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From the FSA State Executive Director

Welcome to Spring!

Looking forward to all the maple products and extra daylight that come with it.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack signed a Secretarial Drought Disaster Designation on March 6, 2023 for Merrimack, Belknap and Grafton counties on the basis of documented crop losses in those counties. This designation, along with previous drought declarations in 2022, opens up emergency loan and loan set-aside availability in all 10 NH counties for producers meeting eligibility requirements. Seven counties have been named as primary drought counties and three qualify for the loan assistance as contiguous counties. Check with your local FSA farm loan office for details.

NH has never been thought of as prime drought territory like the desert Southwest, but in the first 20 years of this century, NH has experienced a drought in 11 of those years. The rate of “major” drought is trending higher in the most recent decade as well. For many producers, irrigation equipment is rapidly “pivoting” from a luxury to a necessity. A number of projects

supported by the Biden-Harris Administration focus on climate-smart practices that will make ag production more resilient in the face of our changing environment. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) makes an unprecedented investment in existing FSA and NRCS programs to meet the challenges US agriculture faces.

USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup starting **February 27 through April 7, 2023**. CRP is a cornerstone voluntary conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris administration's effort to address climate change and help agricultural communities invest in the long-term well-being of their land and natural resources.

Producers and landowners enrolled more than 5 million acres into CRP through signups in 2022, building on the acceptance of more than 3.1 million acres in the [largest Grassland CRP signup in history](#). There are currently 23 million acres enrolled in CRP, with 1.9 million set to expire this year. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is aiming to reach the 27-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2023.

General CRP

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. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

Continuous CRP

Under Continuous CRP, producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR30), the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watershed, has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices. Under this administration, FSA also moved SAFE practices back to the Continuous CRP signup, giving producers and landowners more opportunities to participate in the initiative. Through the FWP, producers and landowners can

enroll land in CRP as part of their efforts to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, to improve both vegetation and water flow.

This administration has also made significant improvements to CREP, which leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific State, regional or nationally significant conservation concerns. Specifically, USDA made significant improvements to CREP to reduce barriers and make the program more accessible to a broad range of producers and new types of partners.

These updates included flexibility for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, along with an investment in additional staff to work directly with partners. Through CREP, for the first time ever, three Tribal Nations are now partnering with USDA to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Grassland CRP

FSA will announce the dates for Grassland CRP signup in the coming weeks. 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.

How to Sign Up

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

More Information

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.

New Hampshire Producers Urged to Consider NAP Risk Protection Coverage Before Crop Sales Deadlines

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages you to review available USDA crop risk protection options, including federal crop insurance and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage, before the crop deadline of March 15th.

Federal crop insurance covers crop losses from natural adversities such as drought, hail and excessive moisture. NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available.

The following crops in New Hampshire have a NAP application deadline of March 15: Most annual fruits and vegetables.

You can determine if crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP by visiting the [RMA website](#).

NAP offers higher levels of coverage, from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Producers of organics and crops marketed directly to consumers also may exercise the “buy-up” option to obtain NAP coverage of 100 percent of the average market price at the coverage levels of between 50 and 65 percent of expected production. NAP basic coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production.

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

If a producer has a Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification (Form CCC-860) on file with FSA, it may serve as an application for basic coverage for all eligible crops beginning with crop year 2022 and all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage will be waived for these producers.

Federal crop insurance coverage is sold and delivered solely through private insurance agents. Agent lists are available at all USDA Service Centers or at [USDA's online Agent Locator](#). You can use the [USDA Cost Estimator](#) to predict insurance premium costs.

For more information on NAP, service fees, sales deadlines, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Malted Grains and Maple Syrup Eligible for Farm Storage Facility Loans

Malted small grains and maple syrup are now eligible for Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL) through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

FSFLs provide low-interest financing to help you build or upgrade storage facilities and to purchase portable (new or used) structures, equipment and storage and handling trucks.

Eligible malted small grains include barley, oats, rice, rye and wheat. Maple sap is used to produce maple syrup.

The low-interest funds can be used for:

- bottler or filling systems for maple syrup, excluding containers
- equipment to improve, maintain, or monitor the quality of stored FSFL commodities, such as cleaners, moisture testers, heat detectors, along with a proposed storage facility
- handling and drying equipment determined by the County Committee to be needed and essential to the proper functioning of a storage system
- electrical equipment, such as pumps, lighting, motors, and wiring, integral to the proper operation of the storage and handling equipment, excluding installing electric service to the electrical meter.

