



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Arkansas USDA Newsletter - October 2023

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

Greetings

This month we recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in which awareness is raised regarding disability employment issues and we celebrate the contributions of workers with disabilities. This year's national NDEAM theme, "[Advancing Access and Equity](#)," promotes the importance of advancing disability employment and honors the 50th anniversary of the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)." The Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, programs receiving federal financial assistance, federal employment, and federal contractors' employment practices. It also requires accessibility of information and communication technology. NDEAM promotes embracing diversity, promoting accessibility, and combatting discrimination. All of which are essential in a future where every person is valued, respected, and given an equal chance to thrive and contribute.

The deadline for the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program has been extended to **January 13, 2024**. This extension gives eligible farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners more time to apply for assistance. The original deadline was October 31, 2023. Also, the deadline to request records from Farm Service Agency (FSA) for use in applications has been extended to **November 3, 2023**. The application process was designed so that FSA records are not required, though relevant records may be attached to an application as additional evidence if they are available. For additional information, visit www.22007apply.gov, email info@22007apply.gov or contact the national call center at 1-800-721-0970 from 8 a.m. ET to 8 p.m. PT, every day except federal holidays. If sign

language is needed, please use the 711 relay service to call. Email or contact the national call center if you have a disability and need another accommodation. Information about the program, resources, recent office openings and local events across the country is also available through a [weekly e-newsletter](#). For more information view the following News Article: [USDA Extends Application Deadline for Discrimination Financial Assistance Program to January 13 | USDA](#)

Arkansas FSA has provided a second payment to Arkansas Producers participating in Rice Production Program. The total assistance for Arkansas Producers year-to-date is \$120,095,906. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, provided the authority and funding for USDA to make payments to rice producers based on 2022 data already on file with the USDA, including planted acres and acres prevented from being planted.

FSA will begin mailing County Committee (COC) Election Ballots on November 6, 2023, to all eligible voters for the 2023 COC Elections. Producers and landowners must return ballots to their local FSA county office or have their ballots be postmarked by December 4, 2023, for those ballots to be counted. Committee members are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA.

FSA is closing out the [Emergency Livestock Relief Program](#) (ELRP) for losses suffered in 2021. ELRP Phase Two payments are estimated at \$115.7 million. Ranchers who lost grazing acres due to drought and wildfire and received assistance through ELRP Phase One will soon receive an additional payment through ELRP Phase Two. ELRP Phase Two payments to producers will be automatic with no application required.

FSA is closing out Phase Two of the [Emergency Relief Program](#) (ERP) through the delivery of more than \$1.17 billion in crop disaster assistance payments to producers of eligible crops who suffered losses, measured through decreases in revenue, due to qualifying natural disaster events that occurred in calendar years 2020 and 2021. ERP Phase Two was intended primarily for producers of crops that were not covered by federal crop insurance or FSA's [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP).

The [Dairy Margin Coverage](#) (DMC) Program 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. The August milk margin triggered the eighth consecutive payment for dairy producers who obtained DMC) for the 2023 program year. To date, including the projected August payments, dairy producers have received more than \$1.2 billion in much needed economic support for 2023.

DMC also complements other assistance available to dairy producers, including the [Milk Loss Program](#) (MLP) and the [Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program](#) (ODMAP). MLP covers milk that was dumped or removed (without compensation) from the commercial milk market due to qualifying weather events, and the consequences of those weather events, that inhibited delivery or storage of milk (e.g., power outages, impassable roads, infrastructure losses, etc.) during calendar years 2020, 2021 and 2022. As for ODMAP, a second round of payments has been announced providing an additional \$5 million to help dairy producers mitigate market volatility, higher input and transportation costs, and unstable feed supply and prices that have created unique hardships in the

organic dairy industry. FSA has already paid out \$15 million in the first round of payments for eligible producers, bringing total ODMAP payments to \$20 million.

Agricultural employers can begin to apply for a pilot program designed to improve the resiliency of the food and agricultural supply chain by addressing workforce challenges farmers and ranchers face. Up to \$65 million in grants are available for the Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Program (FLSP Program). The program will help address workforce needs in agriculture, promote a safe and healthy work environment for farmworkers, and aims to support expansion of lawful migration pathways for workers. The maximum award amount is \$2,000,000 and the minimum amount is \$25,000 per grant agreement (including any sub-awardees). Award amounts will be determined based on the projected number of full-time equivalent (FTE) agricultural employees, desired award level, as well as the competitive nature of the application. Consistent with the H-2A requirements, applicants must demonstrate insufficient availability of a U.S.-based workforce. The grant window for each recipient is 24 months, allowing producers to use the grant over the course of two agricultural production seasons. Applications for the FLSP program must be received on or **before 11:59 pm Eastern Time on November 28, 2023**. More information about the application process can be found here: www.ams.usda.gov/flsp.

