



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA News - Lone Star State Edition - May 23, 2023

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

- [From the FSA State Executive Director](#)
 - [From the NRCS State Conservationist](#)
 - [Myth-Busting FSA's New Revenue-Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs](#)
 - [USDA Previews Emergency Relief Assistance for Agricultural Producers Who Incurred Losses Due to 2022 Natural Disaster Events](#)
 - [USDA Announces Signup for New Rice Production Program](#)
 - [USDA Offers Livestock Disaster Program Flexibilities; Responds to Needs Expressed by Producers Hard-Hit by Natural Disasters](#)
 - [USDA Offers Assistance to Help Organic Dairy Producers Cover Increased Costs with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program](#)
 - [USDA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023](#)
 - [USDA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program Assists Organic Producers Recover Costs Associated with Organic Certification](#)
 - [Avoid Scams Related to USDA Financial Assistance for Farmers Facing Discrimination](#)
 - [FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans](#)
 - [Don't Miss Your Opportunity to be Represented in Ag Census Data](#)
 - [Upcoming Events](#)
-

From the FSA State Executive Director



Earlier this month, Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced the new [Rice Production Program](#), which will provide up to \$250 million in assistance to rice farmers based on 2022 planted and prevented planted acres. We are using a streamlined approach for rice producers by mailing a pre-filled application to eligible producers. Producers who do not receive a pre-filled application can visit their local FSA to apply. Eligible producers have until July 10, 2023, to return applications.

The June 2, 2023 signup deadline is rapidly approaching for the [Emergency Relief Program Phase 2](#) (ERP2) and [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program](#) (PARP). Each of these programs were announced earlier this year to assist producers whose revenue was impacted by natural disasters in 2020 and 2021 (ERP2) or by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (PARP). FSA awarded [cooperative agreements](#) to organizations across the nation to provide outreach and technical assistance to producers on these programs. Be sure to review upcoming events listed in the newsletter and take advantage of webinars hosted by our cooperators.

Last week, FSA [announced forthcoming assistance](#) under the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) and Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP) for producers who sustained losses due to a qualifying natural disaster in calendar year 2022. Signup for both of these programs is expected to start this summer. You can read more below on both upcoming programs, including information on how you can prepare for the program signups.

Section 22007 of 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 is 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. Note that application forms for this program are **not** yet available and the application filing period has **not** started.

You can get up-to-date information about this program at farmers.gov/22007, a USDA website.

On a final note, FSA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have opened the new Dallas Urban Service Center, located at 3102 Maple Ave., Dallas, TX. This new service center will be integral in serving urban producers across the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and supporting the work of the [Dallas Urban County Committee](#) in administering FSA programs and identifying the needs of urban producers. Stefen Tucker, Urban County Executive Director, and Deandra Wheeler, Urban Program Technician, along with NRCS staff, stand ready to assist urban producers.

There are many programs across FSA that may be able to assist you with your needs. If you have questions on any of the programs I have mentioned here or that are included in this newsletter edition, please do not hesitate to reach out to your [local FSA office](#).

Sincerely,

Kelly Adkins
State Executive Director
Farm Service Agency - Texas

From the NRCS State Conservationist

We are in full swing at one of our busiest seasons for our agency. Field offices are making one-on-one visits with producers to assess natural resources conditions and provide recommendations during the spring growing season. Many outreach activities with schools and colleges are underway across the state. In April alone, NRCS helped assist with over 40 wildlife, soil, range and plant identification contests for Texas FFA and 4-H members. These events provide an ideal avenue for our staff in attendance to talk about careers with our agency and how they may align with student's interest in natural resources.



As part of a broader effort to implement the \$19.5 billion from the Inflation Reduction Act allocated for conservation programs, NRCS is advertising to fill critical field office positions throughout Texas. Applications are being processed and selections will be made in the near future. Additionally, to help with implementation, NRCS is working with partners nationwide to hire nearly 3,000 team members in the coming years, who will also play a critical role in the conservation planning and implementation process, complementing the work done by NRCS employees.

