



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA News - Lone Star State Edition - July 27, 2023

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From the FSA State Executive Director



I hope that you are having a great summer. We are just over a month into the season and have already seen record breaking temperatures across the state along with a decrease in rains which has started to impact some crops and pastures. While you are out tending to crops and livestock, I encourage you to remain mindful of your health and heat stress. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides some useful information on [Coping with Hot Work Environments](#), available through their [Agricultural Safety & Health](#) program.

USDA and FSA have made several important program announcements this month. The [Discrimination Financial Assistance Program](#) authorized by Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act provides financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs. Program details including an application and e-filing portal are available at [22007apply.gov](#). Applicants can also contact the call center (free call) at 1-800-721-0970 or visit one of several dozen brick-and-mortar program support offices. Visit [22007apply.gov/local-assistance/html](#) for office locations. This is not a first-come, first-served program. All applications received or postmarked before the Oct. 31 deadline will be considered.

More than 144,000 acres in Texas had been accepted through this year's Grassland CRP signup. [Grassland CRP](#) helps grasslands sequester carbon, provides wildlife habitat and grazing opportunities. Producers and landowners are also encouraged to consider the [Continuous CRP](#) signup, which is currently open.

The [Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program](#) (ODMAP) deadline has been extended to Aug. 11, 2023. ODMAP mitigates market volatility, higher input and transportation costs, and unstable feed supply and prices that have created unique hardships in the organic dairy industry. ODMAP provides a one-time cost-share payment based on marketing costs on pounds of organic milk marketed in the 2022 calendar year. Eligible producers include certified organic dairy operations that produce milk from cows, goats and sheep. To apply, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

The [FSA county committee](#) nominations are due by Aug. 1. FSA county committee members are local agricultural producers who help ensure fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their county or multi-county jurisdiction. You can nominate yourself or others. Organizations representing minority and women agricultural producers can also nominate candidates. The [FSA-669A](#) nomination form must be postmarked or received in your local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2023. To find out if your area is holding an election this year, contact your [local FSA office](#).

On a final note, [FSA and NRCS in Texas announced](#) we are establishing a new Urban Service Center in Dallas and a new urban FSA county committee in Houston.

This new Urban Service Center and Urban County Committee will continue FSA's work in identifying the needs of urban producers and providing support through our existing farm loan, conservation, disaster assistance and risk management programs. For more information on support for urban producers, you can visit [farmers.gov/urban](#).

Enjoy the rest of summer!

Sincerely,

Kelly Adkins
State Executive Director
Farm Service Agency - Texas

From the NRCS State Conservationist

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) [Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative \(MBRI\)](#) through July 31, 2023. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized NRCS to create the MBRI due to a pressing need for migratory bird species. The EQIP MBRI is aimed at preserving, protecting, and improving habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, neotropical birds and other avian species in the Prairie Pothole Region and in key portions of the Pacific, Mississippi, and the Central Flyways.



The USDA NRCS is announcing an additional opportunity for farmers, ranchers and producer to sign up for the [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) through the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\)](#). **Applications for this opportunity are being accepted through July 31, 2023.** CSP-IRA is different than the CSP Classic Program, as this signup specifically targets “climate and clean energy.” CSP-IRA applications must include at least one core Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) conservation practice or activity that directly improves soil carbon, reduces nitrogen losses, or reduces, captures, avoids or sequesters carbon dioxide, methane or nitrous emissions associated with agricultural productions. Facilitating practices or activities that are needed to implement the core practice may also be included.

For questions regarding eligible practices and to apply for EQIP-MBRI or CSP-IRA, contact your [local NRCS Service Center](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans in many positive ways. USDA is building new markets for farmers and producers by 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 help agricultural producers invest in conservation on their farms, ranches and working forests, NRCS is currently hiring additional staff, soil conservationists, soil conservation technicians, and engineering technicians, to deliver conservation programs. For more information on federal employment, please visit www.usajobs.gov.

NRCS has opened the doors of its new urban USDA Service Center located at 3102 Maple Avenue in Dallas, Texas. This office has been established specifically to serve the needs of the urban community. The new office will focus on assisting small farm production and conservation efforts in urban areas. This includes providing guidance on sustainable farming practices, access to financing and grants, technical assistance for crop and livestock

management, and advice on navigating local regulations and zoning requirements, as well as information on networking and marketing avenues through local gardening organization, farmers markets and restaurants that purchase locally grown produce.

NRCS Texas has partnered with the Texas Corn Producers Association and iCEV Multimedia, a creative educational video company, to produce a training and certification program for Texas youth interested in agriculture. iCEV is the nation's leading producer of career and technical education materials. Using an online platform, the program provides quality academia and industry-approved curriculum primarily for high school students nationwide. More than 8,000 educators and 300,000 students throughout the United States currently use iCEV materials.