To find your local FSA office, please visit farmers.gov/service-locator.

Visit www.farmers.gov to learn more about FSA Programs.

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 Natural Resources Conservation Service(NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan

Greetings and Happy Fall!

Each year, we observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15 by celebrating the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. I am proud to work with many great leaders of Hispanic heritage at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). At NRCS, we are very proud of the women and men who make up our diverse workforce. We also celebrate the assistance they provide to our customers in helping them get conservation on the ground. For more information, visit <https://hispanicheritagemonth.gov/>.

NRCS continued its conservation work in Arkansas last fiscal year. The agency assisted farmers, ranchers and forest landowners implement conservation practices on their

working lands, which help conserve natural resource such as soil, water and wildlife as well as boost producers' bottom lines.

Some of Arkansas NRCS's accomplishments in FY23 include:

- **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA):** Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - \$5.2 million obligated - **125% of initial allowance**. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - \$10.4 million - **188% of initial allowance**.
- **EQIP Classic:** \$71+million obligated, 99+% of Financial Assistance (FA) allocated
- **CSP Classic:** \$36 million obligated, 98+% of FA allocated

A few other notable accomplishments:

- **EQIP Historically Underserved (HU) Participation**, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (SDFR) 20%, Beginning Farmers and Ranchers (BFR) 46%, Limited-Resource Farmers (LRF) 5%, Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (VFR) 2%
- **EQIP High Tunnel ACT NOW** signup, 219 applications, 116 contracts, \$2 million obligated. Set goal of 150 High Tunnels – exceeded with 160 obligated.
- **New EQIP Urban Agriculture/Small Scale signup**, 167 applications, 22 Contracts, \$500k obligated.
- **Migratory Bird Resurgence Initiative (MBRI)** 600 applications, \$60 million+ demand, 56 contracts/\$6.9 million obligated.
- **EQIP IRA, ACT NOW signup**, 244 applications, 61 contracts, \$5.2 million obligated, 36% of IRA funds obligated to HU.
- \$19 Million obligated in **Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF)** practices in EQIP contracts – creating a **glide path for IRA in Fiscal Year (FY)24**.
- **CSP Renewals** – 97 Contracts, \$10.4 million obligated, 75.7 thousand acres
- **New CSP Urban Agriculture/Small Scale signup**, 13 applications, 12 Contracts, >\$120, 000 obligated, >250 acres
- **Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):** RCPP FY23 FA = \$ 6.1 million obligated (95.8%) MRBI FY23 FA EQIP \$ 15.1 million obligated (100%).
- **Public Law (PL) 566** - received/obligated \$16.1 million for construction, **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)** – 14 Preliminary Investigation Findings Report (PIFRs) completed and planning underway
- **Hiring:** 60 new hires
- **Pathways** – Three conversions, 14 pathways interns, Three 1890s scholars
- **Attrition:** down from 24 in FY22 to 11 in FY23 (53% decrease)

I want all our NRCS staff to know how much I appreciate their dedication, commitment and service. There is no way we get all this done without their contributions to assist Arkansas's producers!

Our NRCS Team at our 61 USDA Service Centers across Arkansas stand ready to help you with one-on-one conservation planning assistance. NRCS offers programs to help you improve the sustainability of your land through conservation and recover after natural disasters. To get started, call the NRCS office at your local USDA Service Center, which you can find at farmers.gov/service-locator.

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.

Oct. 19th – 21st – Innovative Ag Conference

The Innovative Ag Conference is a three day, power packed event that will encompass live, futuristic agriculture exhibits, educational workshops and one-of-a-kind experiences that will expose agricultural producers to modern day practices and industry goals. The conference begins at 10:00am. The conference will be virtual and in-person. Conference site is the U of A Cooperative Extension Headquarters, 2301 South University, Little Rock, Arkansas. Register at the following link: [Innovative Urban Ag Conference \(innovativeag.info\)](https://innovativeag.info). For additional information visit [Innovative Urban Ag \(innovativeag.info\)](https://innovativeag.info).

Oct 26th & 27th - ALCDC Annual Youth Day and Annual Conference Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) is hosting their Annual Youth Day and Annual Conference. The Annual Youth Day will be held Thursday, Oct. 26, 2023, and the Annual Conference will be held Friday, Oct. 27, 2023. **Rod Woods**, District Director, will be presenting at the conference. Please visit [ALCDCs Website](#) for additional information.

