



In This Issue:

- [Message from the State Executive Director: Bob Etheridge](#)
- [Still time to respond to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, USDA to follow up with producers who have not yet responded](#)
- [Agricultural Producers Have Until March 15 to Enroll in USDA's Key Commodity Safety Net Programs](#)
- [USDA Encourages Rice Farmers to Prepare for new Rice Production Program](#)
- [Rolling Out Revenue Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs](#)
- [USDA Supports Military Veteran's Transition to Farming](#)
- [Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers](#)
- [USDA Develops Simplified Direct Loan Application to Improve Customer Service](#)
- [USDA Offers Farmers.gov Features to Help Farmers Hire Workers](#)
- [USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023](#)
- [USDA Reminds Farmers, Ranchers and Forest Managers of Approaching Deadline for Prospective Customer Survey](#)
- [Upcoming Events](#)
- [Find Your Local FSA Service Center](#)

Message from the State Executive Director: Bob Etheridge



Greetings, FSA Friends!

Spring is right around the corner, and I look forward to the wonderful changes this time of the year brings.

This month's newsletter is packed with essential information - approaching deadlines, new program opportunities, and upcoming events. For the producers who were unaware, for example, March 15 is the last day to elect and enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs. So please, read through all the material.

You will also notice we've included information from our sister agencies, one being the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The agency has extended the 2022 Census of Agriculture deadline and will continue to accept census questionnaires

through the spring. Your participation is critical because it demonstrates to the nation the value and importance of agriculture and has an influence on the decisions that shape our agriculture's future.

Lastly, I want to thank the producers and ranchers who have shared their farming journeys with our agency. Your stories about the positive impacts our programs and services have had on your farming operations, whether to begin, expand, or restart, are why we strive to provide you with the best resources to help your farm thrive and succeed. Please continue to share your stories with us by contacting [Linda Geron](#), our state outreach and public affairs coordinator.

Thank you for being a part of the FSA family, and I wish you a joyous spring!

Bob Etheridge, SED

Still time to respond to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, USDA to follow up with producers who have not yet responded



Farmers and ranchers still have time to be counted in the 2022 Census of Agriculture, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Although the deadline for submitting the ag census has just passed, NASS will continue to accept completed census questionnaires through the spring to ensure all farmers and ranchers take advantage of the opportunity to be represented in the widely used data.

"We thank everyone who has completed their census to date. Since data collection began last fall, over a million ag census recipients across the country have returned their questionnaires, ensuring their operations and communities are represented," said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer. "We want all producers to use their voices to help shape the future of American agriculture. Census data inform decisions about policy, farm and conservation programs, infrastructure and rural development, research, education, and more. The stronger the response, the stronger the data. It's not too late for farmers to be heard through the ag census, which occurs only once every five years."

NASS will continue to follow up with producers through the spring with mailings, phone calls, and personal visits. Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to complete their ag census either online at agcounts.usda.gov or by mail as soon as possible. The online questionnaire is accessible on desktop, laptop, and other mobile devices.

Federal law under Title 7 USC 2204(g) Public Law 105-113 mandates that everyone who received the 2022 Census of Agriculture questionnaire complete and return it, even if they are not currently farming. The same law requires NASS to keep all submissions confidential, use the information for statistical purposes only, and publish aggregate data to prevent disclosing the identity of any individual producer or farm operation.

NASS will release the results of the ag census in early 2024. To learn more about the Census of Agriculture, visit agcounts.usda.gov. On the website, producers and other data users can access frequently asked questions, past ag census data, special study information, and more. For highlights of these and the latest information, follow USDA NASS on Twitter at [@usda_nass](https://twitter.com/usda_nass).

Agricultural Producers Have Until March 15 to Enroll in USDA's Key Commodity Safety Net Programs

Agricultural producers who have not yet enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2023 crop year have until **March 15, 2023**, to elect and enroll a contract. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers these two safety net programs to provide vital income support to farmers experiencing substantial declines in crop prices or revenues.

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County or PLC, which are both commodity-by-commodity, or ARC-Individual, which covers the entire farm. Although election changes for 2023 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Additionally, if a producer has a multi-year contract on their farm and makes an election change for 2023, they will need to sign a new contract.

If producers do not submit an election by the March 15, 2023, deadline, the election remains the same as the 2022 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the commodity.

In North Carolina, producers have completed 49,139 contracts to date, representing 80% of the more than 60 thousand expected contracts.

Producers who do not complete enrollment by the deadline will not be enrolled in ARC or PLC for the 2023 year and will not receive a payment if triggered.

Producers are eligible to enroll farms with base acres for the following commodities: 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.

Decision Tools

In partnership with USDA, two web-based decision tools are available to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations:

- [Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator](#), a tool available through the University of Illinois allows producers to estimate payments for farms and counties for ARC-CO and PLC.
- [ARC and PLC Decision Tool](#), a tool available through Texas A&M University that allows producers to estimate payments and yield updates and expected payments for 2023.

