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## **From the FSA State Executive Director**

Happy New Year! I am Blong Xiong, FSA State Executive Director in California and I'm looking forward to working with the farmers, ranchers, stakeholders, and FSA staff across the state.

I have an extensive background representing underserved communities, businesses and agricultural producers and I'm looking forward to building on that foundation with FSA. California's agriculture industry is extremely strong and very diverse – diverse in production and diverse in culture. I'm proud of the work that FSA does to timely and equitably support all agricultural producers statewide.

We are working to still reach the populations here California that are being underserved. I recognized that we still have constituencies that we have not adequately reached and I am committed to working with our community and team to bridge these gaps.

There are many fast-approaching deadlines approaching for disaster and safety net programs:

- Two of those programs – the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) and [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) (LFP) – have a January 31, 2022, deadline to file an application for 2021 losses, however producers are urged to get these applications in as soon as possible. More than 57 counties in California have met the qualifying drought ratings that trigger eligibility for LFP. Applications for 2021 losses will be accepted through **Jan. 31, 2022**.
- [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) enrollment for crop year 2022 is open. FSA is encouraging producers to contact their local USDA Service Centers to make or change elections and to enroll for 2022, providing future protections against market fluctuations. The election and enrollment period opened on Oct. 18, 2021 and runs through **March 15, 2022**.
- USDA opened signup for 2022 enrollment in the [Dairy Margin Coverage \(DMC\) Program](#) as well as expanded the program to allow dairy producers to enroll supplemental production. Supplemental DMC will provide \$580 million to better help small- and mid-sized dairy operations that have increased production over the years but were not able to enroll the additional production. Now, they can and retroactively receive payments. The signup period for both DMC 2022 and Supplemental DMC will run from Dec. 13 to **Feb. 18**.
- USDA has extended the deadline for agricultural producers who are certified organic, or transitioning to organic, to apply for the [Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program](#) (OTECP). This program provides pandemic assistance to cover certification and education expenses. The deadline to apply for 2020 and 2021 eligible expenses is now **Feb. 4, 2022**.

Depending on local COVID-19 conditions, some [USDA Service Centers](#) may not be accepting visitors. Service Center staff continue to take phone and virtual appointments, and we encourage you to conduct as much business as you can during your appointment.

I am honored to have this opportunity to serve as your FSA State Executive Director.

Sincerely,

Blong Xiong State Executive Director Farm Service Agency – California

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## USDA Urges Producers to Submit Applications for 2021 Grazing Loss Assistance by Jan. 31



*To Expedite Future Assistance, Gather and Submit Loss Records Now for Livestock Forage Disaster Program*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds ranchers and livestock producers that they may be eligible for financial assistance through the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program \(LFP\)](#) for 2021 grazing losses due to a qualifying drought or fire. The deadline to apply for 2021 LFP assistance is Jan. 31, 2022.

“Severe to extreme drought conditions in California have resulted in significant economic hardships for our agricultural producers and livestock producers are no exception,” said

Blong Xiong State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency in California. “If you suffered 2021 grazing losses, you should contact FSA as soon as possible and file your LFP application for payment. 2021 LFP information may be used to deliver upcoming disaster assistance.”

For the 2021 program year, 57 counties in California have met drought severity levels that trigger LFP eligibility. More than \$473.1 million has been paid, to date, to eligible livestock producers in 26 states and territories for 2021 LFP. For LFP, qualifying drought triggers are determined using the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#). Visit the [FSA LFP webpage](#) for a list of eligible counties and grazing crops.

LFP provides payments to eligible livestock producers and contract growers who also produce forage crops for grazing and suffered losses due to a qualifying drought or fire during the normal grazing period for the county. Eligible livestock include alpacas, beef cattle, buffalo/bison, beefalo, dairy cattle, deer, elk, emus, equine, goats, llamas, reindeer or sheep that have been or would have been grazing the eligible grazing land or pastureland during the normal grazing period.

To expedite the application process, producers are encouraged to gather and submit records documenting 2021 losses. Supporting documents may include information related to grazing leases, contract grower agreements, and more.

### **More Information**

LFP is part of a broader suite of disaster assistance available through USDA.