Nov 9th – Flower Hill Institute Farm and Ranch Public Outreach Meeting

Flower Hill Institute will be hosting a farm and ranch information public Outreach Meeting in Mt. Vernon, Missouri on Thursday, November 9, 2023. The meeting will begin at 4:00pm and will be held at the Southwest Research Extension and Education Center. Topics of interest to area farmers and ranchers will be presented by representatives from Flower Hill Institute, **Farm Service Agency**, the Missouri Cattlemen's Association, and the Southwest Research Extension and Education Center. A buffet style meal being served at 5:15pm and between 6:00 PM and 7:00 PM (CDT), attendees will have the opportunity to speak one on one with each of the organizations and agencies in attendance. Space is limited so register today! For questions, please contact FSATA@flowerhill.institute. Use the following link to register: [Mt. Vernon Missouri FSA Outreach \(hosted by Flower Hill Institute\) \(google.com\)](#)

Nov 29th – Dec 1st – Arkansas Farm Bureau Annual State Convention & Tradeshow

Arkansas Farm Bureau is hosting their Annual State Convention and Tradeshow at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. **FSA will have an information booth**. The conference will be held on November 29 – December 1, 2023. For more information and to register online, please visit [89th Annual Convention :: Events | Arkansas Farm Bureau \(arfb.com\)](#).

Dec. 16th – 17th – National Black Growers Council (NBGC) Annual Meeting

NBGC is hosting their Annual Meeting and Conference at the Hilton Memphis in Memphis, Tennessee. The conference will be held on December 12-15, 2023. For more information and to register online, please visit <https://nationalblackgrowerscouncil.com/>. Early registration ends November 15th. Regular registration is from November 16th – December 11th. Deadline to book hotel rooms is November 30th. Please use the code BG12. Booking link follows: [Available Rooms - Hilton Memphis](#)

Jan 25th -27th – 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 Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo! The Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo will be held January 25-27, 2024. **FSA will present as well as have an informational Booth.** The conference and expo will be held at the Hot Springs Convention Center, Hot Springs, Arkansas. Please visit [Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo - Arkansas Grown](#) for additional information.

UAPB to Offer Borrower Training for FSA Borrowers

Borrower training is available for all Farm Service Agency customers. This training is required for all direct loan applicants, unless the applicant has a waiver issued by the agency.

The Small Farm Program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) will be conducting financial management and production training which will satisfy the Borrower Training requirements for many new or beginning Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers.

Borrower training includes instruction in production and financial management. The purpose is to help the applicant develop and improve skills that are necessary to successfully operate a farm and build equity in the operation. It aims to help the producer become financially successful. Borrower training is provided, for a fee, by agency approved vendors. Contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager for a list of approved vendors.

The course is *tentatively* scheduled for November 15th - 17th, in the conference room of the UAPB S.J. Parker Agricultural Research Center. The course gets underway at 9:00 a.m. each day and ends at 4:30 p.m. Producers will undergo two days of intensive education consisting of 12 hours of farm business training and six hours of production, crop or livestock training.

Producers will have required homework and will be tested at the end of the training. They will receive a score of 1 to 3. A score of 1 or 2 is needed to pass the course. The score will be sent to the FSA state office and to the borrower's local FSA loan officer. Most producers have two years from receipt of their first FSA loan to complete the Borrower Training.

The cost for the training is \$300 per person. Funds will go to a UAPB Small Farm Program Borrower Training Fund. Fees will be collected on the first day of the course. Only a

cashier's check or money order, made payable to UAPB Small Farm Program, will be accepted. Please email registration forms to Karen Lee at leek@uapb.edu.

The S.J. Parker Agricultural Research Center is located at 2101 Oliver Road in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Please use the second door entrance. For additional information, please contact Stephan Walker, UAPB Small Farm Program, at (870) 575-7237. Contact your local FSA office for additional training options.

USDA Announces Milk Loss Assistance for Dairy Operations Impacted by 2020, 2021 and 2022 Disaster Events



USDA announced Milk Loss Program (MLP) assistance for eligible dairy operations for milk that was dumped or removed, without compensation, from the commercial milk market due to qualifying weather events and the consequences of those weather events that inhibited delivery or storage of milk (e.g., power outages, impassable roads, infrastructure losses, etc.) during calendar years 2020, 2021 and 2022. Administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), signup for MLP begins Sept. 11 and runs through Oct. 16, 2023.

