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Message from State Executive Director Doris Washington



Greetings

It's that time of year again, and we want to showcase your planting season on social media and blogs. To participate, just send us a photo and a bit of information. Learn more at <https://www.farmers.gov/blog/share-your-plant-2023-stories>

You are encouraged to submit comments for and virtually attend the fifth public meeting of the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (Committee) on April 18, 2023. The virtual meeting runs from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern. To attend virtually, register by April 18 on the Committee's webpage. To submit comments, send through the Federal eRulemaking Portal. Docket NRCS-2023-0006. For special accommodations, contact Markus Holliday at UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov. Additional details are available in the *Federal Register* notice.

Agricultural operations in Arkansas have been significantly impacted by recent tornadoes and severe storms that caused widespread and extensive destruction across those states. Farm Service Agency (FSA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover in the wake of these disasters. Impacted producers should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about programs that may be available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure and livestock losses and damages. On [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance](#) fact sheet, and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can assist in determining program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, contact your [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs, contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

Beginning in this month, approximately \$123 million will be available in additional financial assistance for qualifying farm loan program borrowers who are facing financial risk (Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)). The announcement builds on financial assistance offered to borrowers through the same program in October 2022. The IRA instructs to expedite assistance to distressed borrowers of direct or guaranteed loans administered by FSA whose operations face financial risk. Qualifying borrowers will receive an individual letter detailing the assistance as payments are made. Distressed borrowers' eligibility for these new categories of automatic payments will be determined based on their circumstances as of today. More information about the new categories, and the specific amount of assistance a distressed borrower receives, can be found described in the following fact sheet, [IRA Section 22006: Additional Automatic Payments, Improved Procedures, and Policy Recommendations](#).

USDA will continue to work with the Department of Treasury to help borrowers understand the potential tax implications from the receipt of an IRA payment, including that options

may be available to potentially avoid or alleviate any tax burden incurred as a result of receiving this financial assistance. Earlier this month, specific set of revised tax documents, educational materials, and resources to borrowers that received assistance in 2022 was scheduled to be distributed. That includes a link to a webinar hosted by a group of farm tax experts to provide education on the options available. FSA cannot provide tax advice and encourages borrowers to consult their own tax professional, but FSA is providing educational materials for borrowers to be aware of the options. FSA has tax-related resources available at farmers.gov/taxes.

Agricultural producers and private landowners can begin signing up for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through **May 26, 2023**. Among CRP enrollment opportunities, Grassland CRP is a unique working lands program, allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while conserving grasslands and promoting plant and animal biodiversity as well as healthier soil.

Under [Continuous CRP](#), producers and landowners may enroll throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. Continuous CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

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

Our goal is to serve all farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners; equitably; through the delivery of effective and efficient agricultural programs.

Until next time...

Message from State Conservationist Mike Sullivan

Greetings

NRCS is continuously working to improve our programs to ensure we are giving producers the best tools to conserve natural resources. We want a broad array of agriculture to see themselves in this effort, including small and historically underserved producers as well as early adopters.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced in February that USDA is making funding available for agricultural producers and forest landowners nationwide to participate in voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided an additional \$19.5 billion over five years for climate smart agriculture through several of the conservation programs that NRCS implements. NRCS is making available \$850 million in fiscal year 2023 for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

These funds will provide direct climate mitigation benefits. They will also expand access to financial and technical assistance for producers to advance conservation on their farm, ranch or forest land through practices like cover cropping, conservation tillage, wetland restoration, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, tree planting and more. For more information, please contact your local NRCS office at the USDA Service Center.

Break through the surface to explore the living, breathing ecosystem beneath our feet. [“Dirt”](#) — a documentary from Arkansas PBS about saving our soil — delves into how

Arkansas farmers, ranchers and more are improving their operations by helping the environment.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8mawEmm49o>

“Helping People Help the Land” is what we’ve been doing at the NRCS since 1935. The success stories in this film shine the spotlight on seven producers from across Arkansas who explain why they have implemented conservation practices and how they work on their land. These producers share their own conservation stories, and how practices are helping them protect and improve resources, how they save time and save money.

It all begins with a conservation plan that NRCS offers at no cost. The plan is developed through the Conservation Technical Assistance Program to provide a blueprint to help producers achieve their objectives with personalized advice and information based on the latest science and research and to help them make informed decisions.