I am pleased to report that NRCS Texas began operations at the new USDA Urban Service Center at 3102 Maple Avenue in downtown Dallas, on April 21, 2023. NRCS Texas Urban Conservationist Michael Brooks has already started working on new urban grant agreements with historically underserved groups at the new location. Joining him in the office is NRCS Civil Engineer Mikela Pryor, who has an urban engineering background. Both will be available to help provide technical and financial assistance to urban agriculture producers in the Dallas area.

As part of our annual plan of operations, NRCS Texas held a State Technical Committee (STC) meeting on May 16. NRCS and other USDA agencies provided brief updates on Farm Bill programs and were available for participants to ask questions and offer suggestions. Through these NRCS-hosted meetings, NRCS leadership seeks input from Texas agriculture producers and representatives of organizations and agencies on natural resource priorities and concerns to help guide the delivery of NRCS conservation programs and technical assistance within the state.

NRCS Texas recently announced new and additional FY23 conservation financial assistance opportunities for agricultural producers and landowners for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). One of the new opportunities is the Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative (MBRI), aimed at preserving, protecting, and improving habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, neotropicals and other avian species in the Prairie Pothole Region and in key portions of the Pacific, Mississippi, and Central Flyways. Another new opportunity is

the [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#) which provides funding to support producers transitioning to organic production by providing financial assistance and technical assistance to implement conservation practices that support organic production. Applications for these initiatives will be accepted through June 15, 2023. Any applications received after June 15, 2023, will automatically be deferred to the next funding period, if applicable. Farmers, ranchers, and private forest managers interested in applying for assistance should contact the NRCS at their local USDA Service Center.

The USDA is investing \$17 million in five NRCS Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) projects, bringing together partners and landowners in a joint effort to return critical wetland functions to agricultural landscapes. In Texas, NRCS is working with Ducks Unlimited on Texas Playa Lakes in the Texas Panhandle through WREP. Partners will target playas surrounding local towns and communities whose available drinking water is impacted due to heavy center pivot irrigation activities. This project is also focused on improving monarch and lesser prairie chicken habitat. Partners are working with nine separate organizations serving underserved landowners across Texas to increase their participation in the program.

The NRCS is streamlining our Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to better help agricultural producers and private landowners conserve wetlands, productive farmlands and at-risk grasslands. Specifically, NRCS is updating its processes around appraisals, land surveys, as well as certifying eligible entities who help NRCS and producers enroll land into easements. These changes are for ACEP [Agricultural Land Easements](#) (ALE) as well as [Wetland Reserve Easements](#) (WRE).

I want to pass along that the USDA is currently seeking nominations for four positions on the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. Nominations will be open to public from May 15, 2023, to July 15, 2023. Members of the committee provide input on policy development and help identify barriers to urban agriculture as USDA works to promote urban farming and the economic opportunities it provides in cities across the country. For more information, visit the [nomination website](#).

In closing, I want to commend the work of USDA employees statewide, as well as employees with our partnering state and local agencies. Since 1985, the first full week of May has been set aside as Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW) in honor of the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county, and local government employees. I sincerely appreciate their individual and collective contributions which has made and is continuing to make a meaningful and significant difference to the farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners that NRCS serves.

Sincerely,

Kristy Oates
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service - Texas

Myth-Busting FSA's New Revenue-Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs

A Message from FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux

In January, we announced two new programs designed to assist producers who experienced revenue losses from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs are revenue-based and feel a little different from our regular programs, but the goal is to better support farmers.

Both the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\) Phase Two](#) and the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#) offer a holistic approach to disaster assistance and provide economic support for producers who bear the financial brunt of circumstances beyond their control.

With the rollout of any new program, there is a learning curve for producers and employees alike. ERP Phase Two and PARP are no exception. To encourage producer participation in these valuable programs, I'm going to do my best to debunk some myths and misconceptions surrounding ERP Phase Two and PARP.

With a June 2, 2023, deadline to apply for both programs, it's important that we clear up confusion about how to apply, what documents are required for participation, insurance requirements and related misinformation making its way across the countryside.

Now, let's do some myth-busting.