Background

On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act (P.L. 117-43), providing \$10 billion for crop losses, including milk losses due to qualifying disaster events that occurred in calendar years 2020 and 2021. Additionally, the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act,

2023 (Pub. L. 117-328) provides approximately \$3 billion for disaster assistance for similar losses that occurred in calendar year 2022.

Eligibility

MLP compensates dairy operations for milk dumped or removed without compensation from the commercial milk market due to qualifying disaster events, including droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), and smoke exposure that occurred in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years. Tornadoes are considered a qualifying disaster event for calendar year 2022 only.

The milk loss claim period is each calendar month that milk was dumped or removed from the commercial market. Each MLP application covers the loss in a single calendar month. Milk loss that occurs in more than one calendar month due to the same qualifying weather event requires a separate application for each month.

The days that are eligible for assistance begin on the date the milk was removed or dumped and for concurrent days milk was removed or dumped. Once the dairy operation restarts milk marketing, the dairy operation is ineligible for assistance unless after restarting commercial milk marketing, additional milk is dumped due to the same qualifying disaster event. The duration of yearly claims is limited to 30 days per year for 2020, 2021 and 2022.

How to Apply

To apply for MLP, producers must submit:

- FSA-376, Milk Loss Program Application
- Milk marketing statement from the:
 - Month prior to the month milk was removed or dumped.
 - Affected month.
- Detailed written statement of milk removal circumstances, including the weather event type and geographic scope, what transportation limitations occurred and any information on what was done with the removed milk.
- Any other information required by the regulation.

If not previously filed with FSA, applicants must also submit all the following items within 60 days of the MLP application deadline:

- Form AD-2047, Customer Data Worksheet.
- Form CCC-902, Farm Operating Plan for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-901, Member Information for Legal Entities (if applicable).
- Form FSA-510, Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs (if applicable).
- Form CCC-860, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification, (if applicable).

- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification) for the MLP producer and applicable affiliates.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have these required forms already on file. However, those who are uncertain or want to confirm the status of their forms can contact their local [FSA county office](#).

MLP Payment Calculation

The final MLP payment is determined by factoring the MLP payment calculation by the applicable MLP payment percentage.

The calculation for determining MLP payment is:

- $((\text{Base period per cow average daily milk production} \times \text{the number of milking cows in a claim period} \times \text{the number of days milk was removed or dumped in a claim period}) \div 100) \times \text{pay price per hundredweight (cwt.)}$.

For MLP payment calculations, the milk loss base period is the first full month of production before the dumping or removal occurred.

The MLP payment percentage will be 90% for underserved producers, including socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers and 75% for all other producers.

To qualify for the higher payment percentage, eligible producers must have a CCC-860, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification, form on file with FSA for the applicable program year.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitations do not apply to MLP, however the payment limitation for MLP is determined by the person's or legal entity's average adjusted gross farm income (income derived from farming, ranching and forestry operations). Specifically, a person or legal entity, other than a joint venture or general partnership, cannot receive, directly or indirectly, more than \$125,000 in payments under MLP if their average adjusted gross farm income is less than 75% of their average AGI or more than \$250,000 if their adjusted gross farm income is at least 75% of their average AGI.

Cost Share for Organic Certification

As part of USDA's broader effort to support organic producers and in response to stakeholder feedback, this year the Farm Service Agency increased the cost share amount under the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), which helps organic producers cover organic certification costs, to the maximum amount allowed by statute. Specifically, FSA will cover up to 75% of costs associated with organic certification, up to \$750 for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and state organic program fees (California only). OCCSP will cover costs incurred from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023.

FSA begins accepting applications for OCCSP Monday, May 15. Applications are due Oct. 31, 2023. To apply, producers and handlers should contact the FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#). As part of completing the OCCSP application, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses. Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through participating state departments of agriculture.

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA will post a synopsis of the funding opportunity on [grants.gov](#) and will send more information to all eligible state departments of agriculture. Additional details can be found on the [OCCSP webpage](#). More information about these initiatives and more can be found at [farmers.gov/organic-transition-initiative](#).

FSA Outlines MAL and LDP Policy

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

FSA is now accepting requests for 2023 MALs and LDPs for all eligible commodities after harvest. Requests for loans and LDPs shall be made on or before the final availability date for the respective commodities.

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

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

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

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

For more information and additional eligibility requirements, contact your local County USDA Service Center at or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Overview of Emergency Disaster Declarations and Designations



Farmers and ranchers know all too well that natural disasters can be a common, and likely a costly, variable to their operation. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has emergency assistance programs to provide assistance when disasters strike, and for some of those programs, a disaster designation may be the eligibility trigger.