More information about the film is available at <https://www.myarkansaspbs.org/programs/dirt>.

Major funding for “*Dirt*” is provided by the Pulaski County Conservation District and the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service in Arkansas.

Important Dates to Remember:

FY24 CSP Renewal Application Deadline: April 28, 2023

FY24 Local-Led Workgroup Meetings to be held by: May 26, 2023

State Technical Committee Meeting: June 8

A Working Lands for Wildlife Pollinator Conservation Webinar Series, presented by Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever, in partnership with USDA-NRCS’s Working Lands for Wildlife, aims to enhance understanding, confidence and knowledge of pollinator conservation concepts, and is designed for conservation professionals working in the southeast. All webinars will be recorded and made available on the WLFW Landscape Portal <https://landscapepartnership.org/networks/working-lands-for-wildlife>. Contact: Celia Vuocolo, WLFW Pollinator Coordinator-East at cvuocolo@quailforever.org for additional information.

May 12 - Who are the Southeast Region’s Pollinators

June 9 - Species of Conservation Concern: Bumble Bees in the Southeast

July 21 - Species of Conservation Concern: Monarch Butterfly in the Southeast

August 11 - Species of Conservation Concern: SWAP & Listed species for 15 Southeast States

September 15 - Planning & Establishing Pollinator Habitat

October 6 - Maintaining Pollinator Habitat

November 3 - Do I Need a Pollinator Seed Mix and How to Build One

December 7 - Pollinators & Livestock Grazing

January 5, 2024 - Pollinators & Forestland: Underappreciated Pollinator Habitat

February 2, 2024 - How to do a Pollinator Outreach Event

Join us for the People's Garden webinar series!



The People's Garden webinar series will begin on April 26 at 3 p.m. ET and will feature experts from USDA and beyond who will share planting tips and resources that benefit community gardens. We'll also share on-the-ground stories of gardens making a difference by growing fresh, nutritious food for their communities. Webinars will be recorded and available for viewing on our website.

Register for the April 26 webinar and preview topics for upcoming monthly webinars at [People's Garden Webinars | USDA](#)

Ask USDA Available to Answer Questions About FSA Programs

Ask USDA is now available as a tool for FSA customers to ask questions about FSA programs and services

Ask USDA, available at ask.usda.gov is similar to AskFSA, which was decommissioned Sept. 21, but it also provides information for all USDA programs. Ask USDA allows USDA customers to search for and read answers about FSA programs and services in the same location as they read about other USDA programs and services.

Customers are able to submit questions through email, chat, and phone if they need more information. This improved customer service approach provides a one-stop shopping experience that covers all of USDA's many programs.

USDA Encourages Rice Farmers to Prepare for new Rice Production Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) previewed plans to provide up to [\\$250 million in assistance](#) to rice farmers and what steps they can take to be prepared to sign up when the program is released later this spring. USDA is sharing information early so producers can prepare for program signup, which will include a pre-filled application in an effort to simplify and streamline the application process.

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

What Farmers Can Do Now

The full details of the program and application will not be available until after a Notice of Funding Availability is published later this year in the Federal Register. But there is something farmers can do right now to be better prepared for the signup, if they qualify for a higher payment limitation.

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

Rice farmers may visit their local county office to submit the appropriate form and certification (FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs*), if they qualify for and want to seek the higher payment limit and get part of the paperwork done early. Farmers will still have a chance to fill out the AGI form during signup as well. The form should be filled out for the 2022 crop year.

Planned Application Process

After the official notice is published later this year, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) plans to mail prefilled applications to producers using information on file with USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) or FSA, as reported by rice producers through their crop insurance agents or FSA county office. This streamlined application process will reduce the burden on producers and minimize errors due to manual data entries on the application form. More information will be provided when FSA announces the signup period in the coming weeks.

Program Payments

As directed by the omnibus legislation, FSA will calculate Rice Production Program (RPP) payments by multiplying the payment rate, individual average actual production history (APH), as reported to RMA, or county yield and an amount of certified rice acres determined by the number of planted acres and acres that were prevented from being planted. FSA plans to issue an initial payment to eligible farmers soon after applications are returned and a final payment after the sign-up has closed. Details on these procedures and the initial payment rate will be in the future notice.

