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## Financial Assistance Application Process Opens for USDA Farm Loan Borrowers Who Have Faced Discrimination

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the opening of the financial assistance application process for eligible farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending programs prior to January 2021. Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) directs USDA to provide this assistance. Since the law's passage, USDA has worked diligently to design the program in accordance with significant stakeholder input.

The program website, [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov), is now open. The website includes an English- and Spanish-language application that applicants can download or submit via an e-filing portal, information on how to obtain technical assistance in-person or virtually, and additional resources and details about the program.

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination by USDA in its farm loan programs prior to January 1, 2021 and/or are currently debtors with assigned or



assumed USDA farm loan debt that was the subject of USDA discrimination that occurred prior to January 1, 2021, are eligible for this program.

To apply, borrowers have the option to apply via the e-filing portal at [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov) or submit paper-based forms via mail or in-person delivery to the program's local offices. The application process will be open from July 7 to October 31, 2023. Under the planned timeline, applications will be reviewed in November and December, with payments reaching recipients soon thereafter. Importantly, applicants should know that the application process is not on a first come, first served, basis. All applications received or postmarked before the October 31 deadline will be considered.

To support producers throughout the application process, USDA is ensuring that organizations with extensive experience conducting outreach to farm organizations are able to support individuals who may be eligible for the program. These groups include [AgrAbility](#), [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#), [Farmers' Legal Action Group](#), [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#), [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#), [Land Loss Prevention Program](#), [National Young Farmers Coalition](#), and [Rural Coalition](#).

Vendors operating four regional hubs are also providing technical assistance and working closely with these and other community-based organizations to conduct outreach using digital and grassroots strategies, to ensure potential applicants are informed about the program and have the opportunity to apply. These hubs are operating a network of brick-and-mortar program offices and will conduct extensive outreach about the program. Windsor Group serves farmers in the eastern regions of the U.S. and Analytic Acquisitions serves the western regions. A national administrator, Midtown Group, is responsible for program oversight and integrity, and will lead a national call-center, operate the application website - [22007apply.gov](https://22007apply.gov), which is now open – and review and process applications and payments. All vendors have experience in professional services, supporting government contracts, and complex program operations.

On March 1, 2023, USDA shared initial [details on how the Section 22007 program will work](#), including that the Inflation Reduction Act specifies the Secretary of Agriculture is responsible for providing this assistance through qualified nongovernmental entities standards set by USDA. USDA entered into agreements with vendors and cooperators in May.

In addition to the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program (DFAP) opening today, the Inflation Reduction Act also created several other programs that are helping USDA rebuild trust, address systemic issues and improve service to people who may have been underserved by USDA in the past. Information about USDA's equity agenda and progress is available at [www.usda.gov/equity](https://www.usda.gov/equity).

In standing up this program, USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about the discrimination assistance process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information. As of today, the official application process has begun and filling out an application is **free**.

No attorneys' fees will be paid to applicants or their counsel by USDA or by any other agency or department of the United States. The amount of financial assistance will not be increased for those claimants who are represented by an attorney. Applicants are not required to retain an attorney. USDA, the national administrator, and the regional hub vendors will neither recommend that any applicant retain counsel or retain a specific attorney or law firm, nor discourage an applicant from obtaining counsel or using a specific attorney or law firm. For more information, read our [fact sheet about the program timeline and ways to protect against possible scams](#).

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## USDA Extends Deadline for Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Until August 11



USDA's Farm Service Agency is extending the deadline for the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) to Aug. 11, 2023. This extension gives organic dairy producers more than two additional weeks to apply for the program. ODMAP helps 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. This assistance will help keep organic dairy operations

sustainable until markets return to more normal conditions.

Organic dairy producers should apply by August 11, 2023 at their local USDA Service Center. [Learn more.](#)

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## Farm Service Agency Now Accepting Nominations for Farmers and Ranchers to Serve on Local County



USDA is now accepting nominations for county committee members for elections that will occur later this year. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is unveiling a new GIS tool to make it easier for producers to participate in the nomination and election processes for county committee members, who make important decisions on how federal farm programs are administered locally. All nomination forms for the 2023 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2023.

Elections will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA) for members. LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction and they may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area. Customers can locate their LAA through a new GIS locator tool available at [fsa.usda.gov/elections](https://fsa.usda.gov/elections).

Agricultural producers may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee if they:

- Participate or cooperate in a USDA program; and

- Reside in the LAA that is up for election this year.

A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits. Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority producers, women and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote and hold office.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 dedicated members of the agricultural community serve on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment and other agricultural issues.

### **Urban and Suburban County Committees**

The 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to form urban county committees as well as make other advancements related to urban agriculture, including the establishment of the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. FSA established county committees specifically focused on urban agriculture. The urban county committees will work to encourage and promote urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural production practices. Additionally, the new county committees may address areas such as food access, community engagement, support of local activities to promote and encourage community compost and food waste reduction.

