

USVI FSA, NRCS, Updates for September 2023-USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USVI FSA Updates September 22, 2023

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

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- [Save Time – Make an Appointment with FSA](#)
 - [SCORE Matches Producers to Mentors](#)
 - [USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property](#)
 - [NRCS Perennial Peanut Ecological Sciences Technical Note Now Available!](#)
 - [Making Your Land More Resilient to Drought](#)
 - [Save Time – Make an Appointment with NRCS](#)
 - [NRCS Celebrates 2023 National Hispanic Heritage Month](#)
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Farm Service Agency

Save Time – Make an Appointment with FSA

Producers are encouraged to call their local FSA office to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of their time and to make sure FSA staff is available to tend to their important business needs. Please call your local FSA office ahead to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that might be needed during your appointment. To find your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator.

SCORE Matches Producers to Mentors

If you are a farmer or rancher, or have agricultural or business experience, join us in supporting the next generation and in investing in your local community. Your experiences and knowledge as a business owner, agricultural professional, or farmer can provide vital support to your community.

SCORE – score.org - the nation's largest network of volunteer, expert business mentors, is looking to expand the field of available agricultural mentors and provide free business mentoring to farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural and rural business owners.

SCORE is currently looking for volunteers with experience in an agriculture-related field who would like to become part of an extended field of volunteers. The organization's Orientation and Mentoring Certification program provides volunteers with everything needed to be a successful volunteer. Training includes background about SCORE's mission and services, as well as guidance on how to be a business mentor, including enhancement of listening, interviewing and problem-solving skills.

Current mentors have backgrounds in finance, accounting, marketing, operations, business and financial planning. The mentors provide local expertise and free one-on-one business mentoring to new and existing farmers and business owners. Together they work through the process of starting or maintaining agricultural and rural businesses. No matter what stage a business is in, SCORE volunteer mentors can help in developing business plans, navigating financing and legal issues, identifying new markets, and other topics, in order to help their clients succeed.

Learn more and sign up to become a mentor today at score.org/usda.

USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

Farmers can use USDA farm ownership microloans to buy and improve property. These microloans are especially helpful to beginning or underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013.

Microloans can also help with farmland and building purchases and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers

strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

To learn more about the FSA microloan program, contact your St. Croix County USDA Service Center at 340-773-9146 or visit fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS Perennial Peanut Ecological Sciences Technical Note Now Available!

In FY 2021, NRCS began a farm trial project funded by the National NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC) to establish *Arachis pintoi* (perennial peanut) as a conservation cover for Puerto Rico's coffee farms. *A. pintoi* was selected for its ability to suppress weed growth, create a uniform cover, fix nitrogen in the soil, grow in a wide range of soil pH, provide soil health benefits, and its resistance to nematodes. On September 6, 2023, NRCS released an Ecological Sciences Technical Note with the farm trial methods for establishing perennial peanut.



The [Perennial Peanut Technical Note 002](#) offers information on where to plant *A. pintoi*, how to plant it, as well as operation and maintenance considerations, to use it as a permanent cover under coffee or other trees. According to the technical note, “where sunlight is available, perennial peanut (*A. pintoi*) becomes a fast-growing legume plant that is known for its ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen to the soil. Since perennial peanut is low growing, it will not interfere with coffee or other tree production.”

With this validation project, NRCS will create practice scenarios for the use of *A. pintoi* as a conservation cover in conservation incentive programs like the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#). Find more information about the [Caribbean *Arachis pintoi* Conservation Cover Farm Trials](#) on the NRCS website. For more information contact Edrick Marrero, State Agronomist at edrick.marrero@usda.gov.

Making Your Land More Resilient to Drought

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help you conserve water and build resilience to drought, through conservation practices that improve irrigation efficiency, boost soil health, and manage grazing lands.



Irrigation Efficiency

USDA helps you improve your irrigation efficiency to ensure each drop of water is used wisely. Saving water on your farm can help during drought and can offset rising water costs; reduce expenditures for energy, chemicals, and labor; and enhance revenues through higher crop yields and improved crop quality. Funded conservation practices include conversion to more efficient irrigation systems, such as micro-irrigation or subsurface drip irrigation, installation of irrigation pipeline, irrigation water management, structures for water control, and flow meters. Tools like drip irrigation, which provides water precisely where and when it's needed, can achieve greater precision with flow meters and soil moisture sensors.

