



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## Virginia June Newsletter Articles and Updates - June 2021

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

### In This Issue:

- [Acting State Director Message](#)
- [NRCS State Conservationist's Message](#)
- [USDA Expands Aquaculture Disaster Assistance in Virginia to Include Fish Raised for Food](#)
- [USDA Extends General Signup for Conservation Reserve Program](#)
- [FSA Outlines MAL and LDP Policy](#)
- [Foreign Buyers Notification](#)
- [In Historic Move, USDA to Begin Loan Payments to Socially Disadvantaged Borrowers under American Rescue Plan Act Section 1005](#)
- [USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#)
- [New Farmers.gov Features Help You Manage Your USDA Business Online](#)
- [Share Your Planting Season Experience for #Plant2021](#)
- [Farmers, Homeowners Can Help Pollinators Prosper](#)
- [USDA Offers Targeted Farm Loan Funding for Underserved Groups and Beginning Farmers](#)
- [USDA Packages Disaster Protection with Loans to Benefit Specialty Crop and Diversified Producers](#)
- [Selected Interest Rates for June 2021](#)
- [Dates to Remember](#)

## Acting State Director Message

FSA and NRCS Collaboration to Share Program Information

Virginia FSA hopes you will enjoy some enhancements we are making to our electronic newsletter. In addition to some visual changes, we are also partnering with NRCS and RMA to bring you the most pertinent and important information you need on the farm—in one publication.

FSA understands how busy this time of year is for everyone. As you head into the fields to till and fertilize the ground, plant crops, make hay, work livestock, or undertake other essential chores, please keep Virginia FSA in mind; acreage reporting is required to establish or maintain USDA program eligibility. To ensure that everyone is able to complete this process by the July 15 deadline, please reach out to your local FSA county office to make an appointment soon after you finish planting and they will assist you with acreage reporting. Note that FSA also needs to know about any acreage you are unable to plant due to weather circumstances.

Verifying that your records with FSA are updated and accurate will also help us help you quickly and effectively. Contact your office as soon as possible if you have had changes in your farming operation such as new rented acreage or discontinued leased farms for the 2021 season, ownership changes, dividing out new parcels of land, or other changes to your operation. Updated farm records are important to maintain the accuracy and integrity of programs administered by FSA.

Please remember to follow the acreage reporting process outlined by your county FSA office and to contact them as soon as you finish planting.

We are increasing our in-office staffing until acreage reporting ends to better serve you during this busy time.

**American Rescue Plan Act (commonly called ARPA):** FSA is rolling out ARPA in an historic step towards building trust with all producers.

In the coming weeks, Virginia FSA staff will be generating payment offer letters for eligible Direct Loan borrowers, which will include the ARPA payment amounts. Once those offers are accepted by eligible borrowers and returned to FSA, we will begin processing the loan repayments and issuing the 20% payments.

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## **NRCS State Conservationist's Message**

The beginning of summer and our gradual return to normal operations promise nothing but good things for Virginia NRCS and the producers we serve. We are expanding our workforce at a time when services are most in demand with 22 new team members expected to join our ranks by the fall. These professionals will fill a variety of roles from soil conservationists and agronomists to civil engineers to help provide the most comprehensive technical recommendations for our clients and partners.

Personally, I'm very much looking forward to getting out of the office and on the road to get a closer look at the great conservation work being done throughout the state. NRCS is known for making "house calls" to work one-on-one with landowners and there's no place we'd rather be than out on the farm. Collaboration is key to our success as agency staff work side by side with their soil and water conservation district colleagues and other partners to get more conservation on the ground. I'm also pleased that we are working

more closely with FSA and conducting joint training to provide superior service to our customers.

I'll conclude with a quick word about some critical workers on Virginia farms. I'm speaking of pollinators and they are key to the health and productivity of our state's agricultural operations. As we look ahead to National Pollinator Week (June 21-27), I invite you to read on to learn more about assistance available to protect and enhance habitat for these beneficial species.

Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez

## USDA Expands Aquaculture Disaster Assistance in Virginia to Include Fish Raised for Food

In response to catastrophic aquaculture losses due to major winter storms that hit states along the U.S. Gulf Coast in February, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced a policy change that makes food fish and other aquatic species eligible for the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#). Previously, only farm-raised game and bait fish were eligible for death loss ELAP benefits. Beginning June 1, eligible aquaculture producers can request ELAP assistance for 2021 losses. This policy change is for the 2021 and subsequent program years.

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or loss conditions, including blizzards and wildfires, as determined by the Secretary.