The [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP), which also has a Jan. 31, 2022, deadline, provides eligible producers with compensation for certain feed losses not covered by LFP as well as assistance with transporting water to livestock and feed transportation expenses.

Additional disaster assistance information can be found on farmers.gov, including the Farmers.gov [Drought Webpage](#), [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#).

For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, including LFP and ELAP, producers should contact 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. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#).

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## **Feb. 4 Deadline for the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program**

Feb. 4 is the deadline for agricultural producers who are certified organic, or transitioning to organic, to apply for the Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP). Signup for OTECP, administered by USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA), began Nov. 8.

Certified operations and transitional operations may apply for OTECP for eligible expenses paid during the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years during this signup period. Signup for the 2022 fiscal year will be announced at a later date.

For each year, OTECP covers 25% of a certified operation's eligible certification expenses, up to \$250 per certification category (crop, livestock, wild crop, handling and State Organic Program fee). This includes application fees, inspection fees, USDA organic certification costs, state organic program fees and more.

Crop and livestock operations transitioning to organic production may be eligible for 75% of a transitional operation's eligible expenses, up to \$750, for each year. This includes fees charged by a certifying agent or consultant for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan.

For both certified operations and transitional operations, OTECP covers 75% of the registration fees, up to \$200, per year, for educational events that include content related to organic production and handling in order to assist operations in increasing their knowledge of production and marketing practices that can improve their operations, increase resilience and expand available marketing opportunities. Additionally, both certified and transitional operations may be eligible for 75% of the expense of soil testing required under the National Organic Program (NOP) to document micronutrient deficiency, not to exceed \$100 per year.

Producers apply through their local FSA office and can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364. The program application and additional information can be found at [farmers.gov/otecp](https://farmers.gov/otecp).

### **Additional Organic Support**

OTECP builds upon USDA's [Organic Certification Cost Share Program \(OCCSP\)](#) which provides cost share assistance of 50%, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope, to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the NOP. Although the application period for OCCSP ended Nov. 1, 2021, FSA will consider late-filed applications for those operations who still wish to apply.

Meanwhile, USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) recently [made improvements to Whole-Farm Revenue Protection](#) to make it more flexible and accessible to organic producers.

To learn more about USDA's broader assistance for organic producers, visit [usda.gov/organic](https://usda.gov/organic).

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## **Community Alliance with Family Farmers Offers Small Farm Tech Hub**



How can technology help expand market opportunities and increase business efficiencies for small farms?

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) Tech Hub is here to Help!

Free Consultation services available to small scale farmers, food hubs and farmers markets operating out of California.

Request an appointment at [www.caff.org/techsupport](http://www.caff.org/techsupport)

For any questions email [Techhub@caff.org](mailto:Techhub@caff.org) or visit [www.caff.org/techhub](http://www.caff.org/techhub)

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## USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022

### General Signup to open Jan. 31

Agricultural producers and landowners can sign up soon for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a cornerstone conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris Administration effort to address climate change and achieve other natural resource benefits. The General CRP signup will run from **Jan. 31 to March 11**, and the Grassland CRP signup will run from **April 4 to May 13**.

Producers and landowners enrolled 4.6 million acres into CRP signups in 2021, including 2.5 million acres in the largest Grassland CRP signup in history. There are currently 22.1 million acres enrolled, and FSA is aiming to reach the 25.5-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2022.

### CRP Signups

General CRP helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland.

Meanwhile, Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

Alongside these programs, producers and landowners can enroll acres in Continuous CRP under the ongoing sign up, which includes projects available through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

### Climate Benefits

Last year, FSA enacted a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP General and Continuous signups, to better target CRP on addressing climate change. This incentive aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CRP's climate-smart practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

Additionally, in order to better target the program toward climate outcomes, USDA invested \$10 million last year in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts. This will enable the agency to further refine the program and practices to provide producers tools for increased climate resilience.

### **More Information on CRP**

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program -- for General CRP before the **March 11 deadline**, and for Grassland CRP before the **May 13 deadline**. 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. Additionally, fact sheets and other resources are available at [fsa.usda.gov/crp](https://fsa.usda.gov/crp).

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

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## **USDA Offers Online Tool for Drought-Stricken Ranchers to Estimate Compensation for Feed Transportation Costs**

An online tool is now available to help ranchers document and estimate payments to cover feed transportation costs caused by drought, which are now covered by the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated the program this year to include feed transportation costs as well as lowered the threshold for when assistance for water hauling expenses is available. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will begin taking applications this fall.