Rolling Out Revenue Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs

Beginning January 23, 2023, agricultural producers can begin to apply for two new important programs for revenue losses, from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. Both programs equitably fill gaps in earlier assistance.

First, you may be eligible for assistance through the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) Phase Two if you experienced revenue losses from eligible natural disasters in 2020 and 2021.

You may also be eligible for the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#) if you experienced revenue losses in calendar year 2020. PARP is addressing gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

Applications for both new programs are due June 2, 2023, and you can apply for both programs during your same appointment with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Historically, FSA programs have been designed to make direct payments to producers based on a single disaster event or for a single commodity loss. For many of you, this may be the first revenue-based program that you've applied for with FSA.

Why revenue-based programs?

ERP Phase Two and PARP take a much more holistic approach to disaster assistance, ensuring that producers not just make it through a single growing season but have the financial stability to invest in the long-term well-being of their operations and employees.

In general, ERP Phase Two payments are based on the difference in allowable gross revenue between a benchmark year, representing a typical year of revenue for the producer and the disaster year – designed to target the remaining needs of producers impacted by qualifying natural disasters and avoid duplicative payments. ERP Phase Two revenue loss is based on tax years.

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 decrease in revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to a typical year. PARP revenue loss is based on calendar years.

How to Apply

In preparation for enrollment, producers should gather 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*.
- 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.

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](#).

Yes, FSA is stepping outside of the box.

FSA is a big proponent of agricultural producers having a say in the design, implementation and delivery of the programs that directly impact their livelihoods. We also believe that some of the most creative and useful ideas for program and process improvements come from the FSA employees who administer this assistance through our network of more than 2,100 county offices. We want to thank producers across the country, along with the entire FSA workforce, for not just thinking outside of the box but also providing their input to make sure that we can improve and enhance our programs and our approach to assistance to better and more efficiently serve all producers who need our help.

Please visit your local USDA Service Center for more information on ERP Phase Two, PARP and our full portfolio of conservation, prices support, safety-net, credit and disaster assistance programs.

Know your Final Planting Dates

All producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for more information on the final planting date for specific crops. The final planting dates vary by crop, planting period and county so please contact your local FSA office for a list of county-specific planting deadlines. The timely planting of a crop, by the final planting date, may prevent loss of program benefits.

USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the Federal Register](#).

More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) ([also available in Spanish](#)) or by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

Progression Lending from FSA

Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loans are considered progression lending. Unlike loans from a commercial lender, FSA loans are intended to be temporary in nature. Our goal is to help you graduate to commercial credit, and our farm loan staff is available to help borrowers through training and credit counseling.

The FSA team will help borrowers identify their goals to ensure financial success. FSA staff will advise borrowers on developing strategies and a plan to meet your goals and graduate to commercial credit. FSA borrowers are responsible for the success of their farming operation, but FSA staff will help in an advisory role, providing the tools necessary to help you achieve your operational goals and manage your finances.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your Local County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service is accepting Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) renewal applications through April 28

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service is accepting Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) renewal applications through April 28, 2023. During the first half of the fifth year of the existing contract term, NRCS may allow a participant to apply and compete to renew their contract for an additional five-year period. NRCS is mailing contract renewal notification letters to all participants whose contracts expire in 2023. These letters contain instructions on how to apply for CSP renewal.

- Participants with 2019 CSP contracts (Classic, Renewal, and RCPP-CSP) expiring December 31, 2023, can apply to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands.
- NRCS will assess and rank all renewal applications received on or before the renewal application cutoff date. Renewal applicants will compete within a separate state-established ranking pool, and NRCS will make funding selections based on ranking score and available funds.

Through CSP, NRCS helps private landowners build their business while implementing conservation practices that help ensure the sustainability of their entire operation.

"Producers who have questions about the CSP renewal instructions, should visit their local NRCS office in the USDA Field Service Center," said Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "CSP is a great chance to continue building your operation's conservation portfolio and help us protect more of our state's natural resources."

USDA Awards Innovations in Climate-Smart Agriculture, Soil Health and Nutrient Management

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing \$40 million this year for 31 new projects through its Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program, including the **Modernizing Fertilizer Recommendations for Climate-Smart Crop Production: The Fertilizer Recommendation Support Tool project** in Arkansas. CIG is one of the ways USDA brings together partners to develop innovative approaches to climate-smart agriculture.

