



- [County Office Message](#)
- [USDA Makes Producer- Friendly Change to 2023 Notice of Loss Requirements for Two Livestock Disaster Assistance Programs](#)
- [Change in Policy on Filing a Notice of Los for Grazed Forage Producers with NAP coverage](#)
- [FSA Offers Safety Net Programs for Honeybee Producers](#)
- [USDA to Provide More Than \\$3 Billion to Commodity and Specialty Crop Producers Impacted by 2022 Natural Disasters.](#)
- [USDA Launches Program to Support Agricultural Employers and Farmworkers, Aiming to Increase Economic and Supply Chair Resilience as Part of President Biden's Investing in America Agenda](#)
- [USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online](#)

County Office Message

Greetings Sweetwater & Sublette County Farmers and Ranchers.

It is the holiday season and the time of year where we reflect on our many blessings, spend time with family and friends and enjoy the holiday cheer. At FSA we are wrapping up a few deadlines, program participation and getting ready for our upcoming County Committee Meeting and Open House.

A couple of quick reminders and important dates:

- There were recent changes to our Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP)- **you no longer need to report any losses to eligible events within 30 days of the loss becoming apparent.** You can now file a notice of loss any time after the eligible weather event and up to the application for payment deadlines! However, you will still need to provide date(s) and eligible weather event(s), along with supporting documentation to those weather events and dates. **If you experienced livestock death losses and/or additional feed purchase needs, with or without snow removal expenses, in 2023, please make sure to contact the office to complete your notice of loss and application for payment by the applicable deadlines.**
- With Winter approaching, please remember to take pictures of any dead animals and keep good records. The LIP program is one that requires extensive records and proof of death. If you have any questions about what kinds of documentation you might need, please give us a call or stop by the office.
- Both Sweetwater and Sublette County have been fortunate this year with moisture. The Livestock Forage Program is a resource for grazing losses sustained in drought conditions during the county's normal grazing season. This year is the first year since 2019 that Sweetwater County ground is not eligible for this program. **Sublette** county triggered for one month, due to registering in a D2 level drought on the Drought Monitor. Producers in Sublette County who suffered grazing losses due to those early drought conditions can apply for the LFP program for ground physically located in Sublette County.

December 14- Sweetwater/ Sublette County Committee Meeting- Ballot Counting

December 20- Open House at the Rock springs USDA Service Center from 9am to 4pm.



December 25- Office Closed- Christmas

January 1, 2024- Office Closed- New Year's Day Holiday

January 15, 2024- Office Closed- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Holiday

January 30, 2024- Deadline to request all ELAP & LFP assistance for 2023 calendar year losses.

January 31, 2024- Final LDP availability date for Wool, Mohair and Unshorn Pelts.

February 19, 2024- Office Closed- Presidents Day Holiday

February 29, 2024- Deadline to request all LIP assistance for 2023 calendar year.

*****Also, producers that have notices of loss for LIP (Livestock Indemnity Program) and ELAP (Emergency Livestock Assistance Program) WE NEED YOUR SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION, so we can get these applications worked up.**

USDA Makes Producer- Friendly Change to 2023 Notice of Loss Requirements for Two Livestock Disaster Assistance Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has waived certain notice of loss requirements for 2023 for the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish](#) (ELAP) and [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). In an effort to streamline assistance to support access to critical 2023 natural disaster recovery assistance, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is waiving the requirement to submit ELAP or LIP notices of loss within a pre-determined number of days for 2023. Instead, producers have the flexibility to submit 2023



notices of loss as soon as possible, once losses are realized, following a natural disaster event or no later than the established annual program application for payment deadlines for each program. FSA county committees are also being asked to re-evaluate 2023 ELAP and LIP late-filed notices of loss to determine if the waiver applies.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish

ELAP provides recovery assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish losses due to an eligible adverse weather or loss condition, including blizzards, disease, water shortages and wildfires. ELAP covers grazing and feed losses, transportation of water and feed to livestock and hauling livestock to grazing acres. ELAP also covers certain mortality losses for livestock including honeybees and farm-raised fish as well as honeybee hive losses. ELAP is designed to address losses not covered by other FSA disaster assistance programs.

For 2023, FSA is waiving the regulatory requirement for producers who are eligible for ELAP to file a notice of loss with FSA within 30 calendar days from when the loss first became apparent for livestock and farm-raised fish and 15 calendar days for honeybees. Under this waiver, notices of loss are to be completed by the eligible producer and submitted to FSA no later than the annual program application deadline of January 30 following the program year in which the loss occurred. Therefore, producers who incurred ELAP-eligible losses in 2023, will need to submit a notice of loss by Jan. 30, 2024.

