USDA Offers Secure New Options for Signing and Sharing Documents Online

Farmers and ranchers working with USDA’s Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service can now sign and share documents online in just a few clicks. By using Box or OneSpan, producers can digitally complete business transactions without leaving their homes or agricultural operations. Both services are free, secure, and available for multiple FSA and NRCS programs.

Box is a secure, cloud-based site where FSA or NRCS documents can be managed and shared. Producers who choose to use Box can create a username and password to access their secure Box account, where documents can be downloaded, printed, manually signed, scanned, uploaded, and shared digitally with Service Center staff. This service is available to any FSA or NRCS customer with access to a mobile device or computer with printer connectivity.

OneSpan is a secure eSignature solution for FSA and NRCS customers. Like Box, no software downloads or eAuthentication is required for OneSpan. Instead, producers interested in eSignature through OneSpan can confirm their identity through two-factor authentication using a verification code sent to their mobile device or a personalized question and answer. Once identity is confirmed, documents can be reviewed and e-signed through OneSpan via the producer’s personal email address. Signed documents immediately become available to the appropriate Service Center staff.

Box and OneSpan are both optional services for customers interested in improved efficiency in signing and sharing documents with USDA, and they do not replace existing systems using eAuthentication for digital signature. Instead, these tools provide additional digital options for producers to use when conducting business with FSA or NRCS.

USDA Service Center staff are available to help producers get started with Box and OneSpan through a few simple steps. Please visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find your local office and let Service Center staff know you’re interested in signing and sharing documents through these new features. In most cases, one quick phone call will be all that is needed to initiate the process.
USDA Offers Additional Assistance for Certain Producers Through Coronavirus Food Assistance Program

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide additional assistance through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), expanding eligibility for some agricultural producers and commodities as well as updating payments to accurately compensate some producers who already applied for the program. Producers who are now eligible and those who need to modify existing applications due to these updates can contact USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) between Jan. 19 and Feb. 26. Some of these changes are being made to align with the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 while others are discretionary changes being made in response to ongoing evaluation of CFAP.

Background:

Expanded Eligibility for CFAP 2

Contract producers of swine, broilers, laying hens, chicken eggs and turkeys who suffered a drop in revenue in 2020 as compared to their 2019 revenue because of the pandemic now are eligible for assistance. Producers could receive up to 80% of their revenue loss, subject to the availability of funds.

Producers of pullets and turfgrass sod also now are eligible for CFAP payments. The commodities were not explicitly included in the initial CFAP 2 rule. Payments are based on eligible sales and the payment calculation in the updated rule includes crop insurance indemnities, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program – Plus (WHIP+) payments.

Updated Payment Calculations for CFAP 2

Similarly, FSA adjusted the payment calculation to use the producer’s eligible 2019 calendar year sales, and 2019 crop insurance indemnities, NAP, and WHIP+ payments, multiplied by the applicable payment rate for all sales commodities, which include specialty crops, aquaculture, tobacco, specialty livestock, nursery crops and floriculture, for CFAP 2. Producers who applied during the sign-up period that closed Dec. 11, 2020, can modify an existing CFAP 2 application between Jan. 19 and Feb. 26, 2021.

Additionally, FSA adjusted the payment calculation for certain row crops for CFAP 2, specifically those where a producer had crop insurance coverage but not an available 2020 Actual Production History (APH) approved yield. FSA is now using 100% of the 2019 Agriculture Risk Coverage-County Option (ARC-CO) benchmark yield to calculate payments when an APH is not available rather than 85%, which was in the original CFAP 2 calculations. This calculation changes only for producers with crop insurance coverage who grow barley, corn, sorghum, soybeans, sunflowers, upland cotton and wheat. Producers who applied during the sign-up period that closed Dec. 11, 2020, can modify an existing CFAP 2 application between Jan. 19 and Feb. 26, 2021.

CFAP 1 ‘Top-up’ Payments for Swine
FSA is providing an additional CFAP 1 inventory payment for swine to help producers who face continuing market disruptions from changes in U.S. meat consumption due to the pandemic. Swine producers with approved CFAP 1 applications will soon automatically receive a “top-up” payment of $17 per head increasing the total CFAP1 inventory payment to $34 per head.

More Information

Newly eligible producers can submit a new CFAP 2 application or producers who need to modify an existing one can do so between Jan. 19 and Feb. 26, 2021, by contacting their local USDA Service Center. New applicants can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364.