FSFLs are not available for the actual processing of the small grain into the malted commodity or maple sap into maple syrup. Additionally, purchased commodities are not eligible for FSFLs.

The following storage and handling equipment is ineligible for FSFLs:

- boiling equipment
- feed handling and processing equipment
- production and feed facilities
- structures of a temporary nature not having a useful life of the term of the loan
- maple sap tubing and pumping systems.

Loans up to \$50,000 can be secured by a promissory note/security agreement, loans between \$50,000 and \$100,000 may require additional security, and loans exceeding \$100,000 require additional security.

You do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply. The loans are designed to assist a diverse range of farming operations, including small and mid-sized businesses, new farmers, operations supplying local food and farmers markets, non-traditional farm products, and underserved producers.

For more information, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport.

FSA Can Help with On-Farm Propane Storage

Winter months in New Hampshire can be long and cold, and for several years, farmers have faced propane storage shortages. FSA's [Farm Storage Facility Loan \(FSFL\) program](#) provides funding for on-farm liquified petroleum tanks.

FSFL low-interest financing can be used to build or upgrade storage facilities and to purchase portable (new or used) structures, equipment, storage and handling trucks. Liquified petroleum tanks are covered for eligible commodities for the use of fuel for grain dryer equipment.

Loans up to \$50,000 can be secured by a promissory note/security agreement, while loans exceeding \$100,000 require additional security.

You do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply. The loans are designed to assist a diverse range of farming operations, including conventional operations, small and mid-sized businesses, new farmers, operations supplying local food and farmers markets, non-traditional farm products, and underserved producers.

To learn more about FSFLs and how these loans can help with your on-site propane tank storage needs, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Expands Eligibility, Enhances Benefits for Key Disaster Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) made updates to several conservation, livestock and crop disaster assistance programs to give more farmers, ranchers, and tribes the opportunity to apply for and access programs that support recovery following natural disasters. Specifically, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) expanded eligibility and enhanced available benefits for a suite of its programs. These updates will provide critical assistance to producers who need to rebuild and recover after suffering catastrophic losses of production and infrastructure due to natural disasters.

FSA has updated the following programs: The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP), the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Conservation Disaster Assistance Updates FSA updated ECP to:

- Allow producers who lease Federally owned or managed lands, including tribal trust land, as well as State land the opportunity to participate.
- Provide advance payments, up to 25% of the cost, for all ECP practices before the restoration is carried out, an option that was previously only available for fence repair or replacement. The cost-share payment must be spent within 60 days.

Additionally, Congress also authorized the Federal government to pay 100% of the ECP and EFRP cost for damage associated with the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire in New Mexico. This fire burned over 340,000 acres from April 2022 to June 2022 and was the largest wildfire in recorded history in New Mexico. ECP and EFRP cost-share assistance is typically capped

at 75%. This policy change for 100% cost-share applies only to those locations impacted by the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire.

ECP and EFRP provide financial and technical assistance to restore conservation practices like fencing, damaged farmland or forests.

Livestock Disaster Assistance Updates

FSA also expanded eligible livestock under ELAP, LFP and LIP. Specifically, horses maintained on eligible grazing land are eligible for ELAP, LFP and LIP. Many family farms and ranches use their forage to raise horses to augment their other agriculture endeavors. FSA recognizes that animals maintained in a commercial agriculture operation, add value to the operation and could be available for marketing from the farm. FSA regulations have been updated to include these animals as eligible livestock

Horses and other animals that are used or intended to be used for racing and wagering remain ineligible.

Ostriches are also now eligible for LFP and ELAP. FSA is making this change because ostriches satisfy more than 50% of their net energy requirement through the consumption of growing forage grasses and legumes and are therefore considered "grazing animals."

This change for ostriches is effective for the 2022 program year for both LFP and ELAP. ELAP requires a notice of loss to be filed with FSA within 30 days of when the loss is first apparent. Because this deadline may have passed for 2022, FSA is extending the deadline for filing notices of loss through March 31, 2023.

LIP and ELAP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage. LFP provides benefits for grazing losses due to drought and eligible wildfires on federally managed lands.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance

NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters. Basic NAP coverage is equivalent to the catastrophic level risk protection plan of insurance coverage, which is based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50% of expected production at 55% of the average market price for the crop.

Previously, to be eligible for NAP coverage, a producer had to submit an application (Form CCC-471) for NAP coverage on or before the application closing date. For 2022, if a producer has a *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification* (Form CCC-860) on file with FSA, it will serve as an application for basic coverage for all eligible crops having a 2022 application closing date and all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage will be waived for these producers.

