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## First Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production to Take Place March 23-24, 2022

**The public is encouraged to attend and submit comments by March 18, 2022**

USDA will host the first public meeting of the inaugural Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on March 23-24, 2022. The public – including urban producers– is encouraged to attend.

The new federal advisory committee is part of USDA's efforts to support urban agriculture, creating a network for feedback. [Members were announced](#) last month, and include agricultural producers, and representatives from the areas of higher education or extension programs, non-profits, business and economic development, supply chains and financing.

### About the Meeting

USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production is coordinating the meeting, which runs from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. ET on March 23 and 24, 2022. To attend, [register by March 18, 2022](#).

At the meeting, committee members will discuss administrative matters and consult on the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Urban, Indoor and Emerging Agriculture grants.

Members of the public who wish to submit comments or questions related to urban agriculture may submit them via [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).

Comments must be submitted by March 18, 2022.

For special accommodations, please contact Leslie Glover at (602) 395-9536 or [UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov](mailto:UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov).

Additional details are available in the [Federal Register notice](#) and online at [farmers.gov/urban](http://farmers.gov/urban) or on the [committee's webpage](#).

### USDA and Urban Agriculture

The Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production is part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture. Other efforts include:

- Grants that target areas of food access, education, business and start-up costs for new farmers, and policy development related to zoning and other urban production needs.
- Cooperative agreements that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans.
- Investing \$260,000 for risk management training and crop insurance education for historically underserved and urban producers through partnerships between USDA's [Risk Management Agency](#) (RMA) and the University of Maryland, University of Connecticut, and Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.
- Providing technical and financial assistance through conservation programs offered by USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS).
- Organizing 11 [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) urban and suburban county committees. FSA will organize additional committees.

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by 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 at [farmers.gov/urban](http://farmers.gov/urban) and the new Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production website at [www.usda.gov/partnerships/advisory-committee-urban-ag-innovative-production](http://www.usda.gov/partnerships/advisory-committee-urban-ag-innovative-production).

Additional resources that may be of interest to urban agriculture entities include grants from USDA's [Agricultural Marketing Service](#) and [National Institute of Food and Agriculture](#) as well as [FSA loans](#).

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## USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

### Improvements Are Part of USDA's Commitment to Increase Equity in All Programs

USDA is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

## Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the Federal Register](#).

## More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) (also available in Spanish) or by contacting 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. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

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## Indiana Farm Service Agency State Office

5981 Lakeside Blvd  
Indianapolis IN 46278

Phone: 317-290-3315  
Fax: 855-374-4066

**Susan Houston**  
Acting State Executive Director  
[susan.houston@usda.gov](mailto:susan.houston@usda.gov)

**Kala Nicholson-Cline**  
Acting Farm Loan Programs Chief  
[kala.nicholson-cline@usda.gov](mailto:kala.nicholson-cline@usda.gov)

**Joshua Oren**  
**Administrative Officer**  
[joshua.oren@usda.gov](mailto:joshua.oren@usda.gov)

**Susan Houston**  
**Price Support/Disaster Program Chief**  
[susan.houston@usda.gov](mailto:susan.houston@usda.gov)

**Stephanie Alexander**  
**Conservation/Compliance Program Chief**  
[stephanie.alexander@usda.gov](mailto:stephanie.alexander@usda.gov)

**Susan Houston**  
**Acting Production Adjustment Program Chief**  
[susan.houston@usda.gov](mailto:susan.houston@usda.gov)

**Susan Houston**  
**Acting State Committee**  
[susan.houston@usda.gov](mailto:susan.houston@usda.gov)

[Indiana Farm Service Agency](#)  
[Service Center Locator](#)