To be eligible, losses must have occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2021. For farm-raised fish and other aquatic species death losses only that occurred prior to June 1, 2021, FSA is waiving the requirement to file a notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent. An aquaculture producer will still need to be able to provide contemporaneous records upon request to document the eligible loss event and demonstrate the beginning and ending inventory. The deadline to file an application for payment for the 2021 program year is Jan. 31, 2022.

Producers must provide acreage reports for the surface acres of water where their aquatic species are raised. Acreage reports for 2021 must be filed by Sept. 30, 2022.

### More Information

USDA offers a comprehensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs. On [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine all program or loan options available for disaster recovery assistance. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

## USDA Extends General Signup for Conservation Reserve Program

The USDA is extending the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup period, which had previously been announced as ending on Feb. 12, 2021. USDA will continue to accept offers as it takes this opportunity for the incoming Administration to evaluate ways to increase enrollment. Under the previous Administration, incentives and rental payment rates were reduced resulting in an enrollment shortfall of over 4 million acres. The program, administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), provides annual rental payments for 10 to 15 years for land devoted to conservation purposes, as well as other types of payments. Before the General CRP Signup period ends, producers will have the opportunity to adjust or resubmit their offers to take advantage of planned improvements to the program.

This signup for CRP gives producers an opportunity to enroll land for the first time or re-enroll land under existing contracts that will be expiring Sept. 30, 2021. All interested producers, including those on Indian reservations and with trust lands, are encouraged to contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) for more information.

## FSA Outlines MAL and LDP Policy

The 2018 Farm Bill extends loan authority through 2023 for Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) and Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs).

MALs and LDPs provide financing and marketing assistance for wheat, feed grains, soybeans, and other oilseeds, pulse crops, rice, peanuts, cotton, wool and honey. MALs provide you with interim financing after harvest to help you meet cash flow needs without having to sell your commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows. A producer who is eligible to obtain a loan, but agrees to forgo the loan, may obtain an LDP if such a payment is available. Marketing loan provisions and LDPs are not available for sugar and extra-long staple cotton.

FSA is now accepting requests for 2021 MALs and LDPs for all eligible commodities after harvest. Requests for loans and LDPs shall be made on or before the final availability date for the respective commodities.

Commodity certificates are available to loan holders who have outstanding nonrecourse loans for wheat, upland cotton, rice, feed grains, pulse crops (dry peas, lentils, large and small chickpeas), peanuts, wool, soybeans and designated minor oilseeds. These certificates can be purchased at the posted county price (or adjusted world price or national posted price) for the quantity of commodity under loan, and must be immediately exchanged for the collateral, satisfying the loan. MALs redeemed with commodity certificates are not subject to Adjusted Gross Income provisions.

To be considered eligible for an LDP, you must have form [CCC-633EZ, Page 1](#) on file at your local FSA Office before losing beneficial interest in the crop. Pages 2, 3 or 4 of the form must be submitted when payment is requested.

Marketing loan gains (MLGs) and loan deficiency payments (LDPs) are no longer subject to payment limitations, actively engaged in farming and cash-rent tenant rules.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provisions state that if your total applicable three-year average AGI exceeds \$900,000, then you're not eligible to receive an MLG or LDP. You must have a valid CCC-941 on file to earn a market gain of LDP. The AGI does not apply to MALs redeemed with commodity certificate exchange.

For more information and additional eligibility requirements visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

## Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. Foreign persons who have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the [AFIDA form](#) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements. The data gained from these disclosures is used in the preparation of periodic reports to the President and Congress concerning the effect of such holdings upon family farms and rural communities. Click [here](#) for more information on AFIDA.

## In Historic Move, USDA to Begin Loan Payments to Socially Disadvantaged Borrowers under American Rescue Plan Act Section 1005

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) [published the first notice of funding availability \(NOFA\)](#) (PDF, 242 KB) announcing loan payments for eligible borrowers with qualifying direct farm loans under the American Rescue Plan Act Section 1005. The official NOFA will be published in the Federal Register early this week and USDA expects payments to begin in early June and continue on a rolling basis. A subsequent notice addressing guaranteed loan balances and direct loans that no longer have collateral and have been previously referred to the Department of Treasury for debt collection for offset, will be published within 120 days.

Section 1005 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provides funding and authorization for USDA FSA to pay up to 120 percent of direct and guaranteed loan outstanding balances as of January 1, 2021, for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as defined in Section 2501(a) of the Food, Agriculture Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 2279(a)). Section 2501(a) defines a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher as a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group, which is further defined as a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Qualifying loans as part of today's announcement are certain direct

loans under the Farm Loan Programs (FLP) and Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFL).