Myth #1 – You need to submit a completed tax return to FSA to apply for ERP Phase Two or PARP.

While these programs are based on revenue losses, you do not need a tax return, completed or otherwise, to apply for assistance. In fact, we have an [ERP Phase 2 tool](#) and [PARP tool](#) that walk you through the process step by step.

We understand that you may have questions for your certified public accountant or tax preparer, who was likely been hard to reach prior to the April 18 Internal Revenue Service tax deadline but we encourage you to download the program decision tools and get started. You'll probably discover that you already have on hand much of the information you need.

The following supporting materials will help you:

- Schedule F (Form 1040); and
- *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 for ERP and for calendar years 2018, 2019, and 2020 for PARP.

The only reason you *might* have to provide your tax returns to FSA is in the event of a spot check or a request from the FSA County Committee.

Myth #2 – You cannot receive an ERP Phase Two payment if you received a payment under Phase One.

It's possible that you can still receive ERP Phase Two benefits if you received an ERP Phase One payment. There is also a possibility that your Phase Two payment may be offset.

Myth #3 – ERP Phase Two was intended to be an additional payment to those who received payment under Phase One.

ERP Phase Two was never designed or intended to be an additional payment. Instead, it was intended to assist those producers who did not receive relief in Phase One.

[Click here to read the full blog and view a producer testimonial on the application process.](#)

USDA Previews Emergency Relief Assistance for Agricultural Producers Who Incurred Losses Due to 2022 Natural Disaster Events

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced plans to roll out \$3.7 billion in [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) and Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP) assistance to crop and livestock producers who sustained losses due to a qualifying natural disaster event in calendar year 2022. USDA is sharing early information to allow producers time to gather documents in advance of program delivery. Through distribution of remaining funds, USDA is also concluding the 2021 ELRP program by sending payments in the amount of 20% of the initial ELRP payment to all existing recipients.

Background

On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the *Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328)* that provides about \$3.7 billion in financial assistance for agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms and other eligible disasters occurring in calendar year 2022.

Additionally, the Act specifically targets up to about \$500 million to livestock producers for losses incurred due to drought or wildfire in calendar year 2022.

ERP 2022 for Crop Producers

USDA, through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), intends to deploy the lessons learned from the development and implementation of ERP and ELRP for previous years' losses to ensure expedited assistance for 2022 losses.

Based on positive feedback from producers, stakeholder groups and FSA county office staff, USDA intends to provide an ERP track for producers who had coverage through Risk Management Agency's [federal crop insurance](#) or FSA's [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#). Through a streamlined application process, USDA intends to be in a position to send pre-filled applications directly to eligible producers in early summer.

For producers who have not been able to avail themselves of risk management coverage or whose losses were not covered, USDA intends to offer a program track to access ERP assistance with assistance provided to producers who suffered a decrease in allowable gross

revenue in 2022 due to necessary expenses related to losses of eligible crops from a qualifying natural disaster event.

Instead of implementing these program tracks as two separate phases on different timelines, FSA intends to make both tracks available to producers at the same time, noting that the first track will follow a streamlined process with less paperwork burden, based on existing, available risk management data. The second ERP track would require that producers provide FSA with certain information related to revenue.

ELRP 2022 for Livestock Producers and Close Out of ELRP for 2021

For impacted ranchers, USDA intends to leverage FSA's Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) data to deliver ELRP assistance for increases in supplemental feed costs in 2022.

To be eligible for an ELRP payment for 2022 losses, livestock producers will need to have suffered grazing losses from wildfire or in a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks or a D3 (extreme drought) or higher level of drought intensity during the 2022 calendar year and have applied and been approved for 2022 LFP. Additionally, otherwise eligible producers whose permitted grazing on federally managed lands was disallowed due to wildfire will also be eligible for ELRP payments if they applied and were approved for 2022 LFP.

In a continued effort to streamline and simplify the delivery of ELRP benefits, eligible producers will not be required to apply for payment.

Meanwhile, FSA also intends to provide additional assistance to ranchers for qualifying livestock losses from drought and wildfire in 2021. More information will be announced in the coming months.

