

March 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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## Topics for March

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### South Carolina Farm Service Agency

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#### State Committee:

Anthony Grant, Chairperson  
Robert Battle  
Bill Sarratt  
Landy Weathers  
Beth White

### USDA Opens Signup March 23 for Added Causes of Loss Under WHIP+ and Announces Disaster Assistance for Sugar Beet Producers

USDA announced additional disaster assistance available to agricultural producers, including producers impacted by drought and excess moisture as well as sugar beet growers. Through WHIP+, USDA is helping producers recover from losses related to 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will open signup on March 23 for producers to apply for eligible losses of drought (D3 or above) and excess moisture. USDA is also entering into agreements with six sugar beet processing cooperatives to distribute \$285 million to grower members of those cooperatives who experienced loss.

In June 2019, more than \$3 billion was made available through a disaster relief package passed by Congress and signed by President Trump. In December 2019, Congress passed, and President Trump

**Administrative Officer:**  
Kenn Jameson

signed the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 that provides an additional \$1.5 billion for the continuation of disaster assistance program delivery.

**Farm Programs Chief:**  
Amy Turner

### **WHIP+ New Qualifying Disaster Events**

The bill added excessive moisture and D3 and D4 drought as qualifying losses for WHIP+ assistance.

**Farm Loan Programs Chief:**  
William Shelley

Producers can contact their [local FSA office](#) for more information or to schedule an appointment.

Beginning March 23, producers who suffered either of these types of loss in 2018 and/or 2019 can apply for WHIP+ assistance at their local FSA office. For drought, a producer is eligible if any area of the county in which the loss occurred was rated D3 (Extreme Drought) or higher on the U.S. Drought Monitor during calendar years 2018 or 2019.

### **Important Dates and Deadlines:**

### **WHIP+ Sugar Beet Loss Assistance**

**March 16:** CRP Grasslands Signup Begins

As also directed in the bill, USDA will provide \$285 million through sugar beet processing cooperatives to compensate grower members for sugar beet crop losses in 2018 and 2019. Details will be finalized in agreements between USDA and participating sugar beet processing cooperatives. Sugar beet producers who are members of these cooperatives and experienced losses may contact their cooperative for more information about how this sugar beet crop assistance will be administered.

**March 23:** WHIP+ Signup Begins

### **WHIP+ for Quality Loss**

In addition, producers have reported widespread crop quality loss from eligible disaster events that results in price deductions or penalties when marketing the damaged crops. The Appropriations bill expands WHIP+ to include assistance for crop quality loss. FSA is gathering data and input from producers and stakeholders regarding the extent and types of quality loss nationwide.

### **Eligibility**

To be eligible for WHIP+, producers must have suffered losses of certain crops, trees, bushes, or vines in counties with a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or a Secretarial Disaster Designation (primary counties only) for the following named natural disaster events; hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity, snowstorms, wildfires, and now excessive moisture that occurred in 2018 or 2019. Also, losses located in a county not designated by the Secretary as a primary county may be eligible if the producer provides documentation showing that the loss was due to a qualifying natural disaster event.

For drought, counties having a D3 or D4 Drought Monitor classification in any portion of the county anytime during calendar year 2018 or 2019 will also be eligible.

A list of counties that received qualifying hurricane declarations and designations is available at [farmers.gov/recover/whip-plus](https://farmers.gov/recover/whip-plus). The U.S. Drought Monitor is available at <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>.

Because livestock losses are covered by other disaster recovery programs offered through FSA, these losses are not eligible for WHIP+.

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## USDA Announces Updates for Honeybee Producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced updates to the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP). These updates include changes required by the 2018 Farm Bill as well as discretionary changes intended to improve the administration of the program and clarify existing program requirements. ELAP was previously administered based on FSA's fiscal year but will now run according to the calendar year. Producers are still required to submit an application for payment within 30 calendar days of the end of the program year. This is not a policy change but will affect the deadline. The signup deadline for calendar year 2020 losses is January 30, 2021.

Starting in 2020, producers will have 15 days from when the loss is first apparent, instead of 30 days, to file a honeybee notice of loss. This change provides consistency between ELAP and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which also has a 15-day notice of loss period for honey. For other covered losses, including livestock feed, grazing and farm-raised fish losses, the notice of loss deadline for ELAP will remain 30 days from when the loss is first apparent to the producer.

Program participants who were paid for the loss of a honeybee colony or hive in either or both of the previous two years will be required to provide additional documentation to substantiate how current year inventory was acquired.

