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From the FSA State Executive Director

First, let me begin by offering our thoughts and prayers to everyone impacted by the severe weather events that have recently occurred across the state. We know that these natural disasters can have long-lasting impacts on our communities, but our resilience will help us rebuild. FSA offices stand ready to deliver disaster programs to help producers recover from these devastating events. You can read more about available disaster programs at farmers.gov/protection-recovery.



Concerning upcoming deadlines, FSA is accepting applications for the [Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program](#) through April 29, 2022. USDA will make payments to hog producers who sold hogs through a spot market from April 16, 2020, through Sept. 1, 2020, the period in which these producers faced the greatest reduction in market prices because of COVID-19.

For information on other important program deadlines, visit [farmers.gov](#).

Relating to urban agriculture, USDA will host the [first public meeting](#) of the inaugural Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on March 23-24, 2022. The public – including urban producers – are encouraged to participate in the virtual meeting. The new federal advisory committee is part of USDA's efforts to support urban agriculture, creating a network for feedback.

We are looking forward to welcoming producers back into our FSA offices across the state. Please be sure to call before visiting your [local FSA office](#) to confirm the status of office operations.

Sincerely,

Eddie Trevino
Acting State Executive Director
Farm Service Agency - Texas

From the NRCS State Conservationist



As we head into April and agricultural producers are seeing the impacts of the drought (<https://www.drought.gov/states/texas>), we are closely watching the situation. NRCS has the science-based solutions and technical experts on the ground today to assist farmers and ranchers in dealing with the drought and preparing for future weather events. NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to cope with drought across the state. I recommend visiting <https://www.farmers.gov/protection-recovery> for more information on USDA disaster assistance.

NRCS field office district conservationists are working with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to establish dates and locations for local workgroup meetings (LWG). I highly encourage everyone to check with their county NRCS or SWCD to see when your county LWG meeting will be held. Participating in the meetings is an excellent opportunity to provide feedback on agricultural and natural resource concerns in your county.

Grant funding opportunities available under the [Texas Partners for Conservation](#) was announced. Priority will be placed on Outreach and Education to Historically Underserved Producers and Clients and Farm Bill Operations. There is no cost sharing or matching requirement for this opportunity. The funding floor is \$30,000, and the ceiling is \$150,000. All funding applications must be submitted via [grants.gov](#) by May 6, 2022.

During the Texas Land Conservation Conference on March 4th, I was a speaker on a panel discussing Texas conservation challenges and opportunities. The conference is a

statewide meeting for anyone working in the field of land and water conservation. Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, Rob Ziehr, spoke about partnership opportunities which generated interest in funding sources such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners who offer value-added contributions. NRCS State Easement Program Coordinator, Kimberly Burr, led a question-and-answer session on various easements and other conservation programs available to meet the goals and objectives of the landowners. NRCS also provided resources and informative handouts to attendees at the booth.

We are working with partners in the identified watershed under the [National Water Quality Initiatives](#) to spread the word about funding opportunities through the program. Conservation partners are assisting with outreach and education efforts in the Lampasas Watershed and the Lavon Lake Watershed.

In honor of Women's History Month in March and International Women's Day, we presented Carla Payne, a Texas rancher who is writing her own history book on her land.

Whether from a bird's eye view high up in the blue skies of Texas or with feet planted firmly on the ground, Carla Payne is no stranger to taking care of the land she loves and the cattle that rely on that land—and on Payne for that matter. An innovator, groundbreaker, and risk taker, this female cattle producer, award-winning longhorn rancher, and conservationist has been involved in the agribusiness in one way or another for more than 30 years.

[Flying C Ranch: A Profile of Determination and Conservation \(arcgis.com\)](#) Open with Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, or Microsoft Edge

A few other announcements that may be of interest (click on title to open the announcement):

- [USDA Report Shows a Decade of Conservation Trends](#)
- [New Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture to Meet March 23-24](#)
- [USDA Invests More Than \\$166.5 Million in Infrastructure to Protect American Communities](#)
- [USDA Offers Special Funding Opportunity for Landowners and Managers in Areas of Grayson, Collin, Fannin, Hunt, Lampasas, and Burnet Counties](#)
- [USDA Targets Funds in Texas to Help Producers with Infrastructure Repairs Along Southern Border](#)

Conservation Practice Adoption and Motivations Survey (CPAMS) begins end of May via National Agricultural Statistics Survey (NASS)

- CPAMS is a joint project between NASS and NRCS aimed at assessing the adoption rates of different conservation practices. NASS is sending questionnaires for crop practices and confined livestock practices in May 2022. Questionnaires for grazing practices and forestry practices will be sent in 2024.
- End of May, farmers across the country will receive a letter from NASS with directions to complete their crop practices or confined livestock practices survey online (they will need the unique survey code to sign in which will be on the letter).

