

## In This Issue:

- [A Note from State Executive Director Laurie Funderburk](#)
- [USDA Establishes New Farm Service Agency Urban County Committee in Columbia, SC](#)
- [USDA Announces New Steps to Enhance Organic Markets and Support Producers](#)
- [Financial Assistance Application Process Opens for USDA Farm Loan Borrowers Who Have Faced Discrimination](#)
- [Tree Assistance Program](#)
- [Signature Policy](#)
- [Report Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\) Losses](#)
- [Applying for Youth Loans](#)
- [Avoid Scams Related to USDA Financial Assistance for Farmers Facing Discrimination](#)

---

## A Note from State Executive Director Laurie Funderburk



### Greetings, South Carolina Producers!

We are now in the month of August, and this month, [USDA celebrates National Farmers Market Week](#), the week of August 6-12, 2023. During this week, we celebrate the vital role farmers markets play in our nation's food supply.

FSA also attended the **South Carolina Local Food Summit**, held in Columbia, SC, on August 16-18, 2023, and had a great opportunity to network with farmers, gardeners, service providers, and food system leaders from across the state, building upon USDA's commitment to serving small, urban, and innovative farms. I would like to say thank you to the farmers, producers and distributors that provide locally sourced produce across the state. Your

contributions are vital to strengthening the agriculture industry in South Carolina.

Along with record-high temperatures, August also brings important updates from the Farm Service Agency (FSA). USDA is establishing a new [urban county committee](#) in Columbia, SC, joining 26 other cities with a committee focused on delivery of USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs to

urban producers. County committee members make important decisions on how federal farm programs are administered locally, and this new urban county committee in Columbia is part of USDA's broad support for urban and innovative agriculture. FSA will release more information on South Carolina's Urban County Committee when it becomes available.

FSA requested and received [two Secretarial Natural Disaster Designations](#) in July to extend emergency credit to producers in 14 counties in South Carolina. These emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs, including the replacement of essential items, such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation, or the refinancing of certain debts. Please visit your county's [local FSA office](#) to learn more about FSA programs that may assist you.

I am proud to be a part of an agency focused on serving our nation's farmers and ranchers, and I thank you for all you do for South Carolina agriculture!

**Laurie Slade Funderburk**  
**State Executive Director**



*State Executive Director Laurie Slade Funderburk celebrated National Farmers Market Week at the Kershaw County Farmers Market on August 12, 2023.*

---

## USDA Establishes New Farm Service Agency Urban County Committee in Columbia, SC



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is establishing a new urban county committee in Columbia, SC, joining 26 other cities with a committee focused on delivery of USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs to urban producers. County committee members make important decisions on how federal farm programs are administered locally, and this new urban county committee in Columbia is part of USDA's broad support for urban and innovative agriculture.

Urban agricultural producers who participate in USDA programs in these cities or cooperate with USDA programs by providing information about their farming operation are encouraged to participate by nominating and voting in their local urban county committee elections. FSA will share more information on the nomination process and elections for this new urban county committee.

This urban county committee in Columbia was announced [by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small](#) as part of a significant investment in urban agriculture. The announcement included a total of 10 new urban county committees and 17 new Urban Service Centers. Other cities with new urban county committees include:

- Boston, Mass.
- Denver, CO
- Houston, TX
- Jackson, MS
- Kansas City, MO
- Las Vegas, NV
- Little Rock, AR
- Memphis, TN
- Pittsburgh, PA

### Support for Urban Agriculture

To help strengthen urban county committees and other urban agriculture investments, USDA is investing \$40 million, made possible by President Biden's American Rescue Plan, into partnerships with community-based organizations. Two of those partnerships include:

- Virginia State University's Small Farm Outreach Program and Cornell University's Small Farm Center, which will support local partner organizations and urban county committee members across the country by providing guidance and training on the practices and assistance most needed by urban agricultural producers, holding regular meetings to assess successes and barriers in each location, and gathering data to analyze the effectiveness of programs and provide recommendations to increase future participation.
- To Improve Mississippi Economics, Inc. (TIME, Inc.), whose mission is to provide outreach, training, and technical assistance to urban agricultural producers and organizations that provide access to healthy food in impoverished communities. TIME, Inc. will work in

collaboration with FSA and local leaders across the nation to fund partnerships with organizations in the 10 cities where USDA will create new urban county committees in 2024.

### More Information

The new urban county committee is part of USDA's broader USDA investment in urban agriculture in Columbia. Other efforts include:

- [Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production competitive grants](#), including one to the Upstate Circle of Friends Minority Farmer Education Center to involve youth and local residents to increase access to affordable healthy food for low-income minority families in need.
- Inviting community gardens to join the [People's Garden initiative](#).

To learn more about county committees, including urban county committees, visit our [County Committees webpage](#). Visit [farmers.gov/urban](https://farmers.gov/urban) for more information on programs and services for urban producers.

