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## USDA to Provide \$6 billion to Commodity and Specialty Crop Producers Impacted by 2020 and 2021 Natural Disasters

The U. S Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that commodity and specialty crop producers impacted by natural disaster events in 2020 and 2021 will soon begin receiving emergency relief payments totaling approximately \$6 billion through the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) new [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) to offset crop yield and value losses.

### Background

On September 30, 2021, President Biden signed into law the *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act* (P.L. 117-43), which includes \$10 billion in assistance to agricultural producers impacted by wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, winter storms, and other eligible disasters experienced during calendar years 2020 and 2021. FSA recently made payments to ranchers impacted by drought and wildfire through the first phase

of the Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP). ERP is another relief component of the Act.

For impacted producers, existing [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) data is the basis for calculating initial payments. USDA estimates that phase one ERP benefits will reach more than 220,000 producers who received indemnities for losses covered by federal crop insurance and more than 4,000 producers who obtained NAP coverage for 2020 and 2021 crop losses.

### **ERP Eligibility – Phase One**

ERP covers losses to crops, trees, bushes, and vines due to a qualifying natural disaster event in calendar years 2020 and 2021. Eligible crops include all crops for which crop insurance or NAP coverage was available, except for crops intended for grazing. Qualifying natural disaster events include wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture, qualifying drought, and related conditions.

For drought, ERP assistance is available if any area within the county in which the loss occurred was rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a:

- D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks; or
- D3 (extreme drought) or higher level of drought intensity.

Lists of [2020](#) and [2021](#) drought counties eligible for ERP is available on the emergency relief website. To streamline and simplify the delivery of ERP phase one benefits, FSA will send pre-filled application forms to producers where crop insurance and NAP data are already on file. This form includes eligibility requirements, outlines the application process and provides ERP payment calculations. Producers will receive a separate application form for each program year in which an eligible loss occurred. Receipt of a pre-filled application is not confirmation that a producer is eligible to receive an ERP phase one payment. Additionally, producers must have the following forms on file with FSA within 60 days of the ERP phase one deadline, which will be announced by FSA's Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs:

- 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, for the 2021 program year.
- 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 ERP producer and applicable affiliates.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs,

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

### **ERP Payment Calculations – Phase One**

For crops covered by crop insurance, the ERP phase one payment calculation for a crop and unit will depend on the type and level of coverage obtained by the producer. Each calculation will use an ERP factor based on the producer's level of crop insurance or NAP coverage.

- **Crop Insurance** – the ERP factor is 75% to 95% depending on the level of coverage ranging from catastrophic to at least 80% coverage.
- **NAP** – the ERP factor is 75% to 95% depending on the level of coverage ranging from catastrophic to 65% coverage.

Full ERP payment calculation factor tables are available on the emergency relief website and in the program [fact sheet.](#)

Applying ERP factors ensures that payments to producers do not exceed available funding and that cumulative payments do not exceed 90% of losses for all producers as required by the Act. Also, there will be certain payment calculation considerations for area plans under crop insurance policies.

The ERP payment percentage for historically underserved producers, including beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers will be increased by 15% of the calculated payment for crops having insurance coverage or NAP.

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 2021 program year.

Because the amount of loss due to a qualifying disaster event in calendar years 2020 and 2021 cannot be separated from the amount of loss caused by other eligible causes of loss as defined by the applicable crop insurance or NAP policy, the ERP phase one payment will be calculated based on the producer's loss due to *all eligible causes of loss.*

### **Future Insurance Coverage Requirements**

All producers who receive ERP phase one payments, including those receiving a payment based on crop, tree, bush, or vine insurance policies, are statutorily required to purchase crop insurance, or NAP coverage where crop insurance is not available, for the next two available crop years, as determined by the Secretary. Participants must obtain crop insurance or NAP, as may be applicable:

- At a coverage level equal to or greater than 60% for insurable crops; or
- At the catastrophic level or higher for NAP crops.