Livestock Indemnity Program

LIP provides disaster recovery assistance to livestock owners and contract growers who experience livestock deaths, in excess of normal mortality caused by eligible loss conditions including adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law, including wolves and avian predators. LIP also helps livestock owners who must sell livestock at a reduced price because of an injury from certain loss conditions.

For 2023, FSA is waiving the regulatory requirement for producers who are eligible for LIP to file a notice of loss within 30 calendar days from when the loss first became apparent. Under this waiver, producers are still required to complete and submit the notice of loss to FSA no later than the annual program payment application date, which is 60 calendar days following the program year in which the loss occurred. The LIP payment application and notice of loss deadline is Feb. 29, 2024, for the 2023 program year.

2023 Disapproved Applications

FSA county committees will review all notices of loss for both ELAP and LIP that were previously disapproved for the 2023 program year due to late filing and re-evaluate them to determine if the waiver applies. To receive ELAP and LIP benefits, producers will still need to file an application for payment by the established program deadline for the 2023 program year. Producers who are unsure about the status of their notice of loss or application for payment, should contact their local FSA county office as soon as possible.

Supporting Documentation

Accurate records and loss documentation are critical following disaster events and are required when filing notices of loss with FSA. Acceptable loss documentation includes:

- Documentation of the number, kind, type, and weight range of livestock that have died, supplemented, if possible, by photographs or video records of ownership and losses.
- Rendering truck receipts by kind, type, and weight - important to document prior to disposal.
- Beginning inventory supported by birth recordings or purchase receipts.
- Documentation from Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Department of Natural Resources, or other sources to substantiate eligible death losses due to an eligible loss condition.
- Documentation that livestock were removed from grazing pastures due to an eligible adverse weather or loss condition.
- Costs of transporting livestock feed to eligible livestock, such as receipts for equipment rental fees for hay lifts and snow removal.

- Feed purchase receipts if feed supplies or grazing pastures are destroyed.
- Number of gallons of water transported to livestock due to water shortages.

More Information

The improvements to ELAP and LIP build on others made since 2021. This includes ELAP benefits for above normal costs for hauling feed and water to livestock and transporting livestock to other grazing acres during a qualifying drought. FSA also [expanded eligible livestock](#) under ELAP, LIP, and the Livestock Forage Disaster Assistance Program, and increased the LIP payment rate for beef, beefalo, bison, and dairy animals less than 250 pounds and most recently beef calves over 800 pounds. Learn about USDA disaster assistance programs on [farmers.gov](#).

On [farmers.gov](#), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine [disaster protection and recovery](#) program or loan options. For more information about FSA programs, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

Change in Policy on Filing a Notice of Loss for Grazed Forage Producers with NAP coverage

For the 2023 crop year, NAP forage producers with the intended use of grazing who elect to use independent assessments or other approved alternative loss percentage methods to establish their loss are no longer required to file a CCC-576 Notice of Loss with FSA. However, a CCC-576 Application for Payment form must be submitted to FSA no later than 60 calendar days after the coverage period ends. If an independent assessment is used to determine the loss, producers have 180 days to file an application for payment.

Producers that elect to have the grazing loss determined using similar mechanically harvested units still must timely file a CCC-576 Notice of Loss within 15 days of the disaster event or damage to the crop first becomes apparent or within 15 days of harvest.

FSA Offers Safety Net Programs for Honeybee Producers

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers two programs that have specific safety net benefits for producers of honeybees and honey. The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) assist producers when disasters impact honey production or damage or destroy colonies, hives or honeybee feed.



NAP is designed to reduce financial losses when natural disasters result in lower yields or crop losses, including honey. NAP coverage is equivalent to catastrophic insurance, meaning it covers up to 50 percent of a producer's normal yield (must have at least a 50 percent loss) at 55 percent of the average market price. The 2018 Farm Bill reinstates higher levels of coverage, from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Producers of organics and crops marketed directly to consumers also may exercise the "buy-up" option to obtain NAP coverage of 100 percent of the average market price at the coverage levels of between 50 and 65 percent of expected production.

The NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

You must apply for NAP coverage by [Dec. 1] prior to the year for which you're seeking coverage.

ELAP covers colony losses, honeybee hive losses (the physical structure) and honeybee feed losses in instances where the colony, hive or feed has been destroyed by a natural disaster or, in the case of colony losses, because of Colony Collapse Disorder. Colony losses must be in excess of normal mortality.

Both the NAP and ELAP programs require you to report the number of colonies you have in production to FSA by Jan. 2, 2024. You must notify FSA within 30 calendar days of changes in the total number of colonies or when honeybees are moved to another county.