For much of the history of the USDA, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have faced discrimination—sometimes overt and sometimes through deeply embedded rules and policies—that have prevented them from achieving as much as their counterparts who do not face these documented acts of discrimination. Over the past 30 years, several major civil rights lawsuits have compensated farmers for specific acts of discrimination—including Pigford I and Pigford II, Keepseagle, and the Garcia cases. However, those settlements and other related actions did not address the systemic and cumulative impacts of discrimination over a number of decades that the American Rescue Plan now begins to address.

Sections 1005 and 1006 of ARPA provide USDA with new tools to address longstanding inequities for socially disadvantaged borrowers. Section 1006 of ARPA provides additional funding to begin long-term racial equity work within USDA, including to address heirs property claims and to stand up an Equity Commission to identify barriers to access USDA programming.

To learn more about the loan payments to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, visit [www.farmers.gov/americanrescueplan](http://www.farmers.gov/americanrescueplan).

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## USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

4 million in competitive grants is available to support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production projects. USDA will accept applications on Grants.gov for planning and implementation projects until midnight July 30, 2021.

**Planning Projects** Planning projects initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs. Projects may target areas of food access, education, business and start-up costs for new farmers, urban agroforestry or food forests, and development of policies related to zoning and other needs of urban production.

**Implementation Projects** Implementation projects that accelerate existing and emerging models of urban, indoor and other agricultural practices that serve multiple farmers. Projects will improve local food access and collaborate with partner organizations and may support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, educational endeavors and urban farming policy implementation.

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## New Farmers.gov Features Help You Manage Your USDA Business Online

Last June, NRCS' Conservation Client Gateway moved to farmers.gov enabling USDA customers to access multiple conservation features through a platform that provides a customer-centric digital experience. Farmers.gov provides a secure, single desktop- and

mobile device-accessible authenticated portal for FSA, NRCS and RMA customer-facing features.

As we've continued to add more content and capabilities, farmers.gov has quickly become the premier online hub for customers to find resources, submit applications and assistance requests, and make connections.

Another new feature is coming to farmers.gov to help you manage your USDA business. You'll now receive an email letting you know that an NRCS document needs your signature, which you can quickly and easily sign online in the portal.

The farmers.gov portal also enables you to:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices and plans.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View detailed information on all previous and ongoing contracts.
- Have the authority as an FSA and/or NRCS customer to work in the portal and act on behalf of your active power-of-attorney entitlements and your current authorities for business entities.

These conservation features join several others already available through the farmers.gov portal, including the ability to view farm loan information. We'll continue to update you about new features as they become available.

If you do not have login information for farmers.gov, you can create your login profile, or eAuthentication by following the instructions at [farmers.gov/sign-in](https://farmers.gov/sign-in).

The [Conservation Features User Guide](#) gives you step-by-step instructions on how to navigate farmers.gov and the [how-to video instructions](#) explain some of the popular features. If you need additional help, personal assistance is available at the farmers.gov Service Desk by selecting the "Help" link located at the top of the all authenticated portal pages and submitting a "Contact Us" request. NRCS field office staff are always available to assist you with your conservation questions and other needs.

## Share Your Planting Season Experience for #Plant2021

After a long winter and a challenging year, spring has finally come. As the world around us bursts into song and color, our farmers will begin to work the soil they've protected all winter and plant the seeds they will nurture for months to come. Later this year, the fruits

of their labor will become the food that feeds our communities, the fiber that clothes our families, and the fuel that powers industries.

For many, 2020 was the first year they'd ever seen an empty shelf at the grocery store. And for the first time, many people realized how much they take farming and the people who make it possible for granted. Fewer and fewer Americans understand what our farmers do, who they are, and the hard work they put in. Let's change that.

This planting season, let Farmers.gov showcase your work by participating in the #Plant2021 campaign. We'll share your story on @FarmersGov on social media and a nationwide [storymap](#). Here's how:

Using your smartphone or digital camera, take photos of what's happening on your operation during planting season. Videos may be too large to email as attachment, so you can email them to us via mail drop (iPhone), Google Photos (Android), or any other file sharing service. A few ideas:

- If you're comfortable, we'd love to see the people that make it happen set against the backdrop of your agricultural operation.
- Take a photo from inside the tractor cab so we can see what you see.
- Photos at sunrise or sunset are always beautiful!
- Behind-the-scenes photos showing us the amount of planning and preparation it takes to have a successful planting season are welcomed.
- Emerging (baby) crops.

Submit your photos/videos along with the following information to us at [SM.FP.Social@usda.gov](mailto:SM.FP.Social@usda.gov):

- Your name if you're comfortable sharing.
- Location of the operation (city or county and state).
- Information about what's in the photo/video and what's being planting.
- Your thoughts about this year's planting season. Is this year different from previous years? How do you feel about the season? What are you hopeful about?
- If your operation has a Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram account, please include it so that we can tag you.