In addition to the changes being made to CFAP, per language in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, FSA will extend 2020 Marketing Assistance Loans to provide additional flexibilities for farmers. FSA is also preparing to move forward on implementation of the remaining provisions of the recently passed Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

To learn more about this additional assistance, visit farmers.gov/cfap.

Quality Loss Assistance Now Available for Eligible Producers Affected by 2018, 2019 Natural Disasters

Signup for the Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) Program started Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021. Funded by the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020, this new program provides assistance to producers who suffered eligible crop quality losses due to natural disasters occurring in 2018 and 2019. The deadline to apply for QLA is Friday, March 5, 2021.

Eligible Crops

Eligible crops include those for which federal crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage is available, except for grazed crops and value loss crops, such as honey, maple sap, aquaculture, floriculture, mushrooms, ginseng root, ornamental nursery, Christmas trees, and turfgrass sod.

Additionally, crops that were sold or fed to livestock or that are in storage may be eligible; however, crops that were destroyed before harvest are not eligible. Crop quality losses occurring after harvest, due to deterioration in storage, or that could have been mitigated, are also not eligible.

Assistance is based on a producer’s harvested affected production of an eligible crop, which must have had at least a 5% quality loss reflected through a quality discount; or for forage crops, a nutrient loss, such as total digestible nutrients.

Qualifying Disaster Events

Losses must have been a result of a qualifying disaster event (hurricane, excessive moisture, flood, qualifying drought, tornado, typhoon, volcanic activity, snowstorm, or wildfire) or related condition that occurred in calendar years 2018 and/or 2019.

Assistance is available for eligible producers in counties that received a qualifying Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or Secretarial Disaster Designation because of one or more of the qualifying disaster events or related conditions.

Lists of counties with Presidential Emergency Disaster Declarations and Secretarial Disaster Designations for all qualifying disaster events for 2018 and 2019 are available here. For drought, producers are eligible for QLA if the loss occurred in an area within a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D3 (extreme drought) or higher intensity level during 2018 or 2019.
Producers in counties that did not receive a qualifying declaration or designation may still apply but must also provide supporting documentation to establish that the crop was directly affected by a qualifying disaster event.

To determine QLA eligibility and payments, FSA considers the total quality loss caused by all qualifying natural disasters in cases where a crop was impacted by multiple events.

Applying for QLA

When applying, producers are asked to provide verifiable documentation to support claims of quality loss or nutrient loss in the case of forage crops. For crops that have been sold, grading must have been completed within 30 days of harvest, and for forage crops, a laboratory analysis must have been completed within 30 days of harvest.

Some acceptable forms of documentation include sales receipts from buyers, settlement sheets, truck or warehouse scale tickets, written sales contracts, similar records that represent actual and specific quality loss information, and forage tests for nutritional values.

Payments Calculations and Limitations

QLA payments are based on formulas for the type of crop (forage or non-forage) and loss documentation submitted. Based on this documentation FSA is calculating payments based on the producer’s own individual loss or based on the county average loss. More information on payments can be found on farmers.gov/quality-loss.

FSA will issue payments once the application period ends. If the total amount of calculated QLA payments exceeds available program funding, payments will be prorated.

For each crop year, 2018, 2019 and 2020, the maximum amount that a person or legal entity may receive, directly or indirectly, is $125,000. Payments made to a joint operation (including a general partnership or joint venture) will not exceed $125,000, multiplied by the number of persons and legal entities that comprise the ownership of the joint operation. A person or legal entity is ineligible for QLA payment if the person’s or legal entity’s average Adjusted Gross Income exceeds $900,000, unless at least 75% is derived from farming, ranching or forestry-related activities.

Future Insurance Coverage Requirements

All producers receiving QLA Program payments are required to purchase crop insurance or NAP coverage for the next two available crop years at the 60% coverage level or higher. Wildlife and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) participants who already met the WHIP+ requirement to purchase crop insurance or NAP coverage are considered to have thereby met the requirement to purchase crop insurance or NAP coverage for QLA. If eligible, QLA participants may meet the insurance purchase requirement by purchasing Whole-Farm Revenue Protection coverage offered through USDA’s Risk Management Agency.

More Information For more information, visit farmers.gov/quality-loss, or contact your local USDA Service Center. Producers can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling 877-508-8364.