Soil Health

In addition, soil health conservation practices, such as reduced- or no-till, cover crops, mulching and residue management can help to make your soil, and the plants you grow or animals you raise, healthier. Healthier soil can absorb and retain more water for longer periods of time, making your farm or ranch more resilient to drought. Using soil health practices, you can conserve water by increasing your soil's water-holding capacity and use conservation tillage to keep the ground covered, reducing water loss through transpiration and evaporation.

And soil health practices increase organic matter, and each pound of organic matter can hold up to 20 pounds of water. Every 1% increase in organic matter results in as much as 25,000 gallons of soil water per acre. Each 1% increase in organic matter can also provide up to 30 pounds of more available nitrogen per acre. That means less money and time spent on inputs like water and fertilizer, which make your operation more profitable.

Rotational/Prescribed Grazing, Water Sources for Livestock

Drought also impacts grazing lands, and NRCS works with you to increase the resilience of your livestock operation. Ranchers can adapt to dry conditions in two main ways: increasing the availability and suitability of forage and ensuring that cattle have an adequate and reliable source of water. For forage, rotational or prescribed grazing (rotating cattle among pastures) can relieve pressure on stressed vegetation and ensure a more consistent supply of forage for animals. NRCS conservationists can also work with you to plant more drought-tolerant forage species, plants best suited to local soils and conditions. For reliable sources of water, NRCS can help you with installing watering facilities, water wells, or water pipeline for livestock. Having available forage and water for livestock can make a big difference in difficult drought conditions.

Cattle grazing in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico.

USDA and NRCS are here for you, helping you recover from drought and prepare for the next one. For more information on drought recovery assistance at farmers.gov/protection-recovery/drought#recovery. For more information on conservation practices to make your operation more resilient to drought in future years, go to [Caribbean Area | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/nrcs/caribbean).

Save Time – Make an Appointment with NRCS

Producers are encouraged to call their local NRCS office to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of their time and to make sure NRCS staff is available to tend to their important business needs. Please call your local NRCS office ahead to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that might be needed during your appointment. See the following list to find your local Caribbean Area NRCS office, or visit: farmers.gov/service-center-locator

Caribbean Area Offices

Arecibo: 787-817-2473

Serving: Arecibo, Braceloneta, Camuy, Dorado, Florida, Hatillo, Manatí, Quebradillas, Toa Baja, Vega Alta and Vega Baja

Caguas: 787-743-2743

Serving: Aguas Buenas, Caguas, Canóvanas, Carolina, Cataño, Cayey, Culebra, Fajardo, Guaynabo, Humacao, Juncos, Las Piedras, Loiza, Luquillo, Naguabo, Río Grande, San Juan, San Lorenzo, Trujillo Alto, Vieques and Yabucoa

Corozal: 787-859-2880

Serving: Aibonito, Barranquitas, Bayamón, Comerío, Corozal, Morovis, Naranjito, Orocovis and Toa Alta

Juana Díaz: 787-837-4450

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San Sebastián: 787-896-3565/2987

Serving: Aguada, Aguadilla, Isabela, Lares, Moca, Rincón and San Sebastián

St. Croix: 340-692-9662

Serving: St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas and Water Island

Utuado: 787-894-1480/2416

Serving: Adjuntas, Ciales, Jayuya and Utuado

NRCS Celebrates 2023 National Hispanic Heritage Month

From September 15-October 15, 2023, we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. Join us in celebrating the outstanding work done by Hispanic farmers, producers, landowners, agronomists, scientists, natural resource managers, conservationists and more!



Check out farmers.gov/blog to learn about Hispanic farmers, producers and landowners who are working to improve their operations with USDA programs. Visit the [NRCS Caribbean](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Caribbean) website to learn about the different programs and technical assistance in the Caribbean Area that you may benefit from.



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