Additionally, USDA is announcing a \$19 million investment in two projects focused on nutrient management funded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and two new formal partnerships to further nutrient management implementation.

These investments emphasize adoption and implementation of climate-smart practices, including nutrient management, which helps producers manage nutrients and soil amendments to maximize their economic benefit while minimizing their environmental impact.

"These investments move the needle in helping agricultural producers adopt and implement climate-smart practices, including nutrient management," said Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in

Arkansas. “This helps producers manage nutrients and soil amendments to maximize their economic benefit, while minimizing their environmental impact.”

CIG

This year, NRCS is investing \$25 million through On-Farm Trials, which supports more widespread adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches in partnership with agricultural producers. Incentive payments are provided to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches.

NRCS is also investing \$15 million in 17 projects through CIG Classic, which enables partners to develop new tools, technologies, and strategies to support next-generation conservation efforts on working lands and develop market-based solutions to resource challenges.

In Arkansas, \$630,861 is being invested through CIG Classic:

University of Arkansas Modernizing Fertilizer Recommendations for Climate-Smart Crop Production: The Fertilizer Recommendation Support Tool (FRST) This component is the umbrella project that integrates soil test correlation and calibration data derived from the two regional projects, data from legacy projects, and continues testing, refinement, and upgrades of the FRST decision tool.

See the [NRCS website](#) for the list of all CIG Classic and CIG On-Farm Trials awarded projects.

For fiscal year 2022, NRCS set aside targeted funds for CIG Classic and On-Farm proposals that entirely benefit underserved producers, which includes producers who have previously lacked access or not participated in NRCS programs. This includes socially disadvantaged producers, military veterans, beginning farmers and limited-resource producers. Additionally, applicants competing for these set-aside funds were able to waive the non-federal match requirements.

Additional funding will be available for CIG On-Farm Trials for fiscal year 2023. The IRA provided \$19.5 billion to support climate-smart practices through NRCS conservation programs, enabling NRCS to invest \$50 million per year from fiscal years 2023 to 2027 for CIG On-Farm Trials. As part of the next call for proposals, NRCS will prioritize applications that focus on diet and feed management to reduce enteric methane emissions from livestock. More information on the fiscal year 2023 call for proposals is forthcoming.

RCPP Nutrient Management Grants

NRCS awarded two grants through RCPP to help producers achieve more efficient nutrient management within targeted critical conservation areas (CCA):

- Family Farms LLC will improve soil health and reduce the amount of nutrients applied to and lost from cropland in the Mississippi River Basin. This will be done through nutrient management plans that incorporate the addition of biochar to help conserve nutrients by enhancing nutrient efficiency.
- The Environmental Initiative, Inc. will use “nutrientsheds” – interconnected networks of geographically close farms to move and balance nutrient needs – to mitigate excess nutrient run-off adversely affecting the watershed. Within each of the two proposed “nutrientsheds,” participating producers will obtain nutrient management plans so that manure at participating farms can be collected and processed through the partners’ centralized thermophilic anaerobic digesters.

Through RCPP Grants, the lead partner must work directly with agricultural producers to support the development of new conservation structures and approaches that would not otherwise be available under RCPP Classic.

The more than \$19 million awarded through these grants builds on the \$200 million in RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangement and RCPP Classic partnership projects previously awarded in fiscal year 2022.

The RCPP fiscal year 2023 funding opportunity will be announced in late Spring. The Inflation Reduction Act provided an additional \$4.95 billion in RCPP over four years starting in fiscal year 2023 to accelerate the adoption of conservation practices that help producers prepare for and mitigate against the impacts of climate change.

Nutrient Management MOUs

Additionally, as part of its effort to [increase use of nutrient management practices](#), NRCS has also recently signed two Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that further its conservation efforts targeted at improving nutrient management:

- American Society of Agronomy (ASA) and its International Certified Crop Adviser (ICCA) Program establishes a framework enabling ASA to recommend individuals for the NRCS Technical Service Provider (TSP) program. The TSP program enables certified individuals outside of NRCS to provide among other things, nutrient management plans to producers and landowners.
- Truterra (a Land O' Lakes company) intends to explore opportunities to expand nutrient management adoption and increase technical capabilities of producers and landowners; assess the capabilities and tools of Truterra to deliver nutrient management technical assistance; expedite and streamline the technical assistance delivery system; and collaborate on assessment tools and opportunities to expedite producer participation in broader NRCS programs.