Please note that by submitting your photo/video, you are granting USDA permission to use these materials for outreach and education purposes. Follow @FarmersGov on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#), and we look forward to sharing your story!

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## Farmers, Homeowners Can Help Pollinators Prosper

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What comes to mind when you think of bees, beetles, flies and wasps? If you consider them to be pests, National Pollinator Week is a great opportunity to change your perspective on these and other species that are actually critical to food and fiber production in Virginia and throughout the world.

Bees, butterflies and beneficial insects like the ones listed above are the cornerstone of complex food webs that sustain other wildlife by feeding them directly or pollinating the plants and plant fruits they eat. One third of our nation's food can be attributed to activities that transfer pollen from one plant to another and many populations are decreasing due to habitat loss, disease, parasites and pesticide use.



Virginia landowners can take some simple steps to help reverse those trends. Stocking a garden with high-quality pollinating plants can offer long-lasting benefits. Farmers who place wildflowers in and around fields and choose cover crops that attract these species can support declining populations, create habitat for other wildlife (including insects that feed on crop pests) and increase yields at the same time. If you're putting in conservation practices to prevent soil erosion or protect stream banks, consider including wildflowers, shrubs and trees that support pollinators while improving water quality.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance for 29 separate conservation practices that enhance or protect Virginia pollinator habitat. Contact your local Service Center or visit [nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators](https://nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators) to learn more about financial assistance available under Farm Bill programs. NRCS partners at the [Xerces Society Pollinator Conservation Program](#) or [Pollinator Partnership](#) can provide recommendations on the best varieties for gardens in your region.

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## USDA Offers Targeted Farm Loan Funding for Underserved Groups and Beginning Farmers

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers that FSA offers targeted farm ownership and farm operating loans to assist underserved applicants and beginning farmers and ranchers.

USDA defines underserved applicants as a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities. For farm loan program purposes, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Underserved or beginning farmers and ranchers who cannot obtain commercial credit from a bank can apply for either FSA direct loans or guaranteed loans. Direct loans are made to applicants by FSA. Guaranteed loans are made by lending institutions who arrange for FSA to guarantee the loan. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of

principal and interest on a loan. The FSA guarantee allows lenders to make agricultural credit available to producers who do not meet the lender's normal underwriting criteria.

The direct and guaranteed loan program provides for two types of loans: farm ownership loans and farm operating loans. In addition to customary farm operating and ownership loans, FSA offers Microloans through the direct loan program. Microloans focus on the financing needs of small, beginning farmer, niche, and non-traditional farm operations. Microloans are available for both ownership and operating finance needs. To learn more about microloans, visit [fsa.usda.gov/microloans](https://fsa.usda.gov/microloans).

To qualify as a beginning producer, the individual or entity must meet the eligibility requirements outlined for direct or guaranteed loans. Individuals and all entity members must have operated a farm for less than 10 years. Applicants must materially or substantially participate in the operation.

For more information on FSA's farm loan programs and targeted underserved and beginning farmer guidelines, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](https://fsa.usda.gov/farmloans).

## **USDA Packages Disaster Protection with Loans to Benefit Specialty Crop and Diversified Producers**

*Free basic coverage available for new and underserved loan applicants*

Producers who apply for Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loans will be offered the opportunity to enroll in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). NAP is available to producers who grow noninsurable crops and is especially important to fruit, vegetable, and other specialty crop growers.

New, underserved and limited income specialty growers who apply for farm loans could qualify for basic loss coverage at no cost.

The basic disaster coverage protects at 55 percent of the market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of production. Covered "specialty" crops include vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, hay, forage, grazing and energy crops. FSA allows beginning, underserved or limited income producers to obtain NAP coverage up to 90 days after the normal application closing date when they also apply for FSA credit.

Producers can also protect value-added production, such as organic or direct market crops, at their fair market value in those markets. Targeted underserved groups eligible for free or discounted coverage include American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and women.

FSA offers a variety of loan products, including farm ownership loans, operating loans and microloans that have a streamlined application process.

NAP coverage is not limited to FSA borrowers, beginning, limited resource, or underserved farmers. Any producer who grows eligible NAP crops can purchase coverage. To learn more, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov/nap](https://fsa.usda.gov/nap) or [fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](https://fsa.usda.gov/farmloans).

## Selected Interest Rates for June 2021

90-Day Treasury Bill	.125%
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	1.875%
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	3.25%
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.5%
Emergency Loans	4.75%
Farm Storage Facility Loans - (7 years)	1.25%
Commodity Loans 1996-Present	1.125%

## Dates to Remember

6/15 Acreage Reporting Deadline (ARD) for Beans (Planted 3/4-5/25)

7/15 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Beans (Planted 5/26-7/10), Tomatoes, Perennial Forage and all crops without an established ARD



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