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Message from Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Doris Washington

Last month we observed Native American Heritage Month, which also referred to as American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. This observance provided an opportunity for us to reflect on how the cultures and traditions continue to advance resilient economies and vibrant lands nationwide. Indigenous knowledge continues to be affirmed throughout our everyday life in our land management practices, the foods we eat, our systems of government and our stewardship of natural resources. The theme was “Three Sisters: The Intersection of Indigenous and Western Knowledge.” Adapted from the named intercropping method of planting corn, beans, and squash developed as an indigenous agricultural practice, the three sisters theme represents a continuous cycle in which each generation is responsible for caring for one another and leaving a better world for the next. These three plants protect and nourish each other in different ways as they grow and provide a solid diet for their cultivators. The beans provide nitrogen for the soil, including for the corn which is a nitrogen intensive plant, and the broad squash leaves reduce the pest and weed population-decreasing the need for pesticides and herbicides. Special Emphasis Observances inform and support collective efforts to advance equity in USDA. It was awesome to acknowledge and honor America’s first food producers and original land stewards.

USDA is investing an additional \$325 million for 71 projects under the second funding pool of the [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#) effort, bringing the total investment from both funding pools to over \$3.1 billion for 141 tentatively selected projects. Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is working to expand markets for American producers who produce climate-smart commodities, leverage greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart production, and provide meaningful benefits to producers, including small and underserved producers.

USDA has extended the deadline for producers to enroll in [Dairy Margin Coverage \(DMC\)](#) and [Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage \(SDMC\)](#) for program year 2023 to January 31, 2023. DMC is a voluntary risk management program that offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed price (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer. Nearly 18,000 operations that enrolled in DMC for 2022 have received margin payments for August and September for a total of \$76.3 million. At \$0.15 per hundredweight for \$9.50 coverage, risk coverage through DMC is a relatively inexpensive investment. DMC offers different levels of coverage, even an

option that is free to producers, aside from a \$100 administrative fee. Limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged, and military veteran farmers and ranchers are exempt from paying the administrative fee, if requested. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can use the online [dairy decision tool](#).

Reminding you again, if you are a farmer, rancher or forest manager, please share your vital feedback with USDA by taking a nationwide survey at [farmers.gov/survey](#)! The survey is completely anonymous, will take about 10 minutes to complete, is available in multiple languages, and will be open until March 31, 2023. The survey focuses on gathering feedback about the FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA). The survey will help USDA enhance support, improve programs and services, increase access, and advance equity for new and existing customers.

For more information on Farm Service Agency (FSA), contact your [local USDA service center](#) or visit [www.farmers.gov](#).

Our hope is, that you appreciate us, as much as we appreciate you. May your Holidays be filled with cheer, warm memories, and contentment. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Message from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas has much to be proud of because Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 was another great year assisting farmers, ranchers and foresters implement conservation practices addressing natural resource concerns on their operations. Thanks to the extra efforts of all our Arkansas NRCS employees and our conservation partners, we continued to manage our workloads servicing existing Farm Bill contracts while improving conservation planning and technical assistance and servicing new Farm Bill requests.

Here's an example of some of our accomplishments:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program — EQIP**
 - Active Contracts: 3,982 Acres: 712,838
 - New Contracts: 1,455 Acres: 226,948
 - Obligations: \$57,445,126
- **Conservation Stewardship Program — CSP**
 - Active Contracts: 995 Acres: 846,701
 - New Contracts: 231 Acres: 168,408
 - Obligations: \$30,034,209
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program — ACEP**
 - Easements: 9 Acres: 3196
 - Acquisition and Restoration: \$11,078,201
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program — RCPP**
 - Contracts: 64
 - Acres: 11,982
 - Obligations: \$3,380,907

We are proud of the strong partnership NRCS has with our conservation partners in Arkansas. Throughout Fiscal Year 2023, we will work closely with our partners to continue

accomplishing our goals above and beyond what we could ever achieve on our own. Through hard work and extra effort, we will continue to deliver high-quality service assisting our customers address their most pressing natural resource concerns.

New NRCS Website

We're recently unveiled our new website <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/arkansas>, which was designed whether you are a farmer, rancher or forest landowner who uses Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs or one of our partners who helps us deliver on our conservation mission.

The new NRCS site has been designed to support and enhance our mission by delivering relevant, timely, customer-focused information in an easy-to-navigate platform.