USDA Seeks Members for Advisory Committee on Urban Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking members for a new advisory committee on urban agriculture, part of a broader effort to focus on the needs of urban farmers. The 12-person committee will advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural production practices as well as identify any barriers to urban agriculture.

USDA is seeking nominations for individuals representing a broad spectrum of expertise, including:

- Four agricultural producers (two agricultural producers in an urban area or urban cluster and two agricultural producers who use innovative technology).
- Two representatives from an institution of higher education or extension program.
Any interested person or organization may nominate qualified individuals for membership. Self-nominations are also welcome.

Nominations should include a cover letter, resume and a background form. Nomination packages must be submitted by mail or email by March 5, 2021. They should be addressed to Ronald Harris, Designated Federal Officer, Director of Outreach and Partnerships, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 6006-S, Washington, D.C. 20250, or emailed to Ronald.Harris@usda.gov.

The 2018 Farm Bill established the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production and directed USDA to form this advisory committee as well as make other advancements related to urban agriculture. It is led by the NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture. Its mission is to encourage and promote urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural practices, including community composting and food waste reduction. More information is available in this notice on the Federal Register or at farmers.gov/urban.

### 2021 Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs

**Election and Enrollment**

Agricultural producers can now make elections and enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2021 crop year. The signup period opened Tuesday, Oct. 13. These key USDA safety-net programs help producers weather fluctuations in either revenue or price for certain crop.

Enrollment for the 2021 crop year closes March 15, 2021.

ARC provides income support payments on historical base acres when actual crop revenue declines below a specified guaranteed level. PLC provides income support payments on historical base acres when the effective price for a covered commodity falls below its reference price.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

**2021 Elections and Enrollment**

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in crop-by-crop ARC-County or PLC, or ARC-Individual for the entire farm, for the 2021 crop year. Although election changes for 2021 are optional, enrollment (signed contract) is required for each year of the program. If a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2021, it will be necessary to sign a new contract.

If an election is not submitted by the deadline of March 15, 2021, the election defaults to the current election for crops on the farm from the prior crop year.

For crop years 2022 and 2023, producers will have an opportunity to make new elections during those signups. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the farm.

**Web-Based Decision Tools**
In partnership with USDA, the University of Illinois and Texas A&M University offer web-based decision tools to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Tools include:

- **Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator**, the University of Illinois tool that offers farmers the ability to run payment estimate modeling for their farms and counties for ARC-County and PLC.
- **ARC and PLC Decision Tool**, the Texas A&M tool allows producers to analyze payment yield updates and expected payments for 2021. Producers who have used the tool in the past should see their username and much of their farm data already available in the system.

**More Information**

For more information on ARC and PLC, including two online decision tools that assist producers in making enrollment and election decisions specific to their operations, visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#).

For additional questions and assistance, contact your local USDA service center. To locate your local FSA office, visit [farmers.gov/service-locator](#).

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**Commodity Loan Reminders on Quality & Grain Disposition**

**Maintaining the Quality of Farm-Stored Loan Grain**

Bins are ideally designed to hold a level volume of grain. When bins are overfilled and grain is heaped up, airflow is hindered and the chance of spoilage increases.

If you take out marketing assistance loans and use the farm-stored grain as collateral, remember that you are responsible for maintaining the quality of the grain through the term of the loan.

**Unauthorized Disposition of Grain Results in Financial Penalties**

If loan grain has been disposed of through feeding, selling or any other form of disposal without prior written authorization from the county office staff, it is considered unauthorized disposition. The financial penalties for unauthorized dispositions are severe and your name will be placed on a loan violation list for a two-year period. Always call before you haul any grain under loan.

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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 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 to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

For more information, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit farmers.gov.

Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be successful. FSA staff will provide guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower’s graduation to commercial credit. While it is FSA’s commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower’s responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses
- The development of problem situations
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security.

If a farm loan borrower can’t make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

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

Managed Forests Yield the Best Benefits

A tract of forestland has great potential, but it must be managed well to harness its full benefits. If your woodlands have grown unproductive or overcrowded, consider some simple management techniques like an occasional cutting or thinning to improve them. Improvements to forests are easy – and the best part is, trees typically respond quickly to management techniques.