How Producers Can Prepare

To participate in ERP and ELRP for 2022 losses, both crop and livestock producers should have or be prepared to have the following forms on file with FSA:

- Form AD-2047, Customer Data Worksheet (as applicable to the program participant);
- Form CCC-902, Farm Operating Plan for an individual or legal entity;
- Form CCC-901, Member Information for Legal Entities (if applicable); and
- Form AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have these required forms on file. However, those who are uncertain or want to confirm should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

In addition to the forms listed above, underserved producers are encouraged to register their status with FSA, using Form CCC-860, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification, as certain existing permanent and ad-hoc disaster programs provide increased benefits or reduced fees and premiums.

Producers with eligible crop losses who did not have federal crop insurance or NAP risk management coverage for 2022 and intend to apply for ERP assistance will need to pull together revenue information that is readily available from most tax records. FSA encourages producers to have their tax documents from the past few years and supporting materials ready including Schedule F (Form 1040) and *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents. FSA will not require these forms to be submitted with the ERP application, but will require a certification, similar to Adjusted Gross Income certification that has been used for many years for Farm Bill programs. Applicants simply report and certify to the information required for the program.

Crop producers who have federal crop insurance coverage should ensure that information on file with their insurance agent is accurate and that any pending activities needed to file loss claims for 2022 losses are addressed as soon as possible. Producers who received ERP assistance last year or who will receive assistance for 2022 losses are required to purchase crop insurance or NAP for the next two crop years.

More Information

In the coming months, USDA intends to provide additional information on how to apply for assistance through ERP and ELRP for 2022 losses. Through proactive communications and outreach, USDA will keep producers and stakeholders informed as program eligibility, application and implementation details unfold.

USDA Announces Signup for New Rice Production Program

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) began sending prefilled applications to rice producers the week of May 8 for the new [Rice Production Program](#) (RPP), which will provide up to \$250 million in assistance to rice farmers based on 2022 planted and prevented planted acres.

On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law H.R. 2617, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, which provided the authority and funding for USDA to make payments to rice producers based on data already on file with USDA, including planted acres and acres prevented from being planted.

How to Apply

FSA is mailing pre-filled applications to producers using information on file with USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) or FSA, as reported by rice producers through their crop insurance agents or FSA county offices.

To apply for assistance through the RPP, producers must return their completed FSA-174, *Rice Production Program Application*, to their recording FSA county office by close of business on Monday, July 10, 2023. Applications may be submitted either in person, by mail, email, or facsimile.

Producers who reported eligible rice to FSA by the acreage reporting deadline but do not receive a pre-filled application may still apply by visiting their local FSA office and completing

the application by Monday, July 10, 2023. Producers who filed late or modified 2022 rice acreage reports will not be eligible for RPP.

Program Payments

FSA will make an initial payment to eligible producers at a reduced payment rate of one cent per pound. If funds remain at the end of the application period, a second payment, not to exceed one cent per pound may be issued to eligible producers. To be eligible, a producer must have reported to FSA a share interest in eligible rice.

As directed by the omnibus legislation, FSA will calculate payments by multiplying the:

- Payment rate;
- Individual average actual production history (APH) as reported to RMA or the FSA-established yield; and
- Amount of certified rice acres determined by the number of planted acres and acres that were prevented from being planted.

If applicable, a prevented planted factor of 60% will be applied.

Payment Limitation

The payment limitation for the program is set by statute and is higher if the farmer's average adjusted gross farm income (income from activities related to farming, ranching or forestry) is more than 75% of their average adjusted gross income (AGI). Specifically, a person or legal entity with an average adjusted gross farm income of less than 75% of their average AGI cannot receive, directly or indirectly, more than \$125,000 in payments. Farmers who derive 75% or more of their average AGI from farming qualify for a \$250,000 payment limit. AGI is based on the three taxable years preceding the most immediately preceding complete tax year.

Rice farmers may visit their local county office to submit the appropriate form and certification (FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs*), if they qualify for and want to seek the higher payment limit.