- There are four different conservation categories which are surveyed: *crop practices, grazing practices, confined livestock practices, and forestry practices*. Each category will have a questionnaire that has been designed to gather information specific to the practices involved in each category. *Survey data will be used to guide the implementation of NRCS programs in the future. The letter also states, "If we do not receive your completed survey by August 12, we may contact you to arrange a phone interview."*
- Results from the CPAMS for crop practices and confined livestock practices will be available on the NASS website.

[Upcoming events that Texas NRCS will be involved](#) to spread the conservation message:

- March 23-25,2022 - [National Land Conference](#), San Antonio
- March 25-27, 2022 – [Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Annual Meeting and Expo](#), Fort Worth
- March 30, 2022 – [Plant Party #6: Breaking Down Plant Identification](#), Virtual

Sincerely,

Kristy Oates
 State Conservationist
 Natural Resources Conservation Service - Texas

New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers now have a one-stop shop to help ensure they are treated fairly. The new farmerfairness.gov portal developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) allows you to report potential violations of livestock and poultry antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently expressed concern that producers across the country have for too long faced a marketplace that benefits a few large companies over the farmers and ranchers who grow and raise our food.

For example, ranchers received more than 60 cents of every dollar a consumer spent on beef 50 years ago, compared to approximately 39 cents today. Hog farmers fared worse over the past 50 years, as their share of the consumer dollar fell from between 40 to 60 cents 50 years ago to approximately 19 cents today.

In order to assure economic opportunity and fairness for all, this portal makes it easy for farmers and ranchers to register a complaint or tip and provide details that would aid an investigation.

Who may submit a complaint or tip?

Anyone who suspects a violation of Federal law governing fair and competitive marketing and contract growing of livestock and poultry, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

What information should I provide?

Those reporting potential violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act and other competition laws via the online portal are asked to submit the following information:

- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that are involved,
- A description of any possible violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act or other [federal antitrust laws](#),
- Examples of the conduct that may violate one or more of these laws,
- Any other relevant details about the violation, and
- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that may be harmed by the alleged violation and how they are harmed.

What is the process following submission of a complaint or tip?

Complaints and tips will go through a preliminary review by USDA Packers and Stockyards Division staff and Department of Justice staff. If a complaint raises sufficient concern under the Packers and Stockyards Act or antitrust laws, it will be selected for further investigation by the appropriate agency. This action may lead to the opening of a formal investigation.

USDA or DOJ staff will only contact complainants if additional information is needed.

Will my confidentiality be protected?

Both USDA and DOJ will protect the confidentiality of the complainants to the fullest extent possible under the law. For any information provided, DOJ and USDA will follow their respective Privacy and Confidentiality Policies found at: [DOJ Confidentiality](#) and [USDA Privacy](#). Packers and Stockyards regulations regarding confidentiality also apply: [PSD Confidentiality](#). DOJ and USDA commit to supporting relevant whistleblower protections, including newly applicable protections [for criminal antitrust complainants against unlawful retaliation](#).

To submit an anonymous complaint or tip, complainants or tippers should provide appropriate details but not enter their names or contact information. Neither USDA nor DOJ will be able to contact anonymous complainants or tips to obtain additional information that might be needed to evaluate your complaint tip, or to engage in future correspondence regarding your complaint or tip

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers deserve the benefits of fair and competitive markets for their products and services. This portal is an additional tool to support and protect these individuals who are vital to agriculture and our food supply.

USDA Updates Eligibility for Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has clarified the definition of a spot market sale and hog eligibility under the [Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program](#) (SMHPP), which assists producers who sold hogs through a spot market sale from April 16, 2020, through

Sept. 1, 2020. Hog producers will also now be required to submit documentation to support information provided on their SMHPP application. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications through April 29, 2022, which is an extension of the April 15, 2022, deadline previously set for the program.