Through our partnership with Texas Corn Producers and iCEV, we have developed a high school curriculum-based industry certification, *Fundamentals of Conservation & Sustainability in Agriculture Certification*, to create awareness of soil and water conservation techniques and aid in recruitment opportunities into the natural resources and agricultural industry. This new educational training initiative will be rolled out just in time for the 2023-24 school year.

Sincerely,

Kristy Oates
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service - Texas

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

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](#), 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.

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](#).

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.

USDA Accepts Nearly 2.7 Million Acres in Grassland CRP Signup, Bringing the Program Closer to Acreage Cap

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting offers for nearly 2.7 million acres from agricultural producers and private landowners through this year's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grassland signup. This program allows producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while protecting grasslands and further CRP conservation efforts. Grassland CRP is part of the Biden-Harris administration's broader effort to address climate change and conserve natural resources.

Additionally, USDA has accepted more than 1 million acres through the General CRP signup, and more than 465,800 acres have been submitted through the Continuous CRP signup so far this year:

Top states include:

- Colorado, 430,899 acres;
- Nebraska, 417,865 acres; and
- South Dakota, 325,443 acres.

Grassland CRP leverages working lands practices to improve biodiversity and conserve environmentally sensitive land. To target conservation in key geographies, USDA prioritizes land within two National Priority Zones: the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and the Dust Bowl area. FSA accepted more than 911,000 acres in these two zones. Land enrolled in these zones will contribute to broader USDA conservation efforts through [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) by conserving working grasslands and other lands that underpin iconic big game migrations.

Grasslands enrolled in CRP help sequester carbon in vegetation and soil, while enhancing resilience to drought and wildfire. Meanwhile, producers can still conduct common grazing practices, such as haying, mowing or harvesting seed from the enrolled land, which supports agricultural production.

Broadening Reach of Program

As part of the Agency's Justice40 efforts, producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers, limited-resource producers, and military veterans, received 20 additional ranking points to enhance their offers. From more than 6,400 underserved producers, USDA accepted offers of more than 1.8 million acres, about 74% of those who submitted applications.

Additionally, USDA is working to broaden the scope and reach of Grassland CRP by leveraging the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to engage underserved communities. CREP is a partnership program that enables states, Tribal governments, and non-profit entities to partner with FSA to implement CRP practices and address high priority conservation and environmental objectives. Interested entities are encouraged to contact FSA.

More Information

Producers can still make an offer to participate in CRP through the [Continuous CRP signup](#), which is ongoing, by contacting FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

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, 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 usda.gov.

USDA Extends Deadline for Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Until August 11

USDA's Farm Service Agency is extending the deadline for the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) to Aug. 11, 2023. This extension gives organic dairy producers more than two additional weeks to apply for the program. ODMAP helps producers mitigate market volatility, higher input and transportation costs, and unstable feed supply and prices that have created unique hardships in the organic dairy industry. This assistance will help keep organic dairy operations sustainable until markets return to more normal conditions.

Organic dairy producers should apply by August 11, 2023 at their local USDA Service Center. [Learn more.](#)

USDA Establishing New Urban Service Center in Dallas and County Committee in Houston

The Urban Service Centers will be staffed by FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees and will offer farm loan, conservation, disaster assistance and risk management programs. USDA is also establishing a new Urban County Committee in Houston, joining 26 other cities with a committee focused on delivery of USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs to urban producers.

See where the new service center is located and how the county committee can help you. [USDA Establishing New Urban Service Center in Dallas and Urban County Committee in Houston](#)

USDA Hiring Engineers, Natural Resource Specialists Nationwide to Strengthen Inflation Reduction Act Implementation, Enhance Agricultural Conservation

USDA announced it is ramping up hiring for key positions that will help strengthen agricultural conservation efforts and turn President Biden's Investing in America agenda into action. The available positions include engineers, civil engineering technicians and natural resource specialists, building on other large-scale hiring announcements earlier this year.

Today's announcement is funded by \$19.5 billion from President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. The new NRCS engineers and engineering technicians will play a critical role in solving a host of natural resource problems for agricultural producers and local communities. Their projects may involve stream restoration, erosion control, developing water systems for livestock, improving and conserving irrigation water and restoring wetlands. They may also help communities recover from natural disasters.

Natural resource specialists perform a variety of duties to help landowners meet their conservation objectives. This may include assisting in the implementation of conservation plans, conducting scientific studies and performing on-site evaluations with customers. Their work enhances conservation program delivery and helps build resilient farms and communities across America.

How to Apply

Interested candidates can find more information and apply by searching for these job titles on USAjobs.gov.

To qualify for these positions, candidates must meet the education requirements, or a combination of education and experience requirements, as outlined in the job announcement. General qualifications for the engineering and natural resource management job series are also available on OPM.gov. Additional information on career opportunities at NRCS is available on the agency's [careers webpage](#).

More Information

Over the next several years, NRCS expects to add over 4,400 new employees to its federal workforce, in addition to over 3,000 team members through partner organizations, to help with Inflation Reduction Act implementation.