Key features include:

- It has been designed using the U.S. Web Design System, so you'll see a certain "family resemblance" among USDA and other federal websites, including [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov).
- It has accessibility (508 conformant), meaning the site is designed for use by people with disabilities.
- It's mobile responsive, meaning that it should work on a cellphone or tablet as easily as on a desktop computer.

Be sure to check out our:

- [Guides and Instructions](#)- Search by resource type, NRCS program, natural resource concern, and state.
- [Getting Assistance](#)-Learn more about available technical and financial assistance and how you can get support online as well as with the NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.
- [Conservation by State](#)-Find information on NRCS programs, services and other information in your state.

If you can't find something that you used to find on [our website](#), [contact us](#) and we can help.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Now that we are in the winter season, this is a reminder that NRCS offers disaster assistance for those operations affected by inclement weather. NRCS provides financial resources through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes. Contact your local [USDA Service Center](#) for more information

Important Dates to Remember

- December 30, 2022: CSP-GCI Obligation deadline
- December 30, 2022: FY23 CSP-Renewal obligation deadline
- January 27, 2023: Deadline to sign-up for Buffalo River Partnership RCPP Project and The East Arkansas Delta RCPP project
- February 17, 2023: Deadline to sign-up for Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Open Pine Landscape Restoration RCPP project

For additional information, contact your [local USDA Service Center](#).

Have a safe and Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Upcoming Events and Workshops

The USDA Arkansas Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to educating producers on available programs and loans. FSA representatives will be available at the following workshops and conferences. Producers interested in attending these conferences/workshops should follow the registration or RSVP instructions listed below.

Jan 25th -28th – Arkansas Grown Conference and Expo The Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Arkansas Grown program is partnering with Arkansas agriculture associations and organizations to host the first-ever Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo! The Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo. **FSA will have an informational Booth.** The conference and expo will be held at the Embassy Suites, West Little Rock, AR. Please visit [Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo - Arkansas Grown](#) for additional information.

Jan 27th – Catfish Farmers of Arkansas (CFAr) Annual Convention The Board of the CFAr is hosting their annual convention on January 27th. This year's theme is "Wading Through Uncertain Times". **Tonya Washington, District Director, will provide FSA/ELAP updates during the morning session.** The convention will be held at the Embassy Suites in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Please contact the [Catfish Farmers of Arkansas](#) or Dr. Carol Engle at cengle8523@gmail.com for additional information.

Feb 2nd – Arkansas Bait and Ornament Fish Growers Association Annual Meeting The Board of the Arkansas Bait and Ornament Fish Growers Association is hosting their annual meeting on February 2nd. **Doris Washington, State Executive Director, will provide FSA updates.** The meeting will be held at the Lonoke Community Center in Lonoke, Arkansas. Please contact Dr. Carol Engle at cengle8523@gmail.com for additional information.

Apr 3rd-4th - Arkansas Women in Agriculture Conference (AWIA) Arkansas Women in Agriculture is hosting the 2023 Conference on April 3 & 4, 2023. Please save the date! The conference will be held at the Hot Springs Convention Center, 134 Convention Blvd, Hot Springs, AR. **FSA will have an Information Booth and Employees will be available to discuss programs and answer questions.** Information will be forthcoming. Please visit: [AWIAs Website](#) for additional information.

Farmers to Receive Documentation of USDA Services

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides a receipt to customers who request or receive assistance or information on FSA programs.

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a customer receipt to be issued for any agricultural program assistance requested from FSA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD). Receipts include the date, summary of the visit and any agricultural information, program and/or loan assistance provided to an individual or entity. Electronic receipts for acreage reports began on Aug. 1, 2016.

A service is any information, program, or loan assistance provided whether through an office visit, email, fax, or letter.

Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance

The term “sodbusting” is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you’re proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.

Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification,” with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.

For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Previews Crop and Revenue Loss Assistance for Agricultural Producers

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced plans for additional emergency relief and pandemic assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA is preparing to roll out the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) Phase Two as well as the new [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#), which are two programs to help offset crop and revenue losses for producers. USDA is sharing early information to help producers gather documents and train front-line staff on the new approach.

ERP Phase Two will assist eligible agricultural producers who suffered eligible crop losses, measured through decreases in revenue, due to wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture and qualifying droughts occurring in calendar years 2020 and 2021.