USDA is offering the SMHPP in response to a reduction in packer production due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in fewer negotiated hogs being procured and subsequent lower market prices. The program is part of USDA's broader [Pandemic Assistance for Producers](#) initiative and addresses gaps in previous assistance for hog producers.

SMHPP Program Updates

When the pandemic disrupted normal marketing channels, including access to packers, producers sold their hogs through cash sales to local processors or butchers, direct sales to individuals and third-party intermediaries, including sale barns or brokers. The use of third-party intermediaries was the only available marketing alternative for many producers and are now included in SMHPP. The only direct to packer sales that are eligible for SMHPP are those through a negotiated sale. Hogs sold through a contract that includes a premium above the spot-market price or other formula such as the wholesale cut-out price remain ineligible. Hogs must be suitable and intended for slaughter to be eligible. Immature swine (pigs) are ineligible.

FSA will now require documentation to support the accuracy of information provided on the FSA-940 Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program application, including the number of hogs reported on the application that were sold through a spot market sale and how the price was determined for the sale.

SMHPP payments will be calculated by multiplying the number of head of eligible hogs, not to exceed 10,000 head, by the payment rate of \$54 per head. To ensure SMHPP funding availability is disbursed equitably to all eligible producers, FSA will now issue payments after the application period ends. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be factored.

Applying for Assistance

Eligible hog producers can apply for SMHPP by April 29, 2022, by completing the FSA-940, Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program application, along with required supporting documentation. Producers can visit farmers.gov/smhpp for examples of supporting documentation, information on applicant eligibility and more information on how to apply.

Applications can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. To find their local FSA office, producers should [visit farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator). Hog producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.

Maintaining ARC/PLC Acreage

If you're enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, you must protect all cropland and noncropland acres on the farm from wind and water erosion and noxious weeds. By signing ARC county or individual contracts and PLC

contracts, you agree to effectively control noxious weeds on the farm according to sound agricultural practices. If you fail to take necessary actions to correct a maintenance problem on your farm that is enrolled in ARC or PLC, the County Committee may elect to terminate your contract for the program year.

Unauthorized Disposition of Grain Results in Financial Penalties

If loan grain has been disposed of through feeding, selling or any other form of disposal without prior written authorization from the county office staff, it is considered unauthorized disposition. The financial penalties for unauthorized dispositions are severe and your name will be placed on a loan violation list for a two-year period. Always call before you haul any grain under loan.

Five Facts About the United States Drought Monitor

This is likely no surprise to you, but drought persists across the western U.S. and is intensifying in some areas. No geographic area is immune to the potential of drought at any given time. The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) provides a weekly drought assessment, and it plays an important role in USDA programs that help farmers and ranchers recover from drought.

Fact #1 - Numerous agencies use the Drought Monitor to inform drought-related decisions.

The map identifies areas of drought and labels them by intensity on a weekly basis. It categorizes the entire country as being in one of six levels of drought. The first two, None and Abnormally Dry (D0), are not considered to be drought. The next four describe increasing levels of drought: Moderate (D1), Severe (D2), Extreme (D3) and Exceptional (D4).

While many entities consult the Drought Monitor for drought information, drought declarations are made by federal, [state](#) and local agencies that may or may not use the Drought Monitor to inform their decisions. Some of the ways USDA uses it to determine a producer's eligibility for certain [drought assistance programs](#), like the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) and [Emergency Haying or Grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres](#) and to "fast-track" [Secretarial drought disaster designations](#).

Fact #2 - U.S. Drought Monitor is made with more than precipitation data.

When you think about drought, you probably think about water, or the lack of it. Precipitation plays a major role in the creation of the Drought Monitor, but the map's author considers [numerous indicators](#), including [drought impacts](#) and local insight from over 450 expert observers around the country. Authors use several dozen indicators to assess drought, including precipitation, streamflow, reservoir levels, temperature and evaporative demand, soil moisture and vegetation health. Because the drought monitor depicts both short and long-term drought conditions, the authors must look at data for

multiple timeframes. The final map produced each week represents a summary of the story being told by all the pieces of data. To help tell that story, authors don't just look at data. They converse over the course of the map-making week with experts across the country and draw information about drought impacts from media reports and private citizens.

Fact #3 - A real person, using real data, updates the map.