If the honeybee colony loss incurred was because of Colony Collapse Disorder, program participants must provide a producer certification that the loss was a direct result of at least three of the five symptoms of Colony Collapse Disorder, which include:

- the loss of live queen and/or drone bee populations inside the hives;
- rapid decline of adult worker bee population outside the hives, leaving brood poorly or completely unattended;
- absence of dead adult bees inside the hive and outside the entrance of the hive;
- absence of robbing collapsed colonies; and
- at the time of collapse, varroa mite and Nosema populations are not at levels known to cause economic injury or population decline.

For honeybees, ELAP covers colony losses, honeybee hive losses (the physical structure) and honeybee feed losses in instances where the colony, hive or feed has been destroyed by a natural disaster or, in the case of colony losses, because of Colony Collapse Disorder. Colony losses must be in excess of normal mortality.

ELAP also provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock and farm-raised fish including for feed and grazing losses. It covers losses because of eligible adverse weather or loss conditions, including blizzards and wildfires on federally managed lands. ELAP also covers losses resulting from the cost of transporting water to livestock due to an eligible drought.

For more information on ELAP visit [farmers.gov/recover](https://farmers.gov/recover) or contact your FSA County Office. To locate your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

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## USDA to Open Signup March 16 for Conservation Reserve Program Grasslands

Farmers and ranchers may apply to enroll grasslands in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands signup beginning March 16. The signup runs through May 15.

Through CRP Grasslands, participants retain the right to conduct common grazing practices, such as haying, mowing or harvesting seed from the enrolled land. Timing of some activities may be restricted by the primary nesting season of birds.

Participants will receive an annual rental payment and may receive up to 50 percent cost-share for establishing approved conservation practices. The duration of the CRP contract is either 10 or 15 years. FSA will rank applications using a number of factors including existence of expiring CRP land, threat of conversion or development, existing grassland, and predominance of native species cover, and cost.

The 2018 Farm Bill set aside 2 million acres for CRP Grassland enrollment. CRP is one of the largest conservation programs at USDA. CRP marks its 35-year anniversary in 2020 with 22 million acres currently enrolled.

For more information or to enroll in CRP Grasslands, contact your local FSA county office or visit [fsa.usda.gov/crp](https://fsa.usda.gov/crp). To locate your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

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## Farm Storage Facility Loans

FSA's Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program provides low-interest financing to producers to build or upgrade storage facilities and to purchase portable (new or used) structures, equipment and storage and handling trucks.

The low-interest funds can be used to build or upgrade permanent facilities to store commodities. Eligible commodities include corn, grain sorghum, rice, soybeans, oats, peanuts, wheat, barley, minor oilseeds harvested as whole grain, pulse crops (lentils, chickpeas and dry peas), hay, honey, renewable biomass, fruits, nuts and vegetables for cold storage facilities, floriculture, hops, maple sap, rye, milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, meat and poultry (unprocessed), eggs, and aquaculture (excluding systems that maintain live animals through uptake and discharge of water). Qualified facilities include grain bins, hay barns and cold storage facilities for eligible commodities.

Loans up to \$50,000 can be secured by a promissory note/security agreement and loans between \$50,000 and \$100,000 may require additional security. Loans exceeding \$100,000 require additional security.

Producers do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply. The loans are designed to assist a diverse range of farming operations, including small and mid-sized businesses, new farmers, operations supplying local food and farmers markets, non-traditional farm products, and underserved producers.

To learn more about the FSA Farm Storage Facility Loan, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport) or contact your local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## USDA Stands Up New Team to Better Serve Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is standing up a new team of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) staff that will lead a department-wide effort focused on serving beginning farmers and ranchers.

To institutionalize support for beginning farmers and ranchers and to build upon prior agency work, the 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to create a national coordinator position in the agency and state-level coordinators for four of its agencies – Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Rural Development (RD).

Sarah Campbell was selected as the national coordinator to lead USDA's efforts. A beginning farmer herself, Campbell held previous positions with USDA and has a wealth of experience working on issues impacting beginning farmers and ranchers. She recently served as acting director of customer experience for the Farm Production and Conservation Business Center, where she led the piloting of innovative, customer-centric initiatives.

In her new role, she will work closely with the state coordinators to develop goals and create plans to increase beginning farmer participation and access to programs while coordinating nationwide efforts on beginning farmers and ranchers.

Each state coordinator will receive training and develop tailored beginning farmer outreach plans for their state. Coordinators will help field employees better reach and serve beginning farmers and ranchers and will also be available to assist beginning farmers who need help navigating the variety of resources USDA has to offer.

### **More on Beginning Farmers**

Twenty seven percent of farmers were categorized as new and beginning producers, with 10 years or less of experience in agriculture, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

USDA offers a variety of farm loan, risk management, disaster assistance, and conservation programs to support farmers, including beginning farmers and ranchers. Additionally, a number of these programs have provisions specifically for beginning farmers, including targeted funding for loans and conservation programs as well as waivers and exemptions.