PARP will assist eligible producers of agricultural commodities who experienced revenue decreases in calendar year 2020 compared to 2018 or 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PARP will help address gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

Emergency Relief Program Phase Two

ERP is authorized under the *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act*, which includes \$10 billion in assistance to agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms and other eligible disasters experienced during calendar years 2020 and 2021.

Phase Two builds on ERP Phase One, which was [rolled out in May 2022](#) and has since paid more than \$7.1 billion to producers who incurred eligible crop losses that were covered by federal crop insurance or Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

ERP Phase Two includes producers who suffered eligible losses but may not have received program benefits in Phase One. To be eligible for Phase Two, producers must have suffered a loss in allowable gross revenue as defined in forthcoming program regulations in 2020 or 2021 due to necessary expenses related to losses of eligible crops from a qualifying natural disaster event.

Eligible crops include both traditional insurable commodities and specialty crops that are produced in the United States as part of a farming operation and are intended to be commercially marketed. Like other emergency relief and pandemic assistance programs, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) continues to look for ways to simplify the process for both staff and producers while reducing the paperwork burden. The design of ERP Phase Two is part of that effort.

In general, ERP Phase Two payments are expected to be based on the difference in certain farm revenue between a typical year of revenue as will be specified in program regulations for the producer and the disaster year. ERP Phase Two assistance is targeted to the remaining needs of producers impacted by qualifying natural disaster events, while avoiding windfalls or duplicative payments. Details will be available when the rule is published later this year.

Deadline for Emergency Relief Program Phase One

Producers who are eligible for assistance through ERP Phase One have until Friday, Dec. 16, 2022, to contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#) to receive program benefits. Going forward, if any additional ERP Phase One pre-filled applications are generated due to corrections or other circumstances, there will be a 30-day deadline from the date of notification for that particular application.

Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program

PARP is authorized and funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

To be eligible for PARP, an agricultural producer must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a certain threshold decrease in allowable gross revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to 2018 or 2019. Exact details on the calculations and eligibility will be available when the forthcoming rule is published.

How Producers Can Prepare

ERP Phase Two and PARP will use 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, as explained further below. Producers will need similar documentation to what was needed for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) Phase Two, where a producer could use 2018 or 2019 as the benchmark year relative to the disaster year.

In the coming weeks, USDA will provide additional information on how to apply for assistance through ERP Phase Two and PARP. In the meantime, producers are encouraged to begin gathering supporting documentation including:

- 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.

Producers should also have, or be prepared to have, the following forms on file for both ERP and PARP program participation:

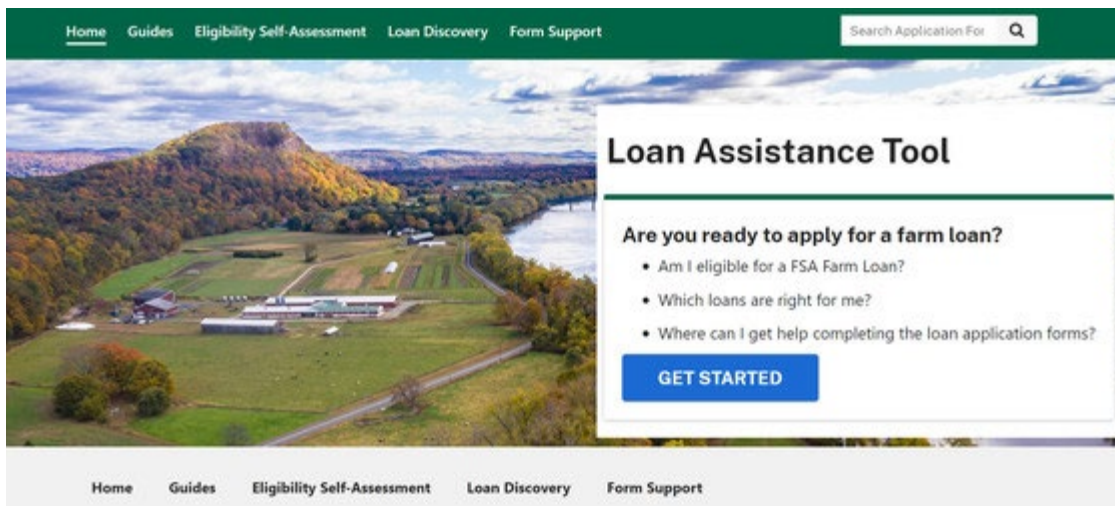
- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet* (as applicable to the program participant);
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity;
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable); and
- Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland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

Through proactive communications and outreach, USDA will keep producers and stakeholders informed as program eligibility, application and implementation details unfold.

USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new online tool to help farmers and ranchers better navigate the farm loan application process. This uniform application process will help to ensure all farm loan applicants receive equal support and have a consistent customer experience with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) regardless of their individual circumstances.

USDA experiences a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, particularly among underserved customers, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. The Loan Assistance Tool is available 24/7 and gives customers an online step-by-step guide that supplements the support they receive when working in person with a USDA employee, providing materials that may help an applicant prepare their loan application in one tool.

Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button. From here they can follow the prompts to complete the Eligibility Self-Assessment and start the farm loan journey. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

The Loan Assistance Tool is the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements and tools that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:

- A streamlined and simplified direct loan application, reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

Background

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA is taking action to immediately [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](#) whose operations are at financial risk while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.

USDA Announces Assistance for On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for Specialty Crop Growers

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to provide up to \$200 million in assistance for specialty crop producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 or 2023. USDA's new [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops](#) (FSCSC) program will help to offset costs for specialty crop producers to comply with regulatory requirements and market-driven food safety certification requirements, which is part of USDA's broader effort to transform the food system to create a more level playing field for small and medium producers and a more balanced, equitable economy for everyone working in food and agriculture.

Specialty crop operations can apply for assistance for eligible expenses related to a 2022 food safety certificate issued on or after June 21, 2022, beginning June 27, 2022. USDA is delivering FSCSC to provide critical assistance for specialty crop operations, with an emphasis on equity in program delivery while building on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain disruptions. Vilsack made the announcement from Hollis, N.H., where he toured a local, family-owned farm and highlighted USDA's efforts to help reduce costs for farmers and support local economies by providing significant funding to cut

regulatory costs and increase market opportunities for farmers in New Hampshire and across the nation.

Program Details

FSCSC will assist specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023. For each year, FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing their certification, as well as a portion of their related expenses.

To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation; meet the definition of a small business or very small business; and have paid eligible expenses related to the 2022 (issued on or after June 21, 2022) or 2023 certification.

Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:

- Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification.
- Maintaining or updating an existing food safety plan.
- Food safety certification.
- Certification upload fees.
- Microbiological testing for products, soil amendments and water.

FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each category of eligible costs. A higher payment rate has been set for socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. Details about the payment rates and limitations can be found at farmers.gov/food-safety.

Applying for Assistance

The FSCSC application period for 2022 is June 27, 2022, through January 31, 2023, and the application period for 2023 will be announced at a later date. FSA will issue payments at the time of application approval for 2022 and after the application period ends for 2023. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application. The application, along with other required documents, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means.

Producers can visit farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

Applying for FSA Guaranteed Loans

FSA guaranteed loans allow lenders to provide agricultural credit to farmers who do not meet the lender's normal underwriting criteria. Farmers and ranchers apply for a guaranteed loan through a lender, and the lender arranges for the guarantee. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of principal and interest on a loan. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.

Guaranteed farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, construct or repair buildings, develop farmland to promote soil and water conservation or to refinance debt.

Guaranteed operating loans can be used to purchase livestock, farm equipment, feed, seed, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance and other operating expenses.

FSA can guarantee farm ownership and operating loans up to \$2,037,000. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.

For more information on guaranteed loans, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Biden-Harris Administration Announces an Additional \$325 Million in Pilot Projects through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, for Total Investment of \$3.1 Billion



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that the Biden-Harris Administration, through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is investing an additional \$325 million for 71 projects under the second funding pool of the [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#) effort, bringing the total investment from both funding pools to over \$3.1 billion for 141 tentatively selected projects. Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is working to expand markets for American producers who produce climate-smart commodities, leverage greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart production, and provide meaningful benefits to producers, including small and underserved producers.

The Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity had high demand from across agriculture and forestry. Between two funding pools, USDA received over 1,000 proposals requesting more than \$20 billion in funds from more than 700 entities, including nonprofit organizations; for-profits and government entities; farmer cooperatives; conservation, energy and environmental groups; state, tribal and local governments; universities; small businesses; and large corporations. Applications were received from all 50 states, tribal lands, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

In September, USDA announced \$2.8 billion for 70 tentatively selected projects from the first funding pool, which received over \$18 billion in total project requests for projects between \$5 million to \$100 million. USDA announced an additional \$325 million for 71 projects under the second funding pool, which received over \$2 billion in proposals for projects from \$250,000-\$4,999,999. All of the projects funded through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities require meaningful involvement of small and underserved producers. The second funding pool was particularly focused on innovative projects that emphasize enrolling small and underserved producers and invest in measuring, monitoring, reporting and verifying the benefits of climate-smart practices at minority-serving institutions.

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects benefit from a diverse range of project partners, including more than 30 minority-serving institutions, more than 20 tribal partners, and many groups focused on working with small and underserved producers. Projects include support for activities that will expand and increase producer access to markets for climate-smart commodities, provide financial and technical assistance to support climate-smart production practice implementation, include investments in quantifying and monitoring greenhouse gas benefits of those practices, and bring the resulting commodities to new markets.

To maximize access to all types of entities, the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity offered applicants flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

USDA is currently in negotiations regarding the first 70 projects and will work with the applicants for all 141 identified projects to finalize the scope and funding levels in the coming months. Funding will be provided by USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation.

Secretary Vilsack made the announcement from Tuskegee University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and 1890 Land-grant University, which is the lead partner on two Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodity projects. On December 16, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Dr. Homer Wilkes joined the University of Arkansas at Monticello and their partners for a visit to Five Oaks Ag Education and Research Center in Humphrey. At the event, Wilkes announced funding for Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities projects, including approximately \$3.7M for an Arkansas based climate smart forestry pilot project that will benefit small and underserved landowners in the Southern Bottomland Region. This and other project examples include:

Developing and Harnessing Climate-Smart Commodities from Hardwood Restoration for Small and Underserved Landowners in the Southern Bottomland Region

This project plans to focus on working with small scale and underserved landowners on marketing climate-smart wood products with support for bottomland hardwood afforestation and planting mixed hardwood oak plantations. Full technical and financial assistance is planned for landowners and demonstration sites. Partners plan to use a forest inventory system to monitor and assess tree stand structure, composition, and health status across the bottomland hardwood forests, and estimate carbon storage and evaluate indicator wildlife populations.

Lead Partner: University of Arkansas System

Other Major Partners: University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM) (lead), University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), Texas A&M University

Primary States Expected: AR

Major Commodities: wood products

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$3,710,000

Climate Resiliency for the Farm and Market Development: Economically Viable Low Carbon and Climate-Smart Practices for Soybean Farming

Team Climate-Smart Soybean plan to provide small/underserved soybean producers with sufficient incentives to encourage the use of climate-smart practices and participate in the development of markets and promotion of climate-smart soybeans. Participants would use cover crops, no-till, climate-smart soybeans, crop rotation, bio-fertilizers, and biochar. Led by an Hispanic-serving institution, project assistance would be provided in a culturally-relative approach.

Lead Partner: University of Texas at Arlington

Other Major Partners: Texas A&M AgriLife, University of Missouri, Tarleton State University

Primary States Expected: AR, MO, TX

Major Commodities: Corn & Soybeans

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$4,991,400

Southeast Arkansas Agricultural Cooperative and Multicultural Education Initiative

This project plans to provide a market platform for rice growers producing premium rice that is certified sustainably grown. Participating farmers may earn a premium and save in variable crop expenses. This project plans to establish an agricultural apprenticeship at a minority serving institution, increase the supply of climate-smart rice, and promote climate-smart practices through education and demonstration. This project would use a “whole farm” approach to climate-smart management with a specific emphasis on quantifying greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in rice production.

Lead Partner: Whitaker Grain

Other Major Partners: University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, RiceTec, Ducks Unlimited

Primary States Expected: AR

Major Commodities: Rice

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$4,999,999

BEACON Pilot: Farmers Guiding Farmers Towards Climate Smart Agriculture

This project plans to advance equity by minimizing transaction costs and addressing cultural dynamics for Black and indigenous producers by using a farmer-to-farmer collaborative training approach. Farmers would define culturally appropriate product labels, and partners would work to increase market access, specifically through marketing the value-add of using climate-smart practices like cover crops, no-till, tree planting and prescribed grazing.