Urban committee members are nominated and elected to serve by local urban producers in the same jurisdiction. Urban county committee members will provide outreach to ensure urban producers understand USDA programs and serve as the voice of other urban producers and assist in program implementation that support the needs of the growing urban community.

### **More Information**

Producers should contact their local FSA office today to register and find out how to get involved in their county's election, including if their LAA is up for election this year. To be considered, a producer must be registered and sign an [FSA-669A](#) nomination form. Urban farmers should use an FSA-669-A-3 for urban county committees.

Nomination forms and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at [fsa.usda.gov/elections](https://fsa.usda.gov/elections). Election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters beginning Nov. 6, 2023.

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## **USDA Invests \$7.4 Million in 25 Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Efforts**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing \$7.4 million in 25 selected grants that support urban agriculture and innovative production. Selected grant recipients, including community gardens and nonprofit farms, will increase food production and access in economically distressed communities, provide job training and education, and allow partners to develop business plans and zoning proposals. These grants build on \$40 million in projects funded since 2020 and are part of USDA's broad support for urban agriculture through its Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP). Funding limits only allowed

USDA to select the top scoring 10% of the applications reviewed. This year, USDA received more than 300 applications, which is twice last year's applications.

"This competitive grant program has already had tremendous impacts for communities across the country, and we look forward to partnering with producers and local organizations to support agriculture in the urban landscape while also helps local communities to provide fresh, healthy food," said Robert Bonnie, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. "The growing popularity of this grant program shows the importance of our broad support for urban agriculture, local and regional food systems and underserved communities."

### **Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grants**

The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) competitive grants program supports a wide range of activities through two types of grants, planning projects and implementation projects. Today's announcement include 25 selected planning and implementation projects.

Planning projects initiate or expand efforts of urban and suburban farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools and other stakeholders to target areas of food access, education, business and start-up costs for new farmers, urban forestry, and policies related to zoning and other urban production needs. Planning projects are expected to provide an early-stage investment in new and start up projects with surveys, assessments, design and planning, business plan creation, feasibility studies, municipal policy and zoning best practices.

Examples of planning projects include:

- Austin Youth and Community Farm Inc. in Texas, which will increase food equity in Travis County by using regenerative farming and natural resource conservation practices to double food production on two urban farms.
- Living Well Kent in Washington, which will transform the food production system to improve food security and advance equity among historically marginalized BIPOC, immigrant and refugee producers and consumers.

Implementation projects accelerate urban, indoor and other agricultural practices that serve multiple farmers and improve local food access. They may support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, education and urban farming policy implementation. Implementation projects are expected to expand the work on existing urban agriculture projects with on-the-job training, mentoring, business development assistance, school training in agricultural careers, and by expanding current operations of community gardens and nonprofit farms.

Examples of implementation projects include:

- Athens Land Trust of Georgia, which will provide locally grown food to the Athens community and offer workshops, paid employment for youth, and business opportunities for beginning and historically underserved farmers.
- Osage Nation in Oklahoma, which will install supplemental lighting for vegetable production facilities and systems along with installing a solar field and serve as a guide for Native nations looking to implement similar systems.

In total, 25 projects were selected in 16 states and territories. For a complete list of selected grant recipients and project summaries, visit [Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grants | USDA](#).

### More Information

OUAIP, established through the 2018 Farm Bill, works in partnership with numerous [USDA agencies that support urban agriculture and innovative production](#). OUAIP coordinates across USDA to help agencies identify, priorities and resolve internal barriers to service with urban, small-scale and innovative customers. UAIP grants are part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture.

Other efforts include:

- Investing up to \$9.5 million for [Composting and Food Waste Reduction \(CFWR\) cooperative agreements](#) for fiscal year 2023.
- Creating and managing a [Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#) to advise the Secretary on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban agriculture.
- Renewing the [People's Garden](#) movement -- join the People's Garden community with gardens across the country; grow using sustainable practices that benefit people and wildlife and teach about gardening and resilient, local food systems.
- Investing in urban agriculture and urban food systems projects through the [Agricultural Marketing Service's Local Agriculture Market Program \(LAMP\)](#) that develop, coordinate, and expand producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and local food enterprises, including those located in urban communities.
- Helping child nutrition program operators incorporate local foods through the [Food and Nutrition Services Farm to School Program](#).

Additionally, OUAIP helps employees at all levels of the USDA to understand that USDA supports agriculture regardless of the size of the operations, where it is located, or how the products are produced.