For NAP, you must notify FSA within 15 calendar days of when a loss occurs or from when the loss is apparent. For ELAP, you must file a notice of loss and application for payment by Jan. 30, 2024

USDA to Provide More Than \$3 Billion to Commodity and Specialty Crop Producers Impacted by 2022 Natural Disasters.

The U. S Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide more than \$3 billion to commodity and specialty crop producers impacted by natural disaster events in 2022. Eligible impacted producers can apply for financial assistance through the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\) 2022](#). The program will help offset the financial impacts of crop yield and value losses from qualifying disasters occurring in 2022.

Background

On Dec. 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 eligible natural disasters that occurred in calendar year 2022.

ERP 2022 covers losses to crops, trees, bushes and vines due to qualifying, calendar year 2022 natural disaster events including wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture, qualifying drought and related conditions.

ERP 2022 program benefits will be delivered to eligible producers through a two-track process. FSA intends to make both tracks available to producers at the same time. This two-track approach enables USDA to:

- Streamline the application process.
- Reduce the paperwork burden on producers.
- Proactively include provisions for underserved producers who have not been well served by past emergency relief efforts.
- Encourage producer participation in existing risk management programs to mitigate the impacts of future severe weather events.

It's important to note that disaster-impacted producers may be eligible for ERP 2022 assistance under one or both tracks. To avoid duplicative benefits, if a producer applies for both tracks, the Track 2 payment calculation will take into account any payments received through Track 1.

ERP 2022 Application Process – Track 1

ERP 2022 Track 1 leverages existing federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) data as the basis for calculating payments for eligible crop producers who received indemnities through these risk management programs.

Although FSA is sending pre-filled ERP 2022 Track 1 application forms to producers who have crop insurance and NAP data already on file with USDA, producers indemnified for losses resulting from 2022 natural disasters do not have to wait to receive the application before requesting ERP 2022 assistance. Effective Oct. 31, 2023, producers can apply for ERP 2022 benefits whether they have received the pre-filled

application or not. Receipt of a pre-filled application is not confirmation that a producer is eligible to receive an ERP 2022 Track 1 payment.

USDA estimates that ERP Track 1 benefits will reach more than 206,000 producers who received indemnities for losses covered by federal crop insurance and more than 4,500 producers who obtained NAP coverage for the 2022 crop year.

ERP 2022 Application Process – Track 2

Track 2 is a revenue-based certification program designed to assist eligible producers who suffered an eligible decrease in revenue resulting from 2022 calendar year disaster events when compared with revenue in a benchmark year using revenue information that is readily available from most tax records. In cases where revenue does not reasonably reflect a normal year's revenue, Track 2 provides an alternative method for establishing revenue. Likewise, Track 2 affords producers of crops that are used within an operation and do not generate revenue from the sale of the crop a method for establishing revenue for the purpose of applying for ERP 2022 benefits. Producers are not required to submit tax records to FSA unless requested by the County Committee if required for an FSA compliance spot check.

Although not required when applying for ERP 2022 Track 2, applicants might find the following documents useful to the process:

- Schedule F (Form 1040)
- *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

Track 2 targets gaps in emergency relief assistance for eligible producers whose eligible losses were not covered by crop insurance or NAP including revenue losses too small (shallow loss) to be covered by crop insurance.

Producers interested in applying for ERP 2022 Track 2, should contact their local FSA county office. Additional reference resources can be found on FSA's [emergency relief website](#).

Additional Required Forms

For both ERP 2022 tracks, all producers must have certain required forms on file with FSA within 60 days of the ERP 2022 deadline. Producers can apply for ERP 2022 starting Oct. 31, 2023. The application deadline has not yet been determined and will be announced at a later date. If not already on file, producers can update, complete and submit required forms to FSA at any time.

Required forms:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet*.
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable).
- Form FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs* (if applicable).
- Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, if applicable, for the 2022 program year.
- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*) for the ERP producer and applicable affiliates.

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 the status of their forms can contact their local FSA county office.

Future Insurance Coverage Requirements

All producers who receive ERP 2022 payments must purchase crop insurance, or NAP coverage where crop insurance is not available, in the next two available crop years as determined by the Secretary. Purchased coverage must be at the 60/100 coverage level or higher for insured crops or at the catastrophic coverage level or higher for NAP crops.

More Information

ERP 2022 eligibility details and payment calculation factor tables are available on the [emergency relief website](#), in the [ERP Track 1](#) and [ERP Track 2](#) fact sheets and through your local [FSA county office](#).