Lead Partner: Florida A&M University

Other Major Partners: National Black Food & Justice Alliance, Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network, the Tallahassee Food Network, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, Organic Farmers Association, Women Food and Agriculture Network, the Earth’s Garden Network

Primary States Expected: GA, FL, AL, AR, OK, TX

Major Commodities: Specialty and organic crops

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$4,999,000

Increasing Accessibility to Regenerative Farming Practices and Markets for Small and/or Underserved Producers

All pilot participants would be paid a stipend to cover time spent on climate-smart regenerative farm planning and emissions reduction plan design. Each farm would also have access to incentive payments, dependent on their emissions reductions and specific implementation of Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry practices. A Greener World plans to provide customized marketing support to all project producers. Partners would ensure all outreach and technical assistance efforts are culturally-relevant and would assist producers in becoming

Certified Regenerative which allows them to access new climate-smart markets and sell commodities for a higher premium.

Lead Partner: Greener World

Other Major Partners: Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, Sub-contractor/Evaluation Partner, Soil Health Institute (SHI), National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), National Co-op Grocers (NCG) Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (RAFI-USA)

Primary States Expected: AR, GA, MO, MS, NC, SC, TX, VA

Major Commodities: Fruit, Vegetables and Specialty Crops; Beef, Livestock

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$4,000,000

National Black Growers Council Regenerative Agriculture Pilot Program (National Black Growers Council: Black Cotton/peanuts)

In this project, the National Black Growers Council (NBGC) plans to work with historically underserved farmers to test regenerative agricultural practices and determine which are best suited for various regions and farm types in the Southeast United States. Once complete, NBGC plans to scale up participation to include additional farmers a, providing incentives to increase adoption of regenerative agricultural practices and leveraging market data to sell products to corporate partners who need to meet corporate sustainability goals.

Lead Partner: National Black Growers Council

Other Major Partners: Cargill, Bayer, Syngenta

Primary States Expected: AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, VA

Major Commodities: Cotton, corn, rice, soybeans, sugar cane, peanuts, canola, and grain sorghum

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$4,789,000

Improved Practices of Climate-Smart Livestock Production Systems and Agricultural Commodities while Enhancing Carbon Sequestration in the Southern USA: Innovating toward a new climate-smart commodity by investing in minority producers

The project plans to work with minority small producers to implement silvopasture systems and climate-resilient forage systems. Producers would receive incentives that enable their participation in climate-smart pilots and continued implementation, including reduced feed costs, carbon credit profits, and value-added products. Partners would create a mobile processing and marketing system to support the local, farm-direct meat production pipeline in a climate-conscious manner. The marketing pipeline combine farmers' markets, local restaurants, craft butcher shops, and direct to-consumer approaches.

Lead Partner: Tuskegee University

Other Major Partners: Mississippi State University, Alabama A&M University, Langston University, Widget Development & Trading Company

Primary States Expected: AL, MS, AR, TX

Major Commodities: Sheep and Goats

Approximate Funding Ceiling: \$4,081,100

A complete list of projects is available at usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities.

“America’s farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are leading the way in implementing climate-smart solutions across their operations,” said Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan in Arkansas. “Through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, USDA will provide targeted funding to meet national and global demand and expand market opportunities for climate-smart commodities to increase the competitive advantage of American producers. We want a broad array of agriculture and forestry to see themselves in this effort, including small and historically underserved producers as well as early adopters.”

The Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects across both funding pools will deliver important impacts for farmers, ranchers, foresters, and communities nationwide. USDA anticipates that the projects from both funding pools combined will result in:

- **Hundreds of expanded markets and revenue streams** for farmers and ranchers and commodities across agriculture and forestry ranging from traditional corn to specialty crops.
- **More than 60,000 farms reached, encompassing more than 25 million acres of working land** engaged in climate-smart production practices, like cover crops, no-till and nutrient management, as well as pasture and forestry management.
- **More than 60 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent sequestered over the lives of the projects.** This is equivalent to removing more than 12 million gasoline-powered passenger vehicles from the road for one year.
- **Involvement of nearly 100 universities, including over 30 minority serving institutions.** This will bring new ideas and innovative skills in monitoring and outreach. This includes:
 - **11 projects with a Historically Black College or University (HBCU)** as the lead and more than 35 projects with HBCUs as major partners; and
 - **Six projects with a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)** as the lead and nearly 20 projects with HSIs as major partners.
- **Over 20 tribes and tribal groups** leading and partnering on many projects and representing tribes across a wide geography.
- Proposals for the 141 selected projects include plans to **match on average 50% of the federal investment with non-federal funds.**