For more information, view the [fact sheet](#) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Offers Livestock Disaster Program Flexibilities; Responds to Needs Expressed by Producers Hard-Hit by Natural Disasters

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has provided additional flexibilities and further enhanced disaster recovery assistance provided by the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#), [Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#) and [Livestock Forage Disaster Program \(LFP\)](#) in response to needs expressed by livestock producers across the U.S. who have experienced significant feed, forage and animal losses from natural disasters. These livestock disaster program policy enhancements include an extended June 2, 2023, deadline to submit notices of loss and applications for payment for 2022 losses. The

deadline extension and program flexibilities are available to eligible producers nationwide who incurred losses from a qualifying natural disaster event.

LIP and ELAP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died because of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed, and forage. LFP provides benefits for grazing losses due to a qualifying drought or wildfire. For fire, losses must occur on federally managed lands. ELAP provides benefits for grazing losses not covered under LFP.

New Program Applications for 2022

FSA is accepting 2022 LIP notices of loss and applications for payment through June 2, 2023, for all covered livestock that may have been eligible in 2022.

Producers who did not sign up for ELAP assistance for hauling livestock, forage and feedstuff hauling or other losses covered under ELAP in 2022 can also apply through June 2, 2023.

FSA will accept LFP applications for only newly eligible covered livestock through June 2, 2023.

All required supporting documentation must be received and on file in the county office by the established deadline.

Revising 2022 Applications

Producers who have a 2022 ELAP, LIP or LFP application on file with FSA as of the program deadline or were placed on an approved register, may revise their application with the newly updated eligible livestock no later than June 2, 2023.

Filing a Notice of Loss for ELAP due to 2022 and 2023 Drought

To support program access for counties that do not currently have a 365-day grazing season, FSA is waiving the 30-day timeframe for producers to submit a notice of loss for the 2023 ELAP program year due to qualifying drought in calendar years 2022 or 2023. Producers can now submit a notice of loss from the date the loss is apparent, as far back as Jan. 1, 2023, for 2022 eligible losses and 2023 eligible losses that occur before June 2, 2023.

For counties that have a 365-day grazing season, producers must have a qualifying drought in the 2023 calendar year to be eligible for 2023 livestock, water and feed hauling in 2023.

More Information

Livestock producers must provide evidence that livestock death was due to an eligible adverse weather event or loss condition. In addition, livestock producers should bring supporting evidence, including documentation of the number and kind of livestock that died, photographs or video records to document the loss, purchase records, veterinarian records, production records and other similar documents. Owners who sold injured livestock for a reduced price because the livestock were injured due to an adverse weather event, must provide verifiable evidence of the reduced sale of the livestock.

Producers can apply for ELAP, LFP and LIP benefits at their local FSA county office. For more information or to submit a notice of loss or an application for payment, please contact your [local FSA office](#) or visit farmers.gov/recover.

USDA Offers Assistance to Help Organic Dairy Producers Cover Increased Costs with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), announces assistance for dairy producers with the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP). ODMAP is established to help mitigate market volatility, higher input and transportation costs, and unstable feed supply and prices that have created unique hardships in the organic dairy industry. Specifically, under the ODMAP, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is making \$104 million available to organic dairy operations to assist with projected marketing costs in 2023, calculated using their marketing costs in 2022.

FSA will begin accepting applications for ODMAP on May 24, 2023. Eligible producers include certified organic dairy operations that produce milk from cows, goats and sheep.

How ODMAP Works

FSA is providing financial assistance for a producer's projected marketing costs in 2023 based on their 2022 costs. ODMAP provides a one-time cost-share payment based on marketing costs on pounds of organic milk marketed in the 2022 calendar year.

ODMAP provides financial assistance that will immediately support certified organic dairy operations during 2023 keeping organic dairy operations sustainable until markets return to more normal conditions.

How to Apply

FSA is accepting applications from May 24 to July 24, 2023. To apply, producers should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#). To complete the ODMAP application, producers must certify to pounds of 2022 milk production, how documentation of their organic certification, and submit a completed application form.

Organic dairy operations are required to provide their USDA certification of organic status confirming operation as an organic dairy in 2023 and 2022 along with the certification of 2022 milk production in hundredweight.