USDA Launches Program to Support Agricultural Employers and Farmworkers, Aiming to Increase Economic and Supply Chain Resilience as Part of President Biden's Investing in America Agenda

The Biden-Harris Administration announced that agricultural employers can begin to apply for a pilot program designed to improve the resiliency of the food and agricultural supply chain by addressing workforce challenges farmers and ranchers face. USDA, in coordination with other federal agencies, is announcing up to \$65 million in grants available for the Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Program (FLSP Program).



The program will help address workforce needs in agriculture, promote a safe and healthy work environment for farmworkers, and aims to support expansion of lawful migration pathways for workers, including for workers from Northern Central America, through the Department of Labor's seasonal H-2A visa program.

The FLSP Program seeks to advance the following Administration priorities:

- **Address current workforce needs in agriculture:** Based on stakeholder input, USDA identified that agricultural employers have experienced increased challenges finding an adequate supply of workers, which threatens our domestic capacity to produce a safe and robust food supply. This pilot program will help address these challenges by expanding the potential pool of workers, and enhancing employers' competitiveness by improving the quality of the jobs they offer.
- **Reduce irregular migration, including from Northern Central America through the expansion of regular pathways:** While U.S. agricultural operations seek additional workers, the Biden-Harris Administration has committed to promote the expansion of regular migration pathways, as part of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. The FLSP offers an opportunity to support this commitment, with economic benefits for foreign workers and their families, and professional and economic development opportunities for communities that send their workers to participate in the H-2A program.
- **Improve working conditions for farmworkers:** A stable and resilient food and agricultural sector relies on attracting and retaining skilled agricultural workers, and strong working conditions are critical to achieve that goal. Through this pilot program, USDA will support efforts to improve working conditions for agricultural workers, both U.S. and H-2A workers. The pilot will help ensure that workers know their rights and the resources available for them, and will promote fair and transparent recruitment practices.

Eligibility for this competitive grant program is limited to domestic agricultural employers who 1) anticipate meeting all Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulatory requirements for the H-2A program, including demonstrated effort to effectively recruit U.S.-based workers and hire all

willing, able, and qualified U.S. workers; and 2) commit to, and indicate capacity to fulfill all Baseline Requirements, as well as any selected (supplemental) commitments that entail additive worker benefits and protections. Eligible employers include fixed-site employers, joint-employers, agricultural associations, and H-2A labor contractors.

The maximum award amount is \$2,000,000 and the minimum amount is \$25,000 per grant agreement (including any sub-awardees). Award amounts will be determined based on the projected number of full-time equivalent (FTE) agricultural employees, desired award level, as well as the competitive nature of the application. Consistent with the H-2A requirements, applicants must demonstrate insufficient availability of a U.S.-based workforce. The grant window for each recipient is 24 months, allowing producers to use the grant over the course of two agricultural production seasons.

Applications for the FLSP program must be received on or before 11:59 pm Eastern Time on **November 28, 2023**. More information about the application process can be found here: www.ams.usda.gov/flsp.

USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online



WASHINGTON, Dec. 5, 2023 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched an online application for Direct Loan customers. More than 26,000 customers who submit a Direct Loan application each year can now use an online, interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan. This tool is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, improve customer service, and expand credit access.

“The Biden-Harris Administration is working hard to make it easier for farmers and ranchers to get the loans they need to keep growing food, fiber, and fuel for our country,” said Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small. “Online services are commonplace in commercial lending, and with USDA Farm Service Agency's new online loan application feature, it is now easier for producers to get the financing they need to start, expand, or maintain their farming and ranching operations.”

The online farm loan application replicates the support an applicant would receive when completing a loan application in person with an FSA Farm Loan Officer, while continuing to provide customers with one-on-one assistance as needed. This tool and other process improvements allow farmers and ranchers to submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete and withdrawn applications.

Through a personalized dashboard, borrowers can track the progress of their loan application. It can be accessed on farmers.gov or by completing FSA's Loan Assistance Tool at farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool. To use the online loan application tool, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \(“eAuth”\) account or a Login.gov account](#). For the initial stage, the online application tool is only available for producers who will be, or are currently, operating their farm as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

Farm Loan Improvement Efforts

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate Farm Loan Program customer-facing business processes. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a Direct Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool on farmers.gov](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the Direct Loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.

More Information

FSA continues to accept and review individual requests for assistance from qualifying borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans or those who were unable to make a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment for installments through January 15, 2024. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance.

The Inflation Reduction Act, a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for agricultural communities, provided \$3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with certain FSA direct and guaranteed loans and to expedite assistance for those whose agricultural operations are at financial risk. Since October 2022, USDA has provided approximately \$1.6 billion in assistance to more than 27,000 distressed direct and guaranteed FSA loan borrowers.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In 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 www.usda.gov.



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COC Meeting: December 14, 2023