FSA administers four types of disaster designations.

USDA Secretarial Disaster Designation

- The designation process can be initiated by individual farmers, local government officials, State governors, State agriculture commissions, tribal councils or the FSA State Executive Director
- This designation is triggered by a 30-percent or greater production loss to at least one crop because of a natural disaster, or at least one producer who sustained individual losses because of a natural disaster and is unable to obtain commercial financing to cover those losses
- In 2012, USDA developed a fast-track process for disaster declarations for severe drought. This provides for a nearly automatic designation when, during the growing season, any portion of a county meets the D2 (Severe Drought) drought intensity value for eight consecutive weeks or a higher drought intensity value for

any length of time as reported by the U.S. Drought Monitor (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>)

Administrator's Physical Loss Notification

- This designation is initiated by the FSA State Executive Director.
- The designation is triggered by physical damage and losses because of a natural disaster, including but not limited to dead livestock, collapsed buildings, and destroyed farm structures.

Presidential Designation

- A Presidential major disaster designation and emergency declaration is initiated by the Governor of the impacted state through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- This designation is triggered by damage and losses caused by a disaster of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capability of the State and local governments.

Quarantine Designation

- This designation is requested of the Secretary of Agriculture by the FSA State Executive Director.
- A quarantine designation is triggered by damage and losses caused by the effects of a plant or animal quarantine approved by the Secretary under the Plant Protection Act or animal quarantine laws.

All four types of designations immediately trigger the availability of low-interest Emergency loans to eligible producers in all primary and contiguous counties. FSA borrowers in these counties who are unable to make their scheduled payments on any debt may be authorized to have certain set asides. Additional disaster assistance requiring a designation may also be provided by new programs in the future.

For more information on FSA disaster programs and disaster designations, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/disaster.

USDA To Provide Additional Financial Assistance to Qualifying Guaranteed Farm Loan Borrowers Facing Financial Risk

The USDA announced it will begin providing additional, automatic financial assistance for qualifying guaranteed Farm Loan Programs (FLP) borrowers who are facing financial risk. The announcement is part of the \$3.1 billion to help certain distressed farm loan borrowers that was provided through Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act.

Since the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law by President Biden in August 2022, USDA has provided approximately \$1.15 billion in assistance to more than 20,000 distressed borrowers as a part of an ongoing effort to keep borrowers farming, remove

obstacles that currently prevent many borrowers from returning to their land, and improve the way that USDA approaches borrowing and loan servicing in the long-term. The financial assistance announced today will provide qualifying distressed guaranteed loan borrowers with financial assistance similar to what was already provided to distressed direct loan borrowers. Based on current analysis, the financial assistance announced today will assist an estimated approximately 3,500 eligible borrowers, subject to change as payments are finalized. An FLP guaranteed loan borrower is distressed if they qualify under one of the options below. FLP guaranteed borrowers who qualify under multiple options will receive a payment based on the option that provides the greatest payment amount:

Payment of any outstanding delinquency on all qualifying FLP guaranteed loans as of Oct. 18, 2022. This includes any guaranteed loan borrowers who did not receive an automatic payment in 2022 on that loan because they were not yet 60 days delinquent as of Sept. 30, 2022, as well as guaranteed borrowers that became delinquent on a qualifying FLP guaranteed loan between September 30, 2022, and Oct. 18, 2022.

Payment on a qualifying FLP guaranteed loan for which a guaranteed loan borrower received a loan restructure, which modified the guaranteed loan maturity date, between March 1, 2020, and Aug. 11, 2023. The payment amount will be the lesser of the post-restructure annual installment or the amount required to pay the loan in full. The guaranteed loan must not have been paid in full prior to Aug. 11, 2023.

Payments on certain deferred amounts on qualifying FLP guaranteed loans, not to exceed \$100,000, for guaranteed borrowers who received a deferral or another type of payment extension, for at least 45 days, between March 1, 2020, and Sept. 30, 2022, from their guaranteed lender on that qualifying guaranteed loan in response to COVID-19, disasters, or other revenue shortfalls. The Inflation Reduction Act payment amount will be the lesser of the most recent deferral or extension amount on the qualifying FLP guaranteed loan, or the amount required to pay that loan in full. The guaranteed loan must not have been paid in full prior to Aug. 11, 2023.