Thinning is often performed when a forest is overstocked with trees. Cutting the excess trees allows the remaining trees and understory plants to prosper from more sun, water and space. Depending on local markets and the size of the trees, it may be possible to remove and sell the thinned trees to offset the cost of the operation.
Harvest cuttings are used to remove and market logs for profit. Depending on the type of forest you own and your objectives for it, you may want to consider periodic intermediate cuttings to remove some trees of marketable size. Final harvest cutting occurs when the bulk of trees in a stand are removed and sold. After cutting, make sure the land is replanted or has existing younger trees to continue the regeneration of the forest.

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service helps private landowners make their forests healthier through conservation activities, often called small woodlot improvement. In addition to these management techniques, NRCS helps landowners with other forest-related practices, such as using prescribed burning, installing fire lanes and establishing native grasses.

When land is managed well, it not only helps you, the landowner, but spurs other environmental benefits as well. For more information, contact the district conservationist at your local USDA Service Center at: USDA Service Center Locator.

Sign in/Sign up for an Online Account

Farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers have online options to access USDA programs. Through USDA’s new streamlined process, producers doing business as an individual can now register, track and manage some applications on the secure and convenient farmers.gov. Producers doing business as an individual first need to sign up for the Level 2 eAuthentication access. Currently USDA eAuthentication does not have the mechanism to issue accounts to businesses, corporations, other entities or for anyone acting on behalf of another individual or entity.

- Step 1: Create and online account at www.eauth.usda.gov
- Step 2: Complete identity verification by either using the online self-service identity verification method or by completing the identity verification in-person at your USDA Service Center.
- Step 3: You’re enrolled
- Step 4: Contact your local USDA Service Center to have your new Level 2 account linked with your USDA customer record
- Step 5: You’re ready to Log In

Or go to your local USDA Service Center and our supportive staff will help you sign up for Level 2 access while in the office. They will get you online so you can create an online account at farmers.gov/sign-in. You’ll complete identity verification on the spot. You’re enrolled! Users with a secure Level 2 eAuthentication ID linked to their USDA customer record can apply for select USDA programs, view and print farm maps and farm records data. Enrolling is easy! Visit farmers.gov/sign-in to learn more.

To locate a service center near you or use online services not requiring eAuthentication access, visit farmers.gov. For technical assistance, call the eAuthentication help des at 1-800-457-3642.

Dates to Remember

- **January 4 – February 12** – General CRP Signup
- **January 30** – Final Date to Submit Application for Payment for 2020 Losses under Livestock Forage Program (LFP)
- **January 30** – Final Date to Submit Application for Payment for 2020 Losses under Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)
- **January 31** – Deadline for Requesting 2020 Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP’s) for wool and unshorn lamb pelts
- **February 12** – Final Date to Submit Offer for General CRP
- **February 15** – Offices Closed – President’s Day
- **March 1** – Final Date to Submit Application for 2020 Losses under Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)
- **March 5** - Final Date to Apply for the Quality Loss Adjustment Program
- **March 15** – 2021 ARC-PLC Election and Enrollment Deadline
- **March 15 – April 23** – CRP Grasslands Signup
March 31 – Final date to obtain Commodity Loans or Loan Deficiency Payments on 2020 harvested small grains
Ongoing - Signup for Continuous CRP
Ongoing – Submit an Application for a Farm Storage Facility Loan
Continuous - Signup for Local County Office FSA Text Alerts
Continuous – Sign up for GovDelivery (https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFSA/subscriber/new/)

January 2021 Interest Rates

Price Support Loans

Commodity Loans – 1.125%

Farm Storage Facility Loans

Farm Storage Facility Loan, 3 year -- 0.250%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 5 year -- 0.375%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 7 year -- 0.625%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 10 year -- 0.875%
Farm Storage Facility Loan, 12 year -- 1.000%

FSFL Microloans are also available for the 3, 5, and 7 year terms at the 3, 5, and 7 year term rates for a maximum aggregated loan amount of $50,000 and at a reduced down payment of 5% (regular FSFL loans require 15% down and have a maximum loan amount of $500,000).

Farm Loans

Farm Operating Loan, Direct -- 1.3750%
Farm Ownership Loan, Direct -- 2.500%
Farm Ownership Loan, Direct, Joint-Financing -- 2.500%
Limited Resource Loans -- 5.000%
Farm Ownership Loans, Down Payment -- 1.500%
Emergency Loans -- 2.375%

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).