NRCS will continue to leverage additional partnerships to expand capacity and reach new producers with technical and financial assistance.

More Information

NRCS has prioritized projects that serve underserved producers through CIG and RCPP in recent years. Additionally, NRCS is [investing up to \\$70 million in cooperative agreements](#) with entities for two-year outreach projects that will increase participation by underserved producers and underserved communities in conservation programs and enhance opportunities for students to pursue careers in agriculture, natural resources and related sciences.

USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Farmers in Arkansas Impacted by Recent Storms and Tornadoes

Agricultural operations in Arkansas have been significantly impacted by recent tornadoes and severe storms that caused widespread and extensive destruction across those states. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover in the wake of these disasters. Impacted producers should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about programs that may be available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure and livestock losses and damages.

“Production agriculture is vital to the economy in these states and USDA stands ready to assist in the recovery from the recent severe weather event,” said Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). “USDA employees are working diligently to deliver FPAC’s extensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs and services to all impacted agricultural producers.”

USDA Disaster Assistance

Producers who experience livestock deaths may be eligible for the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). To participate in LIP, producers will have to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent.

Meanwhile, the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) provides eligible producers with compensation for feed and grazing losses. For ELAP, producers will need to file a notice of loss within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days.

Additionally, eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines lost. This complements [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days.

Agricultural producers are reminded to contact their local USDA Service Center to timely report all crop, livestock and farm infrastructure damages and losses. To expedite FSA disaster assistance, producers will likely need to provide documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses.

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed [farm loans](#), including operating and emergency farm loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low-interest [emergency loans](#) to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs. Additionally, FSA has a variety of loan servicing options available for borrowers who are unable to make scheduled payments on their farm loan programs debt to the Agency because of reasons beyond their control.

The [Farm Storage Facility Loan Program](#) (FSFL) provides low-interest financing so producers can build or upgrade facilities to store commodities. Loan terms vary from three to 12 years. Producers who incurred damage to or loss of their equipment or infrastructure funded by the FSFL program should contact their insurance agent and their local USDA Service Center. Producers in need of on-farm storage should also contact USDA.

Conservation

FSA's [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, damaged farmland or forests. ECP can also cover costs associated with debris removal from cropland.

USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) is always available to provide technical assistance in the recovery process by assisting producers to plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches and working forests impacted by natural disasters. The [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) can help producers plan and implement conservation practices on land impacted by natural disasters.

Assistance for Communities

Additional NRCS programs include the [Emergency Watershed Protection](#) (EWP) program, which assists local government sponsors with the cost of addressing watershed impairments or hazards such as debris removal and streambank stabilization.

Eligible sponsors include cities, counties, towns or any federally recognized Native American tribe or tribal organization. Sponsors must submit a formal request (by mail or

email) to the state conservationist for assistance within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence or 60 days from the date when access to the sites become available.

“NRCS administers the Emergency Watershed Protection Program which responds to emergencies created by natural disasters,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard life and property as a result of a natural disaster. It is not necessary for a national emergency to be declared for an area to be eligible for assistance.”

For more information, producers should contact their [local NRCS office](#).

Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office. If they have crop insurance, producers should report crop damage to their agent within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days.

For NAP covered crops, a [Notice of Loss \(CCC-576\)](#) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours. Producers who have not applied for NAP coverage may still be covered. FSA has [updated NAP](#) to remove barriers and establish procedures through which an underserved producer with a Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification (CCC-860) on file prior to the applicable NAP application closing date will automatically receive basic coverage for any NAP-eligible crops. Like all NAP-covered producers, underserved producers will still need to file a notice of loss and apply for program benefits.

More Information

On [farmers.gov](#), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance](#) fact sheet, and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. 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 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 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 Supports Climate-Smart Ag, Equity and Domestic Food Production through Crop Insurance

USDA has made great strides to better reach underserved agricultural producers and to support climate-smart agriculture through crop insurance. In the past two years, USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) has created new insurance options while improving others and invested in a comprehensive risk management education effort.

Equity in Crop Insurance

RMA took steps to ensure that underserved, specialty crop, organic, small-scale, and urban producers had access to crop insurance options and information during the past two years. This includes launching the new Micro Farm option in 2021 to better serve direct market and small-scale producers. Micro Farm provides a risk management safety net for all eligible commodities on a farm under one insurance policy, but on a smaller scale. In 2022, [RMA listened to producers and expanded the program's eligibility to reach more producers](#).