Coverage requirements will be determined from the date a producer receives an ERP payment and may vary depending on the timing and availability of crop insurance or NAP for a producer's particular crops. The final crop year to purchase crop insurance

or NAP coverage to meet the second year of coverage for this requirement is the 2026 crop year.

### **Emergency Relief – Phase Two (*Crop and Livestock Producers*)**

Today's announcement is only phase one of relief for commodity and specialty crop producers. Making the initial payments using existing safety net and risk management data will both speed implementation and further encourage participation in these permanent programs, such as Federal crop insurance, as Congress intended.

The second phase of both ERP and ELRP programs will fill gaps and cover producers who did not participate in or receive payments through the existing programs that are being leveraged for phase one implementation. When phase one payment processing is complete, the remaining funds will be used to cover gaps identified under phase two.

Through proactive communication and outreach, USDA will keep producers and stakeholders informed as program details are made available. More information on ERP can be found in the [Notice of Funding Availability](#).

### **Additional Commodity Loss Assistance**

The Milk Loss Program and On-Farm Stored Commodity Loss Program are also funded through the *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act* and will be announced in a future rule in the Federal Register.

### **More Information**

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on [farmers.gov](#), including the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, producers should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#).

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## **USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic, Transitioning Producers**

Agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic, along with producers and handlers who are transitioning to organic production, can now apply for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Organic and Transitional Education Certification Program](#) (OTECP) and [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), which help producers and handlers cover the cost of organic certification, along with other related expenses. Applications for OTECP and OCCSP are both due October 31, 2022.

OTECP covers:

- Certification costs for organic producers and handlers (25% up to \$250 per category).
- Eligible expenses for transitional producers, including fees for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan (75% up to \$750).
- Registration fees for educational events (75% up to \$200).

- Soil testing (75% up to \$100).

Meanwhile, OCCSP covers 50% or up to \$500 per category of certification costs in 2022.

This cost share for certification is available for each of these categories: crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and State organic program fees.

Producers can receive cost share through both OTECP and OCCSP. Both OTECP and OCCSP cover costs incurred from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. Producers have until October 31, 2022 to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

To apply, producers and handlers should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at their local USDA Service Center. As part of completing the OCCSP applications, 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 agencies.

Additional details can be found on the [OTECP](#) and [OCCSP](#) webpages.

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## 2022 Avian Influenza in the United States - What you need to know!

To date, USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in commercial and backyard flocks in several states including Georgia. Avian influenza viruses are classified as either "low pathogenic (LPAI)" or "highly pathogenic (HPAI)" based on their genetic features and the severity of the disease they cause in poultry. Caused by an influenza type A virus, HPAI can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and wild birds (especially waterfowl).

The clinical signs of birds affected with all forms of Avian Influenza may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Decreased water consumption up to 72 hours before other clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

In addition to the disease infecting domestic birds, it is important to know that wild birds can also be infected and show no signs of illness. They can carry the disease to new areas when migrating, potentially exposing domestic poultry to the virus. The [APHIS' wild bird surveillance program](#) provides an early warning system for the introduction and distribution of avian influenza viruses of concern in the United States, allowing APHIS and the poultry industry to take timely and rapid action.

With the recent detections of avian influenza in wild birds and domestic poultry in the United States, bird owners should review their biosecurity practices and stay vigilant to protect poultry and pet birds from transmission of this disease. The following bio-safety guidelines are effective methods for safeguarding commercial operations and smaller flocks:

- Backyard flock owners should practice strict biosecurity, including preventing birds from exposure and/or co-mingling with wild birds and other types of poultry.
- Shower, change clothes, and clean and disinfect footwear before entering your poultry housing areas.
- Respiratory protection such as a medical facemask would also be important and remember to always wear clean clothes when encountering healthy domestic birds.
- Carefully follow safe entry and exit procedures into your flock's clean area.
- Reduce the attractiveness for wild birds to stop at your place by cleaning up litter and spilled feed around poultry housing areas.
- If you have free range guinea fowl and waterfowl, consider bringing them into coops or flight pens under nets to prevent interaction of domesticated poultry with wild birds and their droppings.
- It is best to restrict visitors from interacting with your birds currently.
- Do not touch sick or dead wildlife and keep them away from domestic poultry
- Try not to handle sick or deceased domestic birds (if you must, use proper personal protective equipment to minimize direct contact and cautiously disinfect anything that comes into contact with the deceased and or sick bird).