---

## USDA Announces New Steps to Enhance Organic Markets and Support Producers

The USDA is taking additional steps as part of its commitment to strengthen the market for domestically grown organic goods, and to support producers seeking organic certification. These funding opportunities are part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Organic Transition Initiative](#), launched in fall 2022, which is a suite of offerings to help existing organic farmers and those transitioning to organic production and processing.

Consumer demand for organically produced goods surpassed \$67 billion in 2022, and multi-year trends of strong growth in the sector provide market incentives for U.S. farmers across a broad range of products. However, through public comment and listening sessions USDA has heard that producers may be less willing to commit to the three-year transition to organic certification because of risks related to inadequate organic processing, storage, and handling capacity, cost barriers due to limited markets for rotational crops, a lack of certainty about market access, and insufficient supply of certain organic ingredients. The organic livestock and processed product markets depend heavily on imported agricultural products for feed grains and key ingredients. These are longstanding market issues that were brought into sharp focus due to the impacts of the pandemic and international conflicts in critical overseas organic supply regions, resulting in limitations on certain domestic organic products in the face of rising demand.

### Cost Share for Organic Certification

As part of USDA's broader effort to support organic producers and in response to stakeholder feedback, this year the Farm Service Agency increased the cost share amount under the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), which helps organic producers cover organic certification costs, to the maximum amount allowed by statute.

Specifically, FSA will cover up to 75% of costs associated with organic certification, up to \$750 for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and state organic program fees (California only). OCCSP will cover costs incurred from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023.

FSA begins accepting applications for OCCSP Monday, May 15. Applications are due Nov. 1, 2023. To apply, producers and handlers should contact the FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#). As part

of completing the OCCSP application, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses. Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through participating state departments of agriculture.

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA will post a synopsis of the funding opportunity on grants.gov and will send more information to all eligible state departments of agriculture. Additional details can be found on the [OCCSP webpage](#). More information about these initiatives and more can be found at [farmers.gov/organic-transition-initiative](#).

---

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

Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (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.

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination by USDA in its farm loan programs prior to January 1, 2021 and/or are currently debtors with assigned or assumed USDA farm loan debt that was the subject of USDA discrimination that occurred prior to January 1, 2021, are eligible for this 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 will be open from July 7 to 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.

To support producers throughout the application process, USDA is ensuring that organizations with extensive experience conducting outreach to farm organizations are able to support individuals who may be eligible for the program. These groups include [AgrAbility](#), [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](#).

Vendors operating four regional hubs are also providing technical assistance and working closely with these and other community-based organizations to conduct outreach using digital and grassroots strategies, to ensure potential applicants are informed about the program and have the opportunity to apply. These hubs are operating a network of brick-and-mortar program offices and will conduct extensive outreach about the program. Windsor Group serves farmers in the eastern regions of the

U.S. and Analytic Acquisitions serves the western regions. A national administrator, Midtown Group, is responsible for program oversight and integrity, and will lead a national call-center, operate the application website - [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov), which is now open – and review and process applications and payments. All vendors have experience in professional services, supporting government contracts, and complex program operations.

Landowners can visit our South Carolina location for assistance here: **100 South Congress St., Winnsboro, SC 29180.**

On March 1, 2023, USDA shared initial [details on how the Section 22007 program will work](#), including that the Inflation Reduction Act specifies the Secretary of Agriculture is responsible for providing this assistance through qualified nongovernmental entities, under standards set by USDA. USDA entered into agreements with vendors and cooperators in May.

In addition to the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program (DFAP) opening today, the Inflation Reduction Act also created several other programs that are helping USDA rebuild trust, address systemic issues and improve service to people who may have been underserved by USDA in the past. Information about USDA's equity agenda and progress is available at [www.usda.gov/equity](https://www.usda.gov/equity).

In standing up this program, USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about the discrimination assistance process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information. As of today, the official application process has begun and filling out an application is **free**.

No attorneys' fees will be paid to applicants or their counsel by USDA or by any other agency or department of the United States. The amount of financial assistance will not be increased for those claimants who are represented by an attorney. Applicants are not required to retain an attorney. USDA, the national administrator, and the regional hub vendors will neither recommend that any applicant retain counsel or retain a specific attorney or law firm, nor discourage an applicant from obtaining counsel or using a specific attorney or law firm. For more information, read our [fact sheet about the program timeline and ways to protect against possible scams](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, promoting competition and fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov).

---

## Tree Assistance Program

If you're an orchardist or nursery tree grower who experienced losses from natural disasters during calendar year 2023, you 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 help you 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 you can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 1,000 acres annually.

---

## Signature Policy

Using the correct signature when doing business with FSA can save time and prevent a delay in program benefits.