More Information

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is part of USDA’s broader strategy to position agriculture and forestry as leaders in climate change mitigation through voluntary, incentive-based, market-driven approaches. Visit usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities to learn more about this effort, and usda.gov/climate-solutions for climate-related updates, resources and tools across the Department.

Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our Nation’s lands, biodiversity and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through climate-smart agriculture and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local and Tribal governments.

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.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Accepting 2023 Applications for Two Regional Conservation Partnership Program Projects in Arkansas

Farmers and landowners in two USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project areas in Arkansas can apply to receive assistance to implement conservation activities. The projects will offer financial assistance to landowners in fiscal year 2023.

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas who submit applications to their local NRCS office by January 27, 2023, will be considered for this round of funding. Applications received after January 27 will be considered in later funding periods, subject to funding availability.

“RCPP is a unique program that leverages non-federal investments brought by conservation partners to accelerate conservation in selected project areas,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “This approach helps us maximize use of our collective resources to address locally identified concerns.”

The RCPP projects and associated counties with projects are:

- **Buffalo River Partnership Project (portions of Baxter, Boone, Madison, Marion, Newton, Pope, Searcy, Stone, and Van Buren counties):** The project is designed to collaborate with interested farmers and landowners to increase agricultural sustainability by implementing voluntary conservation practices within the Buffalo River Watershed. Partners seek to collaborate with local farmers, landowners and community leaders in priority watersheds to identify resource concerns and conservation practices to improve farm sustainability and water quality, reduce sediment and nutrient loads to the Buffalo River by providing technical and financial assistance to implement practices that improves pasture and nutrient management, restore eroding streambanks to prevent loss of pastureland and reduce maintenance costs and sediment loads from erosion of unpaved roads, and assist interested landowners conserve key conservation lands to prevent future erosion and nutrient loads in the Buffalo River watershed. (Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy)
- **The East Arkansas Delta RCPP project:** The project will implement innovative, effective and compelling solutions for the primary resource concerns related to land improvement/management/restoration of row crop and alternative crop producers and landowners in Lee, St. Francis, Monroe and Phillips counties. The objectives are to provide technical and financial assistance to all eligible producers and landowners, including socially disadvantaged producers and landowners in four select StrikeForce counties to improve their resource management and cropping systems and to help producers and landowners to identify the conservation activities to they need to solve their conservation problems and install appropriate innovative conservation practices to decrease water quality degradation; improve habitat for fish, wildlife, and invertebrates; and reduce excess/insufficient water/drought.

Individuals and other entities actively engaged in agricultural production are eligible to participate in RCPP. RCPP offers a continuous application sign-up. However, to be considered for funding, applications must be received by January 27 2023. Applicants can sign up for the 2023 program year by contacting their local USDA Field Service Center.

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on how well they align with project priorities using procedures to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in. Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway](#) link which can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents.

RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

For more information, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local USDA/NRCS Field Service Center.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Accepting 2023 Applications for Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network Open Pine Landscape Restoration RCPP Project

Farmers and landowners in the Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Open Pine Landscape Restoration Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project in Arkansas can apply to receive financial assistance in fiscal year 2023.

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas who submit applications to their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office by February 17, 2023, will be considered for this assistance.

“RCPP is a unique program that leverages non-federal investments brought by conservation partners to accelerate conservation in selected project areas,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “This approach helps us maximize use of our collective resources to address locally identified concerns.”

The RCPP project and associated counties with the project are:

Conservation Delivery Network Open Pine Land Restoration Project (portions of Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Clark, Drew, Lincoln, Nevada, Ouachita counties)

The AR-LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration partnership will advance the recovery of species of conservation concern by implementing Desired Forest Condition management practices across 30,000 acres of private lands in Arkansas and Louisiana. American Bird Conservancy and 19 partners plan to use several innovative tools and approaches to target funding to lands critical for the protection of species such as Northern Bobwhite, Henslow’s and LeConte’s sparrows, Louisiana Pine Snake, and Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Partnerships with the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff and other entities will help ensure that Historically Underserved farmers participate meaningfully in the project.