### **More Information**

Learn more about USDA's resources for beginning farmers as well as more information on the national and state-level coordinators at [newfarmers.usda.gov](http://newfarmers.usda.gov) and [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov). For more information on available programs in your area, contact your local [USDA service center](#).

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## **Report Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Losses**

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters including freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, flood, excessive heat and qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing), among others.

To file a Notice of Loss, eligible producers must have purchased NAP coverage for 2020 crops. Notices of Loss are filed on form CCC-576 in the producer's applicable county office. Notices of Loss for prevented planting claims must be filed within 15 calendar days after the final planting date. Notices of loss for low yield claims and allowable value losses must be filed by the **earlier** of:

- 15 days after the disaster occurrence;
- 15 days after losses become apparent;
- 15 days after the final harvest date.

Producers of hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops must notify FSA within 72 hours of the loss becoming apparent.

Eligible crops must be commercially produced agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops.

For more information on NAP, contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/nap](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap).

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## Transitioning Expiring CRP Land to Beginning, Veteran or Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

CRP contract holders are encouraged to transition their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to beginning, veteran or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers through the Transition Incentives Program (TIP). TIP provides annual rental payments to the landowner or operator for up to two additional years after the CRP contract expires, provided the transition is not to a family member.

Enrollment in TIP is on a continuous basis through 2023 or until the new statutory limit of \$50 million under the 2018 Farm Bill is reached.

CRP contract holders no longer need to be a retired or retiring owner or operator to transition their land. TIP participants must agree to sell, have a contract to sell, or agree to lease long term (at least five years) land enrolled in an expiring CRP contract to a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who is not a family member.

Beginning, veteran or social disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and CRP participants may enroll in TIP beginning two years before the expiration date of the CRP contract. For example, if a CRP contract is scheduled to expire on Sept. 30, 2022, the land may be offered for enrollment in TIP from October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2022. The TIP application must be submitted prior to completing the lease or sale of the affected lands.

New landowners or renters that return the land to production must use sustainable grazing or farming methods.

For more information on TIP, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation>.

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## Tree Assistance Program (TAP) Sign-up

Orchardists and nursery tree growers who experienced losses from natural disasters during calendar year 2019 must submit a TAP application either 90 calendar days after the disaster event or the date when the loss is apparent.

TAP provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Eligible tree types include trees, bushes or vines that produce an annual crop for commercial purposes. Nursery trees include ornamental, fruit, nut and Christmas trees that are produced for commercial sale. Trees used for pulp or timber are ineligible.

To qualify for TAP, orchardists must suffer a qualifying tree, bush or vine loss in excess of 15 percent mortality from an eligible natural disaster, plus an adjustment for normal mortality. The eligible trees, bushes or vines must have been owned when the natural disaster occurred; however, eligible growers are not required to own the land on which the eligible trees, bushes and vines were planted.

If the TAP application is approved, the eligible trees, bushes and vines must be replaced within 12 months from the date the application is approved. The cumulative total quantity of acres planted to trees, bushes or vines, for which a producer can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 1,000 acres annually.

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## Higher Limits Now Available on USDA Farm Loans

Higher limits are now available for borrowers interested in USDA's farm loans, which help agricultural producers purchase farms or cover operating expenses. The 2018 Farm Bill increased the amount that producers can borrow through direct and guaranteed loans available through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and made changes to other loans, such as microloans and emergency loans.

Key changes include:

- The Direct Operating Loan limit increased from \$300,000 to \$400,000, and the Guaranteed Operating Loan limit increased from \$ 1.429 million to \$1.75 million. Operating loans help producers pay for normal operating expenses, including machinery and equipment, seed, livestock feed, and more.
- The Direct Farm Ownership Loan limit increased from \$300,000 to \$600,000, and the Guaranteed Farm Ownership Loan limit increased from \$1.429 million to \$1.75 million. Farm ownership loans help producers become owner-operators of family farms as well as improve and expand current operations.
- Producers can now receive both a \$50,000 Farm Ownership Microloan and a \$50,000 Operating Microloan. Previously, microloans were limited to a combined \$50,000. Microloans provide flexible access to credit for small, beginning, niche, and non-traditional farm operations.
- Producers who previously received debt forgiveness as part of an approved FSA restructuring plan are now eligible to apply for emergency loans. Previously, these producers were ineligible.
- Beginning and socially disadvantaged producers can now receive up to a 95 percent guarantee against the loss of principal and interest on a loan, up from 90 percent.

### **About Farm Loans**

Direct farm loans, which include microloans and emergency loans, are financed and serviced by FSA, while guaranteed farm loans are financed and serviced by commercial lenders. For guaranteed loans, FSA provides a guarantee against possible financial loss of principal and interest.

For more information on FSA farm loans, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) or contact your [local USDA service center](#).

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