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## Beginning Farmer and Rancher Team Update

Each state has a dedicated Beginning Farmer and Rancher (BFR) team to help producers with less than 10 years' experience learn about available programs and services. Neal Leonard is the Georgia Coordinator. He is with Farm Service Agency. Neal is the team



lead and will answer questions from farmers and ranchers. He can be reached at [neal.leonard@usda.gov](mailto:neal.leonard@usda.gov) or 478-827-0016.

The other members of the team are Champions. They help Neal respond to questions, provide support to county offices and plan outreach events specifically for beginning farmers and ranchers. Your Georgia Champions are: Jon P. “Phil” Deal a Risk Management Specialist with Risk Management Agency, Lance (Chris) Young a Business & Cooperative Specialist with Rural Development, and Amelia Dortch a Public Affairs & Urban Ag Outreach Coordinator with Natural Resources Conservation Service.

For more beginning farmer and rancher resources, visit the website at [www.farmers.gov/newfarmers](http://www.farmers.gov/newfarmers).

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## Beginning Farmer Loan Opportunity

Accessing capital to begin, extend or support an agriculture operation can be especially challenging to new producers. Farm Service Agency’s “Beginning Farmer” direct and guaranteed loan programs provide an opportunity for qualified applicants to secure loans from funding set aside for producers who meet the following conditions:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county’s average size farm.

For more information contact, contact your Georgia state office at 706-546-2166 or visit [fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov).

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## USDA to Host Two In-Person Listening Sessions for Producers in the RMA Valdosta, Georgia Region to Hear About Crop Insurance Coverage for Prevented Planting

– The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is inviting agricultural producers from throughout the Valdosta, Ga. region to participate in one of two special in-person listening sessions to provide comments on the Prevented Planting Request for Information published in the Federal Register on May 23, 2023. The events will give producers the opportunity to meet with members of the USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) and directly comment on their needs and possible changes to prevented planting crop insurance coverage. The first listening session will be held on **August 8, 10 a.m. – 12p.m. EDT , at the Pee Dee Research and education Center, Florence, S.C.; the second is on August 9, 10 a.m. EDT, Clemson Extension Office, S.C.**

“We are excited to have this opportunity to meet with producers and receive comments about such an important issue as prevented planting and the topics that are being considered,” said

Davina Lee, Director of the RMA Valdosta Regional Office. “One of our top priorities at RMA is providing the best risk management tools we can by listening to our nation’s producers. This session helps us accomplish this priority and help our customers the best we can.”

The May 23 request for information on prevented planting outlines several questions for the listening session focusing on topics including:

Harvest Price Option – Feedback on whether to allow the prevented planting payment calculations to be based on the higher of the projected price or the harvest price under the revenue protection plan of insurance.

“1 in 4” Rule – Input on the challenges or experiences since the rule (to be eligible for prevented planting coverage, acreage must have been planted to a crop, insured, and harvested in at least 1 out of the previous 4 crop years) was implemented nationwide.

10 percent additional coverage option – Input on if RMA should reinstate the option to buy-up prevented planting coverage by 10 percent.

Contract price – Whether prevented planting costs are higher for contracted crops and how prevented planting payments should be calculated for contract crops.

General – Willingness to pay additional premium for expanded prevented planting benefits, recommendations on other prevented planting limitations, etc.

“The direct feedback and input that will come out of this session is vital in improving insurance coverage for prevented planting,” Lee added.

The request for information, which includes specific questions and instructions for submitting written feedback by September 1, is available in this [Federal Register](#) notice.

Prevented planting insurance provisions provide valuable coverage when extreme weather conditions prevent expected plantings. Prevented planting is when a producer is unable to plant an insured crop due to an insurable cause of loss in time to grow a viable crop. Final planting dates and late planting periods are detailed in a producer’s crop insurance policy, and they vary by crop and location. Prevented planting coverage is intended to assist with normal costs associated with preparing the land up to the point of seed going into the ground (pre-plant costs).

## More Information

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](http://rma.usda.gov) or by contacting your [RMA Regional Office](#).

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## Crop Insurance Deadline Nears in Georgia for Fresh Market Sweet Corn and Pepper Growers

The USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminds Georgia fresh market sweet corn and pepper growers that the final date to apply for crop insurance coverage for the 2024 crop year is July 31. Current policyholders who wish to make changes to their existing coverage also have until the July 31 sales closing date to do so.

Federal crop insurance is critical to the farm safety net. It helps producers and owners manage revenue risks and strengthens the rural economy. Coverage is available for fresh market sweet corn in Colquitt, Decatur, Grady, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Tift, and Worth counties. Coverage is also available for peppers in Brooks, Colquitt, Cook, Echols, Grady, Lowndes, Thomas, Tift, Ware, and Worth counties.

Growers are encouraged to visit their crop insurance agent soon to learn specific details for the 2024 crop year.

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](https://www.rma.usda.gov). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at [www.rma.usda.gov](https://www.rma.usda.gov).

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