This assistance is only available for FLP guaranteed loan borrowers who did not or will not receive an initial payment on the same FLP guaranteed loan under Inflation Reduction Act assistance announced in October 2022. Distressed guaranteed borrowers qualifying for this assistance will receive a United States Department of the Treasury check that is jointly payable to the borrower and the lender. These borrowers will also receive a letter from FSA informing them of Inflation Reduction Act assistance they will receive as well as instructions to make an appointment with their lender to process the payment and apply it to their qualifying guaranteed loan accounts. Guaranteed lenders will receive an email in the coming days informing them of this assistance and any next steps. Lenders will also receive letters informing them which borrowers will receive assistance and the amount of assistance they will receive. Any distressed guaranteed borrowers who qualify for these forms of assistance and are currently in bankruptcy will be addressed using the same case-by-case review process announced in October 2022 for complex cases. FSA will also provide relief to qualifying FLP guaranteed loan borrowers determined to be distressed borrowers based on liability for remaining federal debt subject to debt collection and garnishment after the liquidation of their guaranteed loan account as of July 31, 2023. This will allow some borrowers to potentially return to farming. Guaranteed borrowers who qualify for this assistance will have their federal debt paid automatically by FSA and will receive a letter informing them of the payment made on their federal debt. All letters to

qualifying guaranteed loan borrowers will contain instructions for opting out of assistance if a borrower chooses to do so.

Important Tax Information Similar to other USDA Inflation Reduction Act assistance, payments provided to borrowers and payments to be applied to FSA farm loan accounts will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Borrowers receiving this assistance will receive a 1099 form from FSA. Please note that payments over \$600 are subject to Federal and State Income Taxes and will be reflected on your annual 1099 form. Borrowers are encouraged to consult a tax professional with all tax-related questions regarding any Inflation Reduction Act assistance received. USDA also has tax-related resources at farmers.gov/taxes. **Individual Requests for Farmers Seeking Assistance**

In addition to the automatic payments announced today for distressed guaranteed loan borrowers, FSA continues to accept and review individual distressed borrower assistance requests from direct loan borrowers who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment on a qualifying direct FLP loan. All FSA direct borrowers should have received a [letter](#) detailing the eligibility criteria and process for seeking this type of assistance, which is available even before they become delinquent. As the letter details, borrowers who are within two months of their next installment may seek a cash flow analysis from FSA using a recent balance sheet and operating plan to determine their eligibility.

FSA direct borrowers also received a [letter](#) detailing an opportunity to receive assistance if they took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their qualifying direct FLP loans, such as taking on or refinancing more debt, selling property, or cashing out retirement or college savings accounts.

Borrowers can submit requests for extraordinary measures or cash flow-based assistance in person at their local FSA office or by sending in a direct request using the farmers.gov 22006 assistance request portals at farmers.gov/loans/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023.

NRCS Announces Recipients of State-Level Conservation Innovation Grants

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas has announced the winning proposals funded for 2023 for Arkansas Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG).

"Conservation Innovation Grants invest in innovative, on-the-ground conservation technologies and approaches, with the eventual goal of wide-scale NRCS adoption to address water quality and quantity, air quality, energy conservation, and environmental markets, among other natural resource issues," Mike Sullivan, Arkansas NRCS state conservationist, said. "We are excited to announce the approval of three Conservation Innovation Grants."

The Entities receiving the state-level grants are:

- *Delta Conservation.:*

Developing Water-Efficient Regenerative Organic System of Rice Intensification
in the Greater Mississippi Delta Region

- *Five Oaks Ag Research and Education Center:*

Effects of Set-Aside Practices on Soil Health

- *Division of Agriculture of the University of Arkansas:*

Economic Budget Calculator for Conservation Practices: Producer Education

NRCS administers CIGs as part of the agency's Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Grants are awarded to state and local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

Grant awardees must provide non-federal matching funds for at least 50 percent of the project cost. Of the non-federal matching funds, a minimum of 25 percent must be from cash contributions, the remaining 25 percent may come from in-kind contributions.

For more on this grant program, visit USDA's Conservation Innovation Grants webpage at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/cig/>

or contact your local NRCS office. To locate a local field office, visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/arkansas>.

USDA Announces \$3 Billion Available for Climate-Smart Practices on Agricultural Lands Through Investing in America Agenda

Agricultural Producers Can Now Apply for Fiscal Year 2024 Conservation Assistance, Highest in History

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making more than \$3 billion in funding available for agricultural producers and forest landowners nationwide to participate in voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices in fiscal year 2024.