Meanwhile, RMA made several improvements to Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), an important policy to specialty crop and organic producers, including:

- Increasing expansion limits for organic and aquaculture producers.
- Increasing insurable revenue up to \$17 million in revenue (formerly \$8.5 million).

As part of USDA's broader Organic Transition Initiative, RMA provided a premium benefit to organic and transitioning producers through the [Transitional and Organic Grower Assistance](#) (TOGA) Program. TOGA reduces producers' overall crop insurance premium bills and helps them continue to use organic agricultural systems.

In order to better engage with producers about these and other risk management tools, RMA has increased its support of risk management education and outreach. In 2021 and 2022, RMA invested about \$6.5 million in partnerships with 27 organizations to provide risk management education as well as to train and equip the next generation of crop insurance agents, adjusters, and outreach educators about crop insurance options.

RMA created a roadshow series to promote Micro Farm and WFRP insurance options. The roadshow series reached over 3,000 producers who attended the events either virtually or in-person since its creation in late fall 2022.

Climate-Smart Agriculture

RMA has taken steps to support producers who are using climate-smart practices, including planting cover crops and split-applying nitrogen. [RMA introduced the Pandemic Cover Crop Program](#) (PCCP), which supports climate smart agricultural practices and helps farmers maintain their cover crop systems, despite the financial challenges posed by the pandemic. RMA provided more than \$110 million in premium support for producers who planted cover crops on over 22 million net acres through PCCP during the 2021 and 2022 seasons. RMA also updated policy in 2021 to allow producers with crop insurance to hay, graze or chop cover crops at any time and still receive 100% of the prevented planting payment.

In 2022, [RMA introduced its Post Application Coverage Endorsement](#) (PACE) in certain states for non-irrigated corn, providing coverage for producers who use this practice that saves them money and is considered better for natural resources, and [expanded the program](#) in September.

Supporting Domestic Production

To increase domestic food production amid potential global food shortages and supply chain disruptions, [RMA expanded double crop insurance opportunities](#) in nearly 1,500 counties where double cropping is viable.

Improvements to Crop Insurance

RMA continues to work with producers and agricultural groups to improve crop insurance. Some examples include:

- [RMA updated three key crop insurance options for livestock producers](#) to reach more producers, offer greater flexibility for protecting their operations, and

ultimately, better meet the needs of the country's swine, dairy and cattle producers.

- [RMA created greater flexibilities for crop insurance reporting](#), making it easier for specialty crop producers and others who sell through direct marketing channels to obtain insurance, report their annual production and file a claim.
- [RMA has expanded Small Grains Crop Provisions to offer revenue protection for oats and rye](#) for crop year 2023—a direct result of RMA listening to and prioritizing the requests and feedback from producers.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA Agent Locator](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov or by contacting your [RMA Regional Office](#).

Rates and Dates

| Selected Interest Rates for April 2023 | | Dates to Remember | |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 90-Day Treasury Bill | 4.750% | | |
| Farm Operating Loans — Direct | 4.750% | | |
| Farm Ownership Loans — Direct | 4.750% | | |
| Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher | 1.500% | | |
| Emergency Loans | 3.75% | | |
| Farm Storage Facility Loans (73 years) | 4.375 | 6/2/23 | Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program deadline |
| SugarFarm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) | 4.000 | 6/2/23 | Emergency Relief Program (phase 2) deadline |
| Commodity Loans 1996-Present | 5.875 | | |



Arkansas USDA

700 West Capitol Room 3416
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

FSA Phone: 501-301-3000
FSA Fax: 855-652-2082

NRCS Phone: 501-301-3100
NRCS Fax: 855-681-7044

RMA Phone: 601-965-4771
RMA Fax: 601-965-4517

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[Arkansas | NRCS | State Office](#)

[Arkansas | RMA \(usda.gov\)](#)

FSA State Executive Director
Doris Washington

NRCS State Conservationist
Mike Sullivan

RMA Regional Director
Roddric Bell

FSA State Committee Meeting: 3rd Tuesday of each month

*Please contact your local Office for questions specific to your operation or county.
To find contact information for your local office visit the service center link below.*

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.

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CONTACT US:

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

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