The new [ELAP Feed Transportation Producer Tool](#) is a Microsoft Excel workbook that enables ranchers to input information specific to their operation to determine an estimated payment. Final payments may vary depending on eligibility.

To use the tool, ranchers will need:

- Number of truckloads for this year.
- Mileage per truckload this year.
- Share of feed cost this year (if splitting loads).
- Number of truckloads you normally haul.
- Normal mileage per truckload.
- Share of normal feed cost

The tool requires Microsoft Excel, and a [tutorial video](#) is available.

### **Updates to ELAP**

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or loss conditions as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture. ELAP now covers feed transportation costs where grazing and hay resources have been depleted. This includes places where:

Drought intensity is D2 for eight consecutive weeks as indicated by the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#); or

Drought intensity is D3 or greater.

The tool calculates the estimated payment for feed transportation assistance, but it is not an application. Once FSA begins accepting applications later this fall for feed transportation assistance, ranchers should contact their FSA county office to apply. To simplify the application process, ranchers can print or email payment estimates generated by this tool for submission to FSA. The deadline to apply for ELAP, including feed transportation costs, for 2021 is Jan. 31, 2022.

ELAP already covers above normal costs for hauling water to livestock in areas where drought intensity is D3 or greater on the drought monitor. FSA is also updating ELAP to also cover water hauling in areas experiencing D2 for eight consecutive weeks, lowering the threshold for this assistance to be available. Program benefits are retroactive for 2021.

### **Payment Calculations**

USDA will reimburse eligible ranchers 60% of feed transportation costs above what would have been incurred in a normal year. Producers qualifying as underserved (socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning or military veteran) will be reimbursed for 90% of the feed transportation cost above what would have been incurred in a normal year.

USDA uses a national cost formula to determine reimbursement costs that will not include the first 25 miles and distances exceeding 1,000 transportation miles. The calculation will also exclude the normal cost to transport hay or feed if the producer normally purchases some feed. For 2021, the initial cost formula of \$6.60 per mile will be used (before the percentage is applied).

### **Eligibility**

To be eligible for ELAP assistance, livestock must be intended for grazing and producers must have incurred feed transportation costs on or after Jan. 1, 2021. Although producers will self-certify losses and expenses to FSA, producers are encouraged to maintain good records and retain receipts and related documentation in the event these documents are requested for review by the local FSA County Committee.

### **More Drought Recovery Information**

USDA has taken additional steps to assist drought-impacted producers, including:

- [Extending deadlines for crop insurance premium and administrative fees, and deferring interest accrual.](#)
- [Streamlining and accelerating losses and issuance of indemnity payments for crop insurance.](#)
- [Investing \\$41.8 million through a four-state pilot of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Conservation Incentive Contracts focused on drought practices.](#)
- [Investing \\$15 million through a block grant to the Klamath Drought Response Agency to provide payments to producers to reduce irrigation demand.](#)

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

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## **Higher Loan Limit Now Available for USDA Guaranteed Farm Loans**



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) now offers a higher loan limit for borrowers seeking a guaranteed farm loan from \$1.776 million to \$1.825 million.

FSA farm loans offer access to funding for a wide range of producer needs, from securing land to financing the purchase of equipment. Guaranteed loans are financed and serviced by commercial lenders. FSA provides up to a 95% guarantee against possible financial loss of principal and interest. Guaranteed loans can be used for both farm ownership and operating purposes.

In fiscal year 2021, FSA saw continued strong demand for guaranteed loans. FSA obligated more than \$3.4 billion in guaranteed farm ownership and operating loans. This includes nearly \$1.2 billion for beginning farmers. The number of guaranteed borrowers has grown by 10% to more than 38,750 farmers and ranchers over the last decade. FSA expects the increasing demand for farm loans to continue into fiscal year 2022.

### **Disaster Set-Aside Extension**

USDA has additional support available to producers given the recent outbreaks of the COVID-19 Delta variant and has extended the availability of COVID-19 Disaster Set-Aside



(DSA) for installments due through Jan. 31, 2022. In addition, FSA will permit a second DSA for COVID-19 and a second DSA for natural disasters for those who had an initial COVID-19 DSA. Requests for a COVID-19 DSA or a second DSA must be received no later than May 1, 2022.