As part of the existing USDA Avian Influenza response plans, Federal and State partners as well as industry are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps:

- **Quarantine** – restricting movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- **Eradicate** – depopulate the affected flock(s);
- **Monitor region** – testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine area;
- **Disinfect** – kills the virus in the affected flock locations; and
- **Test** – confirming that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

Sick or deceased domestic birds should be reported to your local veterinarian. Positive domestic cases are handled by APHIS and its partners. States that have confirmed cases of Avian Influenza should work closely with USDA-APHIS on surveillance, reporting and control efforts. Disposal methods will be evaluated on a case-by-case

basis depending on a variety of factors, including the size of the flock, space requirements, associated costs, local conditions, and applicable laws/regulations.

The United States has the strongest Avian Influenza surveillance program in the world, where we actively look for the disease and provide fair market value compensation to affected producers to encourage reporting.

If you do not raise domestic birds or have a poultry operation but you encounter sick or dead wild birds, please use bio-safety measures, and report your findings through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593. According to the Centers for Disease Control, this strain of Avian Influenza is a low risk to the public. While the transmission rate from animals to humans is low, it is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be shared between species. To learn more about Avian Influenza and to remain up to date on the latest related news and information, you can visit the [USDAAPHIS webpage](#).

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## USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming

Are you a military veteran interested in farming? USDA offers resources to help you:

- **Fund Your Operation:** USDA's Farm Service Agency offers a variety of [funding opportunities](#) to help agricultural producers finance their businesses. Certain funds are targeted for veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Conserve Natural Resources:** USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers [conservation programs and expert one-on-one technical assistance](#) to strengthen agricultural operations now and into the future. Veterans may be eligible for a cost share of up to 90 percent and advance payments of up to 50 percent to cover certain conservation practices.
- **Manage Risks:** USDA is here to help you prepare for and recover from the unexpected. Veterans who are beginning farmers may be eligible for reduced premiums, application fee waivers, increased insurance coverage, and other incentives for multiple [USDA programs that support risk management](#).

USDA wants to ensure that veterans transitioning to agriculture have the resources needed to succeed. While USDA offices are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at [farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus). If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to your [state Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator](#).

## USDA Reminds Producers to File Crop Acreage Reports

Agricultural producers who have not yet completed their [crop acreage reports](#) after spring planting should make an appointment with their local County Farm Service Agency (FSA) before the applicable deadline.

An acreage report documents a crop grown on a farm or ranch and its intended uses. Filing an accurate and timely acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage, can prevent the loss of benefits.

### **How to File a Report**

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable for Georgia counties:

July 15, 2022	All other crops, Perennial Forage
July 31, 2022	Hemp
August 15, 2022	Tomatoes (planted 7/1-8/15),
September 15, 2022	Sweet Corn (planted 7/15-8/25)
October 15, 2022	Cabbage (planted 7/16-9/30)
November 15, 2022	Onions (planted 9/20-10/20)

Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some [USDA Service Centers](#) are open to limited visitors. Contact your local county FSA office to set up an in-person or phone appointment.

To file a crop acreage report, you will need to provide:

- Crop and crop type or variety.
- Intended use of the crop.
- Number of acres of the crop.
- Map with approximate boundaries for the crop.
- Planting date(s).
- Planting pattern, when applicable.
- Producer shares.
- Irrigation practice(s).
- Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable.
- Other information as required.

### **Acreage Reporting Details**

To complete your acreage report, please call your local County FSA Office to schedule an appointment. FSA can work with producers to file timely acreage reports by phone, email, online tools and virtual meetings as well as by appointment in person.