These funds are provided by the [Inflation Reduction Act – the largest climate and conservation investment in history](#). This law invests an additional \$19.5 billion for USDA's popular conservation programs. These programs also advance the President's Justice40 Initiative, which aims to ensure 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain climate, clean energy, and other federal investments reach disadvantaged communities that have been marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. On the heels of [last week's announcement](#) that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) saw record producer interest in these resources in fiscal year 2023, the agency is now

accepting applications from producers interested in this additional conservation assistance for fiscal year 2024.

These additional investments are estimated to help hundreds of thousands of farmers and ranchers apply conservation to millions of acres of land. These funds provide direct climate mitigation benefits, advance a host of other environmental co-benefits, and 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.

USDA is opening up the application period for fiscal year 2024 conservation assistance giving producers the opportunity to apply for this historic funding. However, in the event of a lapse in government funding, technical assistance, one-on-one help in answering questions, and other support for producers in navigating the application process would not be immediately available until the funding lapse ends. In the event of a funding lapse, NRCS would notify producers when staff are available to assist.

What's New

Expansion of Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Activities supported by the Inflation Reduction Act

NRCS is increasing [Climate-Smart Agricultural and Forestry Mitigation Activities](#) eligible for Inflation Reduction Act funding for fiscal year 2024 through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) and [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP). These in-demand activities are expected to deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions or increases in carbon sequestration as well as significant other benefits to natural resources like soil health, water quality, pollinator and wildlife habitat and air quality. In response to feedback received from conservation partners, producers and NRCS staff across the country, NRCS considered and evaluated activities based on scientific literature demonstrating expected climate change mitigation benefits. To learn more, download the [list of practices](#) and a [fact sheet](#).

When applied through this framework, these activities are expected to deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions or increases in carbon sequestration. NRCS will continue to evaluate additional practices as science progresses and will evaluate and identify quantification methodologies during the fiscal year.

Expansion of priorities for the ACEP investments through the Inflation Reduction Act

Additionally, NRCS is expanding the national priority areas eligible for Inflation Reduction Act funding for [Agricultural Conservation Easements Program](#) (ACEP) easements in fiscal year 2024. For ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ALE), NRCS is prioritizing securing:

- Grasslands in areas of highest risk for conversion to non-grassland uses to prevent the release of soil carbon stores.
- Agricultural lands under threat of conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- State-specific priorities including rice cultivation on subsiding highly organic soils.

For ACEP Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE), NRCS is prioritizing:

- Land with soils high in organic carbon.
- Eligible lands that will be restored to and managed as forests like bottomland hardwood forests.
- Eligible lands in existing forest cover that will be managed as forests.
- Several geographically specific priorities (i.e., former cranberry bogs, wet meadows, and ephemeral wetlands in grassland ecosystems).

Background

The Inflation Reduction Act provides funds to the EQIP, CSP, ACEP and [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP). For fiscal year 2024, which began Oct. 1, 2023, the Inflation Reduction Act provides an additional \$1.65 billion for EQIP, \$472 million for CSP, and \$189 million for ACEP, and \$754 million for RCPP.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs year-round, but producers interested in this cycle of Inflation Reduction Act funding should apply as soon as possible. Producers interested in EQIP or CSP should apply by [their state's ranking dates](#) for consideration this year. Funding is provided through a competitive process and will include an opportunity to address the unmet demand from producers who have previously sought funding for climate-smart conservation activities.

Similarly, NRCS accepts applications year-round for ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE), producers interested in this funding cycle must apply by Nov. 13, 2023. NRCS will also consider previously unfunded applications in this round.

NRCS plans to roll out the next RCPP funding opportunity in late January 2024.

NRCS will announce other opportunities for agreements and partnerships at the state level for fiscal year 2024 in the coming months. The Inflation Reduction Act provides funding to support those strategic partnerships with local, regional and national organizations. This will include outreach to underserved producers to ensure Inflation Reduction Act climate funding is reaching those who have been previously unable to access conservation assistance.

Interested producers should contact the NRCS at their [local USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Invests \$70 Million to Expand Conservation Assistance to Underserved Producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing \$70 million in partnerships that will improve outreach to underserved producers and communities to expand access to

conservation assistance, including [programs funded by the Inflation Reduction Act](#), as well as career opportunities. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced the selection of 139 projects with entities for a one- to three-year engagement that encourage participation in NRCS programs, especially in underserved communities and among urban and small-scale producers. Projects will extend outreach to producers who are beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and veterans, and will highlight opportunities for students to pursue careers in agriculture, natural resources and related sciences.