FSA will notify all eligible producers who already have the CCC-860 certification form on file of their eligibility for NAP basic coverage for 2022. To potentially receive NAP assistance, producers who suffered losses due to natural disasters in 2022 should file an acreage report as well as a notice of loss with the FSA at their local Service Center.

Producers who are interested in obtaining NAP coverage for 2023 and subsequent years should also contact their local FSA county office for information on eligibility, coverage options and applying for coverage.

Reporting Losses

Producers impacted by a natural disaster should report losses and damages and file an application with their [FSA county office](#). Timelines for reporting losses and applying for payments differ by program.

For LIP and ELAP, producers will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For LFP, producers must provide a completed application for payment and required supporting documentation to their FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the grazing loss occurred.

For NAP, producers should contact their local FSA office for guidelines on submitting a notice of loss and filing an acreage certification.

More Information

The updates to these programs build on other Biden-Harris administration efforts to improve disaster assistance programs, including additional flexibility in obtaining Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) basic coverage for socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource and veteran farmers and ranchers.

Previous enhancement to the ELAP provide program benefits to producers of fish raised for food and other aquaculture species as well as cover above normal expenses for transporting livestock to forage and grazing acres and transport feed to livestock impacted by qualifying drought. And earlier updates to the LIP payment rates better reflect the true market value of non-adult beef, beefalo, bison and dairy animals.

Yesterday, FSA announced it would begin accepting applications for the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase Two and the new Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) on Jan. 23, 2023, through June 2, 2023. ERP Phase Two is designed to fill gaps in the delivery of program benefits not covered in ERP Phase One and improves equity in program delivery to underserved producers. PARP will help address gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses. Learn more in the [Jan. 9, 2023 news release](#).

Additional Resources

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 program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, contact the local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a simplified direct loan application to provide improved customer experience for producers applying for loans from the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The simplified direct loan application enables producers to complete a more streamlined application, reduced from 29 to 13 pages. Producers will also have the option to complete an electronic fillable form or prepare a traditional, paper application for submission to their local FSA farm loan office. The paper and electronic versions of the form will be available starting March 1, 2023.

Approximately 26,000 producers submit a direct loan application to the FSA annually, but there is a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. Coupled with the Loan Assistance Tool released in October 2022, the simplified application will provide all loan applicants access to information regarding the application process and assist them with gathering the correct documents before they begin the process. This new application will help farmers and ranchers submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete, rejected, or withdrawn applications.

In October 2022, USDA launched the Loan Assistance Tool, an online step-by-step guide that provides materials to help an applicant prepare their farm loan application in one tool. Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser. A version compatible with mobile devices is expected to be available by the summer. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

The simplified direct loan application and Loan Assistance Tool are the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:

- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA took action in October 2022 to [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](#) while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.

Soon, all direct loan borrowers will receive a letter from USDA describing the circumstances under which additional payments will be made to distressed borrowers and how they can work with their FSA local office to discuss these options. Producers can explore all available

options on all FSA loan options at fsa.usda.gov or by contacting their [local USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new online tool to help farmers and ranchers better navigate the farm loan application process. This uniform application process will help to ensure all farm loan applicants receive equal support and have a consistent customer experience with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) regardless of their individual circumstances.

USDA experiences a high rate of incomplete or withdrawn applications, particularly among underserved customers, due in part to a challenging and lengthy paper-based application process. The Loan Assistance Tool is available 24/7 and gives customers an online step-by-step guide that supplements the support they receive when working in person with a USDA employee, providing materials that may help an applicant prepare their loan application in one tool.

Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button. From here they can follow the prompts to complete the Eligibility Self-Assessment and start the farm loan journey. 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.

The Loan Assistance Tool is the first of multiple farm loan process improvements that will be available to USDA customers on farmers.gov in the future. Other improvements and tools that are anticipated to launch in 2023 include:

- A streamlined and simplified direct loan application, reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- An interactive online direct loan application that gives customers a paperless and electronic signature option, along with the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns.
- An online direct loan repayment feature that relieves borrowers from the necessity of calling, mailing, or visiting a local Service Center to pay a loan installment.

Background

USDA provides access to credit to approximately 115,000 producers who cannot obtain sufficient commercial credit through direct and guaranteed farm loans. With the funds and direction Congress provided in Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA is taking action to immediately [provide relief to qualifying distressed borrowers](#) whose operations are at financial risk while working on making transformational changes to loan servicing so that

borrowers are provided the flexibility and opportunities needed to address the inherent risks and unpredictability associated with agricultural operations.

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