Each week's map author, not a computer, processes and analyzes data to update the drought monitor. The [map authors](#) are trained climatologists or meteorologists from the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (the academic partner and website host of the Drought Monitor), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and USDA. The author's job is to do what a computer can't – use their expertise to reconcile the sometimes-conflicting stories told by each stream of data into a single assessment.

Fact #4 - The Drought Monitor provides a current snapshot, not a forecast.

The Drought Monitor is a "snapshot" of conditions observed during the most recent week and builds off the previous week's map. The map is released on Thursdays and depicts conditions based on data for the week that ended the preceding Tuesday. Rain that falls on the Wednesday just before the USDM's release won't be reflected until the next map is published. This provides a consistent, week-to-week product and gives the author a window to assess the data and come up with a final map.

Fact #5 – Your input can be part of the drought-monitoring process.

State climatologists and other trained observers in the drought monitoring network relay on-the-ground information from numerous sources to the US Drought monitor author each week. That can include information that you contribute.

The Drought Monitor serves as a trigger for multiple forms of federal disaster relief for agricultural producers, and sometimes producers contact the author to suggest that drought conditions in their area are worse than what the latest drought monitor shows. When the author gets a call like that, it prompts them to look closely at all available data for that area, to see whether measurements of precipitation, temperature, soil moisture and other indicators corroborate producer-submitted reports. This is the process that authors follow whether they receive one report or one hundred reports, although reports from more points may help state officials and others know where to look for impacts.

There are multiple ways to contribute your observations:

1. **Talk to your state climatologist** - Find the current list at the [American Association of State Climatologists](#) website.
2. **Email** - Emails sent to droughtmonitor@unl.edu inform the USDM authors.
3. **Become a CoCoRaHS observer** - Submit drought reports along with daily precipitation observations to the [Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network](#).
4. **Submit Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR)** - go.unl.edu/CMOR.

For more information, read our [Ask the Expert blog with a NDMC climatologist](#) or visit farmers.gov/protection-recovery.

Loan Maturity for Marketing Assistance Loans

Typically, Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) mature on demand, but no later than the last day of the 9th calendar month after the month the MAL is disbursed. However, with the passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, agricultural producers now have additional time to repay MALs.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 provides an extension of the MAL maturity to 12 months. This extension is applicable to nonrecourse loans for all commodities except seed cotton and sugar. Eligible open loans must be in good standing with a maturity date on or after July 31, 2021. New crop year loans (2021) requested by September 30, 2021, will also be eligible for the twelve-month maturity.

All current, active loans will automatically be extended the additional three months. Producers who prefer a nine-month loan maturity will need to notify their local FSA county office. Loans that are requested after September 30, 2021, will have a nine-month maturity.

MALs have a maximum loan maturity term of 12 months, therefore loans that had the maturity extended through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stability Act of 2020 (CARES Act) are not eligible for an additional extension.

Eligible commodities include barley, chickpeas (small and large), corn, cotton (upland), dry peas, grain sorghum, honey, lentils, mohair, oats, peanuts, rice (long and medium grain), soybeans, unshorn pelts, wheat, wool (graded and nongraded); and other oilseeds, including canola, crambe, flaxseed, mustard seed, rapeseed, safflower, sunflower seed, and sesame seed. Seed cotton and sugar are not eligible.

For more information on MALs, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Progression Lending from FSA

Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loans are considered progression lending. Unlike loans from a commercial lender, FSA loans are intended to be temporary in nature. Our goal is to help you graduate to commercial credit, and our farm loan staff is available to help borrowers through training and credit counseling.

The FSA team will help borrowers identify their goals to ensure financial success. FSA staff will advise borrowers on developing strategies and a plan to meet your goals and graduate to commercial credit. FSA borrowers are responsible for the success of their farming operation, but FSA staff will help in an advisory role, providing the tools necessary to help you achieve your operational goals and manage your finances.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Texas USDA NRCS Local-led Conservation Planning Meetings Being Held Statewide

Each year, from March through May, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Texas county field office staff and their conservation partners at Soil and Water Conservation Districts host Local Work Group meetings across the entire state. These meetings provide a forum to outline future conservation needs, identify conservation resource concerns and set priorities for a given resource area. Participants help:

- identify where the best investments can be made to address natural resource problems,
- share the work that has already been done in the county, and
- share their vision for what the county will look like when these natural resource concerns have been addressed.