ODMAP complements other assistance available to dairy producers, including Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) and Supplemental DMC, with more than \$300 million in benefits paid for the 2023 program year to date. Learn more on the [FSA Dairy Programs webpage](#).

More Information

To learn more about USDA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans

and other programs by [logging into their farmers.gov account](#). If you don't have an account, [sign up today](#).

USDA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup starting **April 17 through May 26, 2023**. Among CRP enrollment opportunities, Grassland CRP is unique as a *working lands program*, allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while protecting grasslands and promoting plant and animal biodiversity and conservation.

Protecting grasslands with CRP not only benefits participants with annual rental payments and cost share assistance; it also contributes positively to the economy of many regions, builds biodiversity, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

More than 2.4 million acres were enrolled through the 2022 Grassland CRP Signup from agricultural producers and private landowners. That signup – the highest ever for the program– reflects the continued success and value of investments in voluntary, producer-led, working lands conservation programs. The current total participation in Grassland CRP is 6.3 million acres, which is part of the 23 million acres enrolled in CRP opportunities overall.

Since 2021, the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), which administers all CRP programs, has made several improvements to Grassland CRP to broaden the program's reach, including:

- Creating two [National Priority Zones](#) to put focus on environmentally sensitive land such as that prone to wind erosion.
- Enhanced offers with 10 additional ranking points to producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers and military veterans.
- Leverage the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to engage historically underserved communities Tribal Nations in the Great Plains.

Other CRP Signups

General CRP

[General CRP signup closed on April 7](#). The program helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

Continuous CRP

Under [Continuous CRP](#), producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states but has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.

How to Sign Up

Landowners and producers interested in Grassland CRP, or any other CRP enrollment option, should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

More Information

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

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](https://www.usda.gov).

USDA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program Assists Organic Producers Recover Costs Associated with Organic Certification

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will cover up to 75% of the costs associated with organic certification, up to \$750 per category, through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers

and handlers to apply for OCCSP by Oct. 31, 2023, for expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023.

As part of USDA's broader effort to support organic producers and in response to stakeholder feedback, this year FSA increased the cost share to the maximum amount allowed by statute.

Cost Share for 2023

The cost share provides financial assistance for organic certification, and producers and handlers are eligible to receive 75% of the costs, up to \$750, for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and state organic program fees (California only).

Producers have until Oct. 31, 2023, to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

How to Apply

To apply, organic producers and handlers should contact 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 department of agriculture. Additional details can be found on the [OCCSP](#) webpage.

Opportunity for 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 electronically mail the notice of funding opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture.

If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA County Offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. However, the producer or handler may only receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture.

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, 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.

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.

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 at or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Don't Miss Your Opportunity to be Represented in Ag Census Data

Time is running out to respond to the 2022 Census of Agriculture! Thank you to the producers who have already completed the ag census. If you have not responded, there is still time. **By federal law, the ag census questionnaire needs to be completed by everyone who received it, including landowners who lease land to producers, those involved in conservation programs, even those who may have received the ag census and did not farm in 2022.**

Strong response means strong data; these data will inform decisions that will help shape the future of American agriculture for the next five or six years. By not responding, you risk being unrepresented and therefore underserved in farm programs and funding, crop insurance rates, rural development, disaster assistance, and more. Return your ag census by mail or fill it out online at agcounts.usda.gov. Learn more at nass.usda.gov/AgCensus and respond today. Learn more at nass.usda.gov/AgCensus and respond today.

Upcoming Events

May 23

[Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers CBO Disaster Assistance Webinar: ERP2 & PARP](#)

May 24

[Farmer Veteran Coalition Emergency Relief Program \(ERP 2\) Brown Bag Lunch Webinar](#)

May 25

[Texas NRCS Quarterly Watershed Program Update](#)

USDA in Texas



Farm Service Agency

State Executive Director
Kelly Adkins

State Committee

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

Natural Resources Conservation Service

State Conservationist
Kristy Oates

Risk Management Agency

Regional Director
Jim Bellmon