The projects selected under the Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements will partner with NRCS to better ensure underserved producers receive the benefits our conservation programs deliver, including those oversubscribed programs that received a boost of funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. NRCS is investing in continued support of community-based organizations and partners that are instrumental in supporting conservation outreach to underserved producers and underserved communities.

The Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements include projects that:

- Promote the benefits of NRCS programs through education or demonstration of conservation practices.
- Develop community conservation partnerships that engage underserved producers to plan and protect farmland ecosystems, watersheds and wildlife habitat in underserved communities.
- Inform small-scale or urban agriculture producers about opportunities to participate in conservation programs.
- Support education on, planning for and adoption of climate-smart conservation practices.

Projects will reach underserved groups through a combination of program outreach and technical assistance in one or more of the following five NRCS priority areas:

- Addressing local natural resource issues.
- Promoting conservation career opportunities.
- Expanding adoption of climate-smart conservation.
- Encouraging conservation in small-scale and urban agriculture.
- Developing conservation leadership skills and opportunities.

Selected projects include:

East Arkansas Enterprise Community, Inc., will encourage diverse and inclusive participation in NRCS programs, introduce climate smart practices, and protect farmland, ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife habitat in Lee, Phillips, St. Francis, and Monroe counties in the East Arkansas Delta. It will develop a community-led conservation project to enable underserved producers and communities to access NRCS programs and services and learn about potential career opportunities.

Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation - The proposed Equity Conservation Outreach Project (ECOP) aims to provide equity-building conservation outreach and technical assistance to underserved farmers and ranchers in Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee. ECOP encourages diverse and inclusive participation in NRCS programs, introduces conservation planning and climate-smart practices, and protects farmland ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife habitat in underserved communities. The project also provide opportunities for students to pursue careers in agriculture, natural resources, and related sciences through internships, training camps, and workforce development.

Panhandle All Care Services will conduct outreach and technical assistance events through the Black Belt Region to enhance coordination of USDA-NRCS agriculture programs. Their objective is to reach socially disadvantaged farmers, veteran farmers, and beginning farmers in a linguistically appropriate manner. They aim to improve participation in USDA programs, provide information on operating farms in a conservation environment, offer demonstrations of eco-friendly farming, and assist with improving the environmental and economic performance of working agricultural lands.

[View the full list of selected projects.](#)

Program Impacts

The selected projects build on NRCS' fiscal year 2022 investment of \$50 million in more than 100 partnerships to expand access to conservation assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry. The fiscal year 2022 investment is supporting efforts in 44 states and territories.

Underserved producers include beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers, as well as other underrepresented or disadvantaged communities.

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 conservation practices 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. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

Getting Acreage Reporting Right

You have a lot at stake in making sure your crop insurance acreage reporting is accurate and on time. If you fail to report on time, you may not be protected. If you report too much acreage, you may pay too much premium. If you report too little acreage, you may recover less when you file a claim.

Crop insurance agents often say that mistakes in acreage reporting are the easiest way for producers to have an unsatisfactory experience with crop insurance. Don't depend on

your agent to do this important job for you. Your signature on the bottom of the acreage reporting form makes it, legally, your responsibility. Double-check it for yourself.

Remember - acreage reporting is your responsibility. Doing it right will save you money. Always get a copy of your report immediately after signing and filing it with your agent and keep it with your records. Remember, it is your responsibility to report crop damage to your agent within 72 hours of discovery. Never put damaged acreage to another use without prior written consent of the insurance adjuster. You don't want to destroy any evidence of a possible claim. [Learn more by visiting RMA's website.](#)

Rates and Dates

Selected Interest Rates for			
90-Day Treasury Bill	5.500%		
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	5.250%		
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	5.250%		
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.500%		
Emergency Loans	9.500%		
		Dates to Remember	
Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years)		11/06/2023	COC Election Ballots mailed to Eligible Voters
Sugar Storage Facility Loans		12/04/2023	Final Date for COC Ballots to be returned to the County Office.
Commodity Loans 1996-Present		01/01/2024	Newly Elected COC Members take Office



State / Regional Name

www.farmers.gov

Arkansas USDA-FSA

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FSA State Executive Director - Doris Washington

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

www.fsa.usda.gov

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

Arkansas USDA-NRCS

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[Jackson, Mississippi | RMA \(usda.gov\)](#)

Please contact your local Office for questions specific to your operation or county.
To find contact information for your local office visit the website below:
[Get Started at Your USDA Service Center | Farmers.gov](#)

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.

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CONTACT US:

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



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