This locally led, grassroots planning effort is the hallmark of USDA NRCS. These listening sessions are open to the public and provide time for participants to share their perspectives on local priorities NRCS offers through the technical assistance and through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding of the current Farm Bill. A complete list of Local Work Group meetings, times and locations for each county can be found via a statewide on the [NRCS Texas website](#). Click on the county you are interested in to see meeting information and NRCS contact for the meeting.

Strategic approach to conservation

This local information gather process is part of NRCS' strategic approach to conservation across the state of Texas. NRCS utilizes Local Work Group meetings to gather input from landowners, agency partners and other stakeholders to identify and prioritize natural resource concerns in the community. This information is collected and provided to the State Conservationist and the State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), which is made up of partners at all levels of government, organizations, research institutions, non-profits, and landowners to concentrate conservation efforts and yield measurable results. Based on the input received, NRCS works with partners to develop local strategies to help agricultural producers in each county to implement conservation practices that address related resource concerns. Local Work Group meetings provide an opportunity to check-in on current projects, to ensure the project is meeting its goals and enabling adjustments to be made when necessary. Visit [farmers.gov](#) to find your [local USDA service center](#) For more information, visit the NRCS Web site at <http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/>.

USDA Seeks Applications to Help Farmers and Ranchers Access New and Better Markets

USDA is accepting applications for grants to help farmers and ranchers create economic prosperity by maximizing the value of the items they produce.

USDA is making the grants available under the [Value-Added Producer Grants](#) program, administered through USDA Rural Development. The grants help agricultural producers

generate new products, create marketing opportunities, and increase their incomes through value-added activities.

USDA is offering [priority points](#) to projects that advance key priorities under the Biden-Harris Administration to help communities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, advance equity, and combat climate change. These extra points will increase the likelihood of funding for projects seeking to address these critical challenges in rural America.

Eligible applicants include independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmer or rancher cooperatives, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures.

Funding priority will be given to farmers or ranchers who are beginning, military veterans or socially disadvantaged; small and mid-sized family farms or ranches; and farmer or rancher cooperatives. Priority also will be given to projects that propose a mid-tier value chain by development of a supply network that moves agricultural products from production through consumption in a local or regional market.

Funding may be used for planning activities or working capital expenses related to producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product.

Planning activities may include conducting feasibility studies and developing business plans. Working capital expenses may include costs associated with processing, marketing, advertising, inventory and salaries.

A total of \$19.75 million is available in fiscal year 2022, including \$2.75 million in COVID-19 relief funds carried over from 2021.

The maximum award for a planning grant is \$75,000. The maximum award for a working capital grant is \$250,000.

Awardees must contribute matching funds equal to the amount of the grant unless they are applying for COVID-19 relief funds, which allows for a reduced matching requirement of 10% of the grant amount.

Electronic applications will be accepted via [Grants.gov](#) until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 25, 2022.

Paper applications must be sent to the [State Office](#) where the project is proposed.

Paper applications must be postmarked and mailed or sent overnight by May 2, 2022. Applications also may be delivered in person or emailed to an RD field office by close of business May 2, 2022.

Additional information is available on page 11396 of the March 1 [Federal Register](#) or by contacting your [local USDA Rural Development office](#).

If you'd like to subscribe to USDA Rural Development updates, visit our [GovDelivery subscriber page](#).

Applications Now Being Accepted for the Texas Department of Agriculture's 2022 Young Farmer Grants - Round 2

Applications for the Texas Department of Agriculture's (TDA) 2022 Young Farmer Grant (YFG) program are being accepted **Wednesday, April 27, 2022, by 11:59 PM Central Time.**

YFG is administered by TDA under the direction of the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority (TAFA). The purpose of this program is to provide financial assistance in the form of dollar-for-dollar matching grant funds to individuals between the age of 18, but younger than 46 years of age at the time of the grant application submission deadline, who are engaged or will be engaged in creating or expanding an agricultural business in Texas.

The 2022 Application will all be completed online. Original/Paper applications will not be accepted. Please **DO NOT e-mail, mail or deliver** applications in person to the TDA Headquarters in Austin.

Please contact TDA via email at Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov with questions. Additional details, instructions and the 2022 Round 2 application materials can be found [here](#).



USDA in Texas

**Farm Service Agency
Acting State Executive Director**

Erasmo (Eddie) Trevino

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
State Conservationist**

Kristy Oates

**Farm Service Agency
State Committee**

Debra Barrett