The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting date, the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.



- **Fruit and Vegetable Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is 15 days after the designated final planting date for the specific zone.**
- **Perennial Forage Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for perennial forage is 15 calendar days before the onset of harvest or grazing of the specific crop being reported.**

For questions, please call your local County FSA Office.

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## White House Delegate and Secretary Vilsack Visit Georgia to Make Announcement

State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Terrance O. Rudolph and local partners helped welcome a group of national leaders to Albany, Georgia in April to announce project funding to help improve rural infrastructure in 31 states, including Georgia. Among the group Mr. Rudolph helped host, were White House Infrastructure Coordinator Mitch Landrieu, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Congressman Sanford Bishop (CD#2). In all, 132 projects were selected for funding under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) to help rehabilitate dams, prevent future flooding, and restore watersheds. Radium Springs, in Albany, was the backdrop of the funding announcement and is one of nine projects in Georgia receiving over \$69 million in allocations. Other USDA leaders in Georgia who were present for the event included State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency, Arthur Tripp, as well as Risk Management Agency's Regional Director, Davina Lee. [Click here](#) for more.

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## USDA Climate-Smart Commodities Funding Opportunity Deadlines Approaching

The deadline for partners with proposals from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999 to apply for the first round of funding through the new [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#) is 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, June 10, 2022. These innovative pilot projects should place an emphasis on the enrollment of small and/or underserved producers, and/or monitoring, reporting and verification activities developed at minority-serving institutions. [Click here](#) for more.

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## USDA Renews People's Garden Initiative

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently planted a tree to announce the reopening of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) People's Garden Initiative. People's Gardens across the country will grow fresh, healthy food and support resilient, local food systems; teach people how to garden using conservation practices; nurture habitat for pollinators and wildlife and create greenspace for neighbors. The garden at USDA headquarters in Washington,

D.C. will be joined by 17 flagship gardens located in urban communities nationwide, including metro-Atlanta. [Click here](#) for more.

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## Farmers.gov Feature Helps Producers Find Farm Loans that Fit Their Operation

Farmers and ranchers can use the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* on farmers.gov to find information on USDA farm loans that may best fit their operations.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of loan options to help farmers finance their operations. From buying land to financing the purchase of equipment, FSA loans can help.

USDA conducted field research in eight states, gathering input from farmers and FSA farm loan staff to better understand their needs and challenges.

### How the Tool Works

Farmers who are looking for financing options to operate a farm or buy land can answer a few simple questions about what they are looking to fund and how much money they need to borrow. After submitting their answers, farmers will receive information on farm loans that best fit their specific needs. The loan application and additional resources also will be provided.

Farmers can download application quick guides that outline what to expect from preparing an application to receiving a loan decision. There are four guides that cover loans to individuals, entities, and youth, as well as information on microloans. The guides include general eligibility requirements and a list of required forms and documentation for each type of loan. These guides can help farmers prepare before their first USDA service center visit with a loan officer.

Farmers can access the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* by visiting [farmers.gov/fund](https://farmers.gov/fund) and clicking the "Start" button. Follow the prompts and answer five simple questions to receive loan information that is applicable to your agricultural operation. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

### About Farmers.gov

In 2018, USDA unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where farmers will be able to apply for programs, process transactions, and manage accounts.

The *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* is one of many resources on farmers.gov to help connect farmers to information that can help their operations. Earlier this year, USDA launched the *My Financial Information* feature, which enables farmers to view their loan information, history, payments, and alerts by logging into the website.

USDA is building farmers.gov for farmers, by farmers. In addition to the interactive farm loan features, the site also offers a Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool. Farmers can visit [farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1](https://farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1) to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

For more information, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [farmers.gov](http://farmers.gov).

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## USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

Farmers can use USDA farm ownership microloans to buy and improve property. These microloans are especially helpful to beginning or underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013.

Microloans can also help with farmland and building purchases and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

To learn more about the FSA microloan program, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov/microloans](http://fsa.usda.gov/microloans).



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