn, MA, to participate in Diversity Day training hosted by our joint MA-RI Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC). This year's program focused on the theme of "A Sense of Place." We learned 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 our clients, partners and coworkers.

Our keynote speaker was Jackson Katz, founder and director of [MVP strategies](#), who led us in an exploration of the bystander philosophy to become leaders in identifying and intervening in gender discrimination, harassment and violence.

Narragansett elder, Dawn Spears, co-owner of [Ashawaug Farm](#) in Rhode Island, shared the connection between agriculture and Indigenous cultures and discussed native planting, growing, and harvest methods used on the farm along with the significance of the crops. Dawn also shared samples of 17 heirloom tomato varieties grown on the farm.

Our training culminated with a First Light Flashback performed by [Annawon Weeden](#) of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe who shared his one-man performance art show illuminating the history of the Wampanoag people from the 1400s to present day.

We thank all our speakers who provided a truly enriching and enlightening experience to strengthen our work with our clients, partners and communities.

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NRICD Hosts Farm Conservation Tour in Foster on September 14th

Join NRCS and our [Northern RI Conservation District \(NRICD\)](#) partners for a conservation tour of historic Burgess Farm in Foster, RI, on September 14th from 5:30-7:15 pm. Burgess Farm is run by beginning farmers who are working to transition the farm from pasture and horse paddocks to vegetable/flower operations.

Burgess Farm participates in the NRCS [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#). Under their first EQIP contract, a NRCS Technical Service Provider (TSP) helped the farmers develop a Forest Management Plan (FMP) to restore forest resources and improve wildlife habitat. Their current EQIP contract focuses on improving pollinator and wildlife habitat and food production. NRCS and NRICD are working with Burgess Farm to help establish pollinator habitat, plan a People's Garden, establish trees and shrubs, renovate old horse paddocks to crop fields and wildlife habitat, and improve the riparian area adjacent to a wetland and seasonally wet area that feeds into Huntington Brook. One of their main goals is to have community engagement and foster inclusivity and accessibility on the farm. The farmers have already done a significant amount of work to encourage native species, manage invasive plants, and provide nesting areas and cover for wildlife on site.

The tour is FREE but please RSVP at <https://nricd.org> or 401-934-0840 x2.

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ERICD Hosts Farm Conservation Tour in Bristol on September 16th



Join NRCS and our [Eastern RI Conservation District \(ERICD\)](#) partners for a conservation tour of historic [Coggeshall Farm](#) in Bristol, RI, on September 16th from 10:00-11:00 am. During the tour we will hear about the history of the farm and the conservation practices they utilize to help the environment. [Coggeshall Farm](#) partners with ERICD and NRCS to follow smart-environmental practices, including fencing, pasture planting, and rotational grazing. Set on 48 acres of coastal farmland in Bristol, Coggeshall Farm recreates the daily experience of tenant farmers on a salt marsh farm in the late 18th century.

This event is FREE but please [RSVP through Eventbrite](#). For questions please contact Sarah Wilkinson at swilkinson.ericd@gmail.com.

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SRICD Hosts Conservation Farm Tour at West Organics, Westerly



On Thursday afternoon, August 31st, our partners at [Southern Rhode Island Conservation District \(SRICD\)](#) hosted a fabulous conservation farm tour at [West Farm Organics](#) in Westerly! Farmers Patty and Paul West shared their successes and challenges growing a wide variety of vegetables, herbs and fruit on their organic farm, with assistance from the

NRCS [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) and SRICD. Tour participants learned about how the West's manage their land organically and how NRCS helped them to finance a high tunnel as well as their future irrigation plans. We also learned how they're managing for wildlife, including deer and coyote, using electric fencing. As a bonus we shopped the farm store afterwards and took home some delicious produce.

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RI Envirothon Champs Rank 15th Internationally



Left to right: RI Envirothon chaperones Peter Stetson & Paul Dolan (RIRC&D Coordinator) and Wheeler students Rohan Jayaraman, Aila Bojarski, Amol Rathore, Boo Paradiso, and Myles Johnson tour New Brunswick, Canada.

On July 28, the Rhode Island Envirothon team from The Wheeler School in Providence claimed 15th place at the 2023 National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Envirothon, out of a field of 49 teams from across the U.S., Canada, and Singapore.

This year's competition, held July 23-28, was hosted in partnership with the Envirothon New Brunswick and Science East Science Center, Mount Allison University in Tantramar, New Brunswick, Canada.

Throughout the week-long competition, students demonstrated their knowledge on soils and land use, aquatic ecology, forestry and wildlife management through written tests and interactive stations featuring New Brunswick's natural resources. The teams were also tested on and then prepared oral presentations on this year's current issue, "Adapting to a Changing Climate."

"Teams from all over the world immersed themselves in the wonders of our natural environment and created life-long memories," said RI Committee member Peter Stetson. The activities were carefully designed to challenge students' intellect, creativity, and teamwork skills. [Read more...](#)

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NRCS Makes \$65 Million Available Nationwide for Conservation Innovation Grants Program

NRCS is making \$65 million in funding available nationwide for new tools, approaches, practices and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands through **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**.



Two separate CIG funding opportunities are now available on grants.gov: \$50 million through [CIG On-Farm Trials](#) and \$15 million is available through [CIG Classic](#).

Strong consideration will be given to proposals that include Historically Underserved entities and individuals. This opportunity is open to all domestic non-federal entities and individuals based in the United States for projects carried out in the U.S. Applications are being accepted now through **October 30, 2023**. [Read more.](#)

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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

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