(Lead Partner: American Bird Conservancy)

Individuals and other entities actively engaged in agricultural production are eligible to participate in RCPP. RCPP offers a continuous application sign-up. However, to be considered for funding, applications must be received by February 17. Applicants can sign up for the 2023 program year by contacting their local USDA Service Center.

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on how well they align with project priorities using procedures to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

All USDA Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with NRCS should call ahead to schedule an appointment. Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal where producers can view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in.

For more information about RCPP, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local [USDA/NRCS Field Service Center](#).

Respond Now: Ag Census Counts

WHY IS THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE IMPORTANT TO YOU?



THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE IMPACTS THE FUTURE OF YOUR OPERATION, COMMUNITY, AND INDUSTRY.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) sends a census questionnaire to every known producer in the country.

Producers benefit with new and improved farm programs and services tailored to their region and needs. They also benefit by having accurate data to help make production and marketing decisions for their operations.

We encourage all producers to complete the questionnaire and return it.

Producers, businesses, and many others use the data to make informed decisions such as where to locate processing or transportation facilities.

As required by federal law, all responses are completely confidential. NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

NASS publishes aggregated census data for all U.S. states, counties, and territories to everyone at the same time, ensuring equal access to data.

NASS compiles and analyzes data about U.S. farming that are only available as part of the census such as demographics, economics, and land use.

Data are kept secure and each NASS employee is committed to data security by following mandated procedures to ensure information is not compromised.

Census of Agriculture data work for you by improving decisions about jobs, transportation, production practices, new technologies, marketing opportunities, farm services and programs, local, state, and federal policy, and more. For these reasons, it is important to respond to the ag census.



www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus
United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

The Importance of Responding to NASS Surveys

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture.

If you receive a survey questionnaire, please respond quickly and online if possible.

The results of the surveys help determine the structure of USDA farm programs, such as soil rental rates for the Conservation Reserve Program and prices and yields used for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs. This county-level data is critical for USDA farm payment determinations. Survey responses also help associations, businesses and policymakers advocate for their industry and help educate others on the importance of agriculture.

NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents and publishes only aggregate data, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

NASS data is available online at nass.usda.gov/Publications and through the searchable [Quick Stats database](#). Watch a video on how NASS data is used at youtube.com/watch?v=m-4zjnh26io&feature=youtu.be.

Key Dates

June 2022 Deadline to sign up to be counted.

November 2022 NASS mails survey codes to producers so they can respond online at agcounts.usda.gov.

December 2022 Producers receive the Ag Census questionnaire in the mail.

February 6, 2023 Response deadline; producers can respond online, by mail, or telephone.

Spring/Summer 2024 Data Release.

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (888) 424-7828
www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus

Rates and Dates

| Selected Interest Rates for December 2022 | | | |
|---|-------|-------------------|---|
| 90-Day Treasury Bill | 3.625 | | |
| Farm Operating Loans — Direct | 5.125 | | |
| Farm Ownership Loans — Direct | 5.000 | | |
| Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher | 1.500 | | |
| Emergency Loans | 3.750 | | |
| Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) | 4.125 | | |
| Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) | 4.000 | | |
| Commodity Loans 1996-Present | 5.625 | | |
| | | Dates to Remember | |
| | | 12/31/2022 | Acreage reporting deadline for NAP grass |
| | | 01/01/2023 | Reporting deadline for honey |
| | | 01/03/2023 | Newly Elected COC Members take Office |
| | | 01/31/2023 | Dairy Margin Coverage election deadline (revision from 12/9/2022) |



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FSA Phone: 501-301-3000
 FSA Fax: 855-652-2082
 NRCS Phone: 501-301-3100 NRCS
 Fax: 855-681-7044

*Please contact your local Office for questions specific to your operation or county.
To find contact information for your local office visit one of the websites below.*

www.farmers.gov

www.fsa.usda.gov

www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Arkansas/index

www.nrcs.usda.gov

www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov

FSA State Executive Director

Doris Washington

NRCS State Conservationist

Mike Sullivan

FSA State Committee Meeting: 3rd Tuesday of each month

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in this meeting/event should contact Rita Smith-Clay at 501-301-3200 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.