NRCS is a federal agency that helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners conserve soil, water and other natural resources. Employees provide technical expertise and conservation planning. Financial assistance is available for a wide variety of conservation programs. NRCS has offices in USDA Service Centers nationwide.

Farm Service Agency Now Accepting Nominations for Farmers and Ranchers to Serve on Local County Committees

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is now accepting nominations for county committee members for elections that will occur later this year. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is unveiling a new GIS tool to make it easier for producers to participate in the nomination and election processes for county committee members, who make important decisions on how federal farm programs are administered locally.

All nomination forms for the 2023 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2023.

Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for members. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction and they may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area.

Customers can locate their LAA through a new GIS locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Agricultural producers may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee if they:

- Participate or cooperate in a USDA program; and
- Reside in the LAA that is up for election this year.

A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority producers, women and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote and hold office.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 dedicated members of the agricultural community serve on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment and other agricultural issues.

Urban and Suburban County Committees

The 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to form urban county committees as well as make other advancements related to urban agriculture, including the establishment of the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. FSA established county committees specifically focused on urban agriculture. The urban county committees will work to encourage and promote urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural production practices. Additionally, the new county committees may address areas such as food access, community engagement, support of local activities to promote and encourage community compost and food waste reduction.

Urban committee members are nominated and elected to serve by local urban producers in the same jurisdiction. Urban county committee members will provide outreach to ensure urban producers understand USDA programs and serve as the voice of other urban producers and assist in program implementation that support the needs of the growing urban community.

County committees for urban agriculture are located in 17 cities across the U.S. including Dallas.

More Information

Producers should contact their local FSA office today to register and find out how to get involved in their county's election, including if their LAA is up for election this year. To be considered, a producer must be registered and sign an [FSA-669A](#) nomination form. Nomination forms and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters beginning Nov. 6, 2023.

Reminders for FSA Direct and Guaranteed Borrowers with Real Estate Security

Farm loan borrowers who have pledged real estate as security for their Farm Service Agency (FSA) direct or guaranteed loans are responsible for maintaining loan collateral. Borrowers must obtain prior consent or approval from FSA or the guaranteed lender for any transaction that affects real estate security. These transactions include, but are not limited to:

- Leases of any kind
- Easements of any kind
- Subordinations
- Partial releases
- Sales

Failure to meet or follow the requirements in the loan agreement, promissory note, and other security instruments could lead to nonmonetary default which could jeopardize your current and future loans.

It is critical that borrowers keep an open line of communication with their FSA loan staff or guaranteed lender when it comes to changes in their operation. For more information on borrower responsibilities, read [Your FSA Farm Loan Compass](#).

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) can help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations,

increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

There are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#) option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a joint financing loan is \$600,000, and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

The operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about farm loans, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Announces Modifications to the Annual Forage and Rainfall Index Program

USDA is modifying the Annual Forage Insurance Program to make it more sustainable and to allow producers more flexibility. This includes allowing producers to choose the areas which they insure, rather than being required to insure all eligible acres. The changes will take effect for the 2024 crop year.

The Annual Forage insurance program is a rainfall index area-based plan that provides coverage to acreage planted each year and used as feed and fodder by livestock. The rainfall index does not directly measure an individual producer's annual forage production or loss. Rather, it measures the normal precipitation deviation that occurs in and around the insured area, which is correlated with forage production. The Annual Forage insurance program include all counties in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Texas.

The modifications to the Annual Forage pilot program include:

- Allowing producers to insure the acres they choose – no longer requiring all eligible acres to be insured.
- Modifying the program design from four growing seasons to 12 growing seasons.
- Moving the Acreage Reporting Date to the fifth day of the month after the month of planting, which creates 12 acreage reporting dates.

- Adding planting dates to designate the planting month and corresponding acreage reporting date.
- Allowing producers in Kansas and Nebraska to have coverage in growing season 10 through 12 and a corresponding growing season at the start of the next crop year, which is consistent with other states where the insurance is offered.
- Updating the Rainfall Index Basic Provisions to incorporate existing guidance on the record requirements in double cropping situations when one of the crops follow a different plan of insurance.

The Annual Forage Insurance Program began in 2014. Producers have enrolled for coverage on more than 6.2 million acres.

USDA Provides Local Support for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

The first 10 years of a farming or ranching operation are tough. USDA recognizes you need dedicated support to help make sense of all the information coming your way. Now each state has a Beginning Farmer and Rancher team headed up by a state coordinator. The coordinator helps producers who have operated a farm or ranch for less than 10 years navigate USDA and partner resources.

To find your Texas coordinator, visit farmers.gov/newfarmers/coordinators/. For more beginning farmer and rancher information, visit farmers.gov/newfarmers.

USDA in Texas



Farm Service Agency

State Executive Director
Kelly Adkins

State Committee

Natural Resources Conservation Service

State Conservationist
Kristy Oates

Risk Management Agency

Debra Barrett, Committee Chair
Armando Mandujano
Angie Martin
Wesley Ratcliff
Cody Scogin

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