Last year, FSA broadened the use of the DSA. Normally used in the wake of natural disasters, the DSA can now allow farmers with USDA farm loans who are affected by COVID-19 and determined to be eligible, to have their next payment set aside. The set-aside payment's due date is moved to the final maturity date of the loan or extended up to twelve months in the case of an annual operating loan. Any principal set-aside will continue to accrue interest until it is repaid. This will improve the borrower's cashflow in the current production cycle.

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## File a Notice of Loss for Failed and Prevented Planted Acres

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds you to report prevented planting and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility for some programs.

You should report crop acreage you intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were prevented from planting. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form *CCC-576, Notice of Loss*, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

If you're unable to report the prevented planting acreage within the 15 calendar days following the final planting date, a late-filed report can be submitted. Late-filed reports will only be accepted if FSA conducts a farm visit to assess the eligible disaster condition that prevented the crop from being planted. A measurement service fee will be charged.

Additionally, if you have failed acres, you should also use form *CCC-576, Notice of Loss*, to report failed acres.

For hand-harvested crops and certain perishables, you must notify FSA of damage or loss through the administrative County Office within 72 hours of the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent. This notification can be provided by filing a *CCC-576*, email, fax or phone. If you notify the County Office by any method other than by filing the *CCC-576*, you are still required to file a *CCC-576, Notice of Loss*, within the required 15 calendar days.

For losses on crops covered by the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), you must file a *Notice of Loss* within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent. You must timely file a *Notice of Loss* for failed acres on all crops including grasses.

For more information, contact your local county USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

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## **California Agricultural Mediation Program (CALAMP) helps farmers and ranchers**

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in California has partnered with the California Agriculture Mediation Program to provide free mediation services. Mediation can be an effective tool for farmers and ranchers who are experiencing challenges with their farm loans, creditors, neighbors, leases, or USDA agencies,.

Mediation is free to any producer for debt/credit issues, family farm transitions, leases, neighbor disputes, organic certification, adverse USDA decisions, and more. If your issue is not included in our authorized list of covered topics, we'll work with you to find an affordable option.

Discussions and notes made during mediation cannot be shared unless everyone agrees to do so. Keeping information private helps create a safe space for difficult conversations. If you come to an agreement or plan, the parties may then decide to share it outside of the meeting.

Mediators are trained to help people talk to each other in a productive way. The mediator does not take a "side" in the conversation, but instead is there to support the conversation and move it forward to address the issue at hand. All of our mediators have agricultural backgrounds, so they understand the issues that are unique to the industry.

The mediator leads a discussion about reaching an agreement or plan. Should the parties reach an agreement, the mediator will draft a settlement document, which is a binding contract. But the parties, not the mediator, decide the outcome and course of action.

Statistically, 75 percent of mediations result in an agreement. Sometimes even if a final agreement is not reached, everyone gains a better understanding of the issue. Mediation can go hand-in-hand with other processes such as working with an estate planner or applying for a farm loan. Mediation can reopen lines of communication and help the participants continue productive conversations outside the meeting.

For more information, submit a request for mediation at [www.calamp.org](http://www.calamp.org)

Or contact:

Matt Strassberg (Director) at 916-330-4500 x101 or [matts@emcenter.org](mailto:matts@emcenter.org)

Mary Campbell (S. CA Coordinator) at 916-330-4500 x101 or [maryc@emcenter.org](mailto:maryc@emcenter.org)

Jenna Muller (N. CA Coordinator) at 916-330-4500 x101 or [jennam@emcenter.org](mailto:jennam@emcenter.org)

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## **Free Farm Manager Apprenticeship Training**

Farmers, are you searching for your future manager or supervisor? Whether you have a current employee who could use some additional training, or are seeking to hire a new team member, The Beginning Farm and Ranch Management Apprenticeship provides a structured pathway for aspiring farm managers to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful on your farm. The Center for Land-Based Learning covers all tuition

for coursework and provides support for farmers and apprentices. To learn more about training an apprentice, visit <https://landbasedlearning.org/apprentice-farmer-mentor>

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