The following are FSA signature guidelines:

- A married woman must sign her given name: Mrs. Mary Doe, not Mrs. John Doe
- For a minor, FSA requires the minor's signature and one from the minor's parent

Note, by signing a document with a minor, the parent is liable for actions of the minor and may be liable for refunds, liquidated damages, etc.

When signing on one's behalf the signature must agree with the name typed or printed on the form or be a variation that does not cause the name and signature to be in disagreement. Example - John W. Smith is on the form. The signature may be John W. Smith or J.W. Smith or J. Smith. Or Mary J. Smith may be signed as Mrs. Mary Joe Smith, M.J. Smith, Mary Smith, etc.

FAXED signatures will be accepted for certain forms and other documents provided the acceptable program forms are approved for FAXED signatures. Producers are responsible for the successful transmission and receipt of FAXED information.

Spouses may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and CCC programs in which either has an interest, unless written notification denying a spouse this authority has been provided to the county office.

Spouses cannot sign on behalf of each other as an authorized signatory for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations or other similar entities. Likewise, a spouse cannot sign a document on behalf of the other in order to affirm the eligibility of oneself.

Any member of a general partnership can sign on behalf of the general partnership and bind all members unless the Articles of Partnership are more restrictive. Spouses may sign on behalf of each other's individual interest in a partnership, unless notification denying a spouse that authority is provided to the county office. Acceptable signatures for general partnerships, joint ventures,

corporations, estates, and trusts must consist of an indicator “by” or “for” the individual’s name, individual’s name and capacity, or individual’s name, capacity, and name of entity.

For additional clarification on proper signatures contact your [local FSA office](#).

---

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

NAP provides financial assistance to you for crops that aren’t eligible for crop insurance to protect against lower yields or crops unable to be planted 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 receive payment, you had to purchase NAP coverage for 2023 crops and file a notice of loss the earlier of 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 days of the final harvest date. For hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops, you must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes 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 USDA Service Center](#) or visit [fsa.usda.gov/nap](https://fsa.usda.gov/nap).

---

## Applying for Youth Loans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes loans to youth to establish and operate agricultural income-producing projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA and other agricultural groups. Projects must be planned and operated with the help of the organization advisor, produce sufficient income to repay the loan and provide the youth with practical business and educational experience. The maximum loan amount is \$5,000.

### Youth Loan Eligibility Requirements:

- Be a citizen of the United States (which includes Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) or a legal resident alien;
- Be 10 years to 20 years of age;
- Comply with FSA’s general eligibility requirements;
- Be unable to get a loan from other sources;
- Conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program of work as outlined above;



- Demonstrate capability of planning, managing and operating the project under guidance and assistance from a project advisor. The project supervisor must recommend the youth loan applicant, along with providing adequate supervision.

For help preparing the application forms, contact your [local USDA Service Center](#) or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

---

## Avoid Scams Related to USDA Financial Assistance for Farmers Facing Discrimination

The Inflation Reduction Act provides \$2.2 billion in financial assistance for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA's farm lending programs prior to January 1, 2021.

USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about this process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information.

Application forms for this program **are not yet available** and the **application filing period has not started**. Before the application process opens, USDA will publish a list of trusted community organizations located across the country that will provide **FREE** help completing applications.

Please beware of organizations seeking to file your application for a fee. Filing an application for the program will be **FREE**. You **will not** need a lawyer to file an application for this program. If you feel the need for legal advice, seek the assistance of a trusted, licensed attorney.

Beware of solicitations by mail, email, or phone calls from individuals claiming to be connected to USDA. **USDA will not solicit you for information.**

The most up-to-date information on this program will be posted at [www.farmers.gov/22007](https://www.farmers.gov/22007), a USDA website. Please check there for any concerns or reach out to your local FSA office. To find your local office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).

If you believe there is an organization conducting a scam related to this process, please contact the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) or any other appropriate authorities. The USDA OIG hotline can be accessed online at <https://usdaoig.oversight.gov/hotline> and by phone at (800) 424-9121.

---

## South Carolina Farm Service Agency

1927 Thurmond Mall  
Suite 100  
Columbia, SC 29201

Phone: 803.806-3820  
Website: [www.fsa.usda.gov/sc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/sc)

### **State Executive Director**

Laurie Funderburk  
[laurie.funderburk@usda.gov](mailto:laurie.funderburk@usda.gov)

### **Administrative Officer**

Kenn Jameson  
[kenn.jameson@usda.gov](mailto:kenn.jameson@usda.gov)

### **Farm Programs Chief**

Linda Williams  
[linda.c.williams@usda.gov](mailto:linda.c.williams@usda.gov)

### **Farm Loan Programs Chief**

William Shelley  
[william.shelley@usda.gov](mailto:william.shelley@usda.gov)

### **State Committee:**

Anthony Grant, Committee Chair

Lawrence Weathers

Mary Frances Koon

J.E.B. Wilson

Warren Dixon