Crop Insurance Considerations and Decision Deadline

ARC and PLC are part of a broader safety net provided by USDA, which also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans. Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider. However, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

Producers should contact their crop insurance agent to make certain that the election and enrollment made at FSA follows their intention to participate in STAX or SCO coverage. Producers have until March 15, 2023, to make the appropriate changes or cancel their ARC or PLC contract.

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their [local USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Encourages Rice Farmers to Prepare for new Rice Production Program



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today previewed plans to provide up to [\\$250 million in assistance](#) to rice farmers and what steps they can take to be prepared to sign up when the program is released later this spring. USDA is sharing information early so producers can prepare for program signup, which will include a pre-filled application in an effort to simplify and streamline the application process.

On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law H.R. 2617, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, which provided the authority and funding for USDA to make payments to rice producers based on data already on file with the USDA, including planted acres and acres prevented from being planted.

What Farmers Can Do Now

The full details of the program and application will not be available until after a Notice of Funding Availability is published later this year in the Federal Register. But there is something farmers can do right now to be better prepared for the signup, if they qualify for a higher payment limitation.

The payment limitation for the program is set by law and is higher if the farmer's average adjusted gross farm income (income from activities related to farming, ranching, or forestry) is more than 75% of their average adjusted gross income (AGI). Specifically, a person or legal entity with adjusted gross farm income of less than 75% of their overall AGI, cannot receive, directly or indirectly, more than \$125,000 in payments. AGI is based on the three taxable years preceding the most immediately preceding complete tax year. Farmers with 75% or more AGI from farming qualify for a \$250,000 payment limit.

Rice farmers may visit their local county office to submit the appropriate form and certification (FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs*), if they qualify for and want to seek the higher payment limit and get part of the paperwork done early. Farmers will still have a chance to fill out the AGI form during signup as well. The form should be filled out for the 2022 crop year.

Planned Application Process

After the official notice is published later this year, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) plans to mail prefilled applications to producers using information on file with USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) or FSA, as reported by rice producers through their crop insurance agents or FSA county office. This streamlined application process will reduce the burden on producers and minimize errors due to manual data entries on the application form. More information will be provided when FSA announces the signup period in the coming weeks.

Program Payments

As directed by the omnibus legislation, FSA will calculate Rice Production Program (RPP) payments by multiplying the payment rate, individual average actual production history (APH), as reported to RMA, or county yield and an amount of certified rice acres determined by the number of planted acres and acres that were prevented from being planted. FSA plans to issue an initial payment to eligible farmers soon after applications are returned and a final payment after the sign-up has closed. Details on these procedures and the initial payment rate will be in the future notice.

Rolling Out Revenue Based Disaster and Pandemic Assistance Programs



As of January 23, 2023, agricultural producers can apply for two new important programs for revenue losses, from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. Both programs equitably fill gaps in earlier assistance.

First, you may be eligible for assistance through the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) Phase Two if you experienced revenue losses from eligible natural disasters in 2020 and 2021.

You may also be eligible for the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#) if you experienced revenue losses in calendar year 2020. PARP is addressing gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

Applications for both new programs are due **June 2, 2023**, and you can apply for both programs during your same appointment with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Historically, FSA programs have been designed to make direct payments to producers based on a single disaster event or for a single commodity loss. For many of you, this may be the first revenue-based program that you've applied for with FSA.

Why revenue-based programs?

ERP Phase Two and PARP take a much more holistic approach to disaster assistance, ensuring that producers not just make it through a single growing season but have the financial stability to invest in the long-term well-being of their operations and employees.

In general, ERP Phase Two payments are based on the difference in allowable gross revenue between a benchmark year, representing a typical year of revenue for the producer and the disaster year – designed to target the remaining needs of producers impacted by qualifying natural disasters and avoid duplicative payments. ERP Phase Two revenue loss is based on tax years.

For PARP, an agricultural producer must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a decrease in revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to a typical year. PARP revenue loss is based on calendar years.

How to Apply

In preparation for enrollment, producers should gather supporting documentation including:

- Schedule F (Form 1040); and
- *Profit or Loss from Farming* or similar tax documents for tax years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 for ERP and for calendar years 2018, 2019 and 2020 for PARP.

Producers should also have, or be prepared to have, the following forms on file for both ERP and PARP program participation:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet* (as applicable to the program participant);
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity;
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable); and
- Form AD-1026 *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*.
- Form CCC-860, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, as certain existing permanent and ad-hoc disaster programs provide increased benefits or reduced fees and premiums.

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 should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

Yes, FSA is stepping outside of the box.

FSA is a big proponent of agricultural producers having a say in the design, implementation and delivery of the programs that directly impact their livelihoods. We also believe that some of the most creative and useful ideas for program and process improvements come from the FSA employees who administer this assistance through our network of more than 2,100 county offices. We want to thank producers across the country, along with the entire FSA workforce, for not just thinking outside of the box but also providing their input to make sure that we can improve and enhance our programs and our approach to assistance to better and more efficiently serve all producers who need our help.

Please visit your local USDA Service Center for more information on ERP Phase Two, PARP and our full portfolio of conservation, prices support, safety-net, credit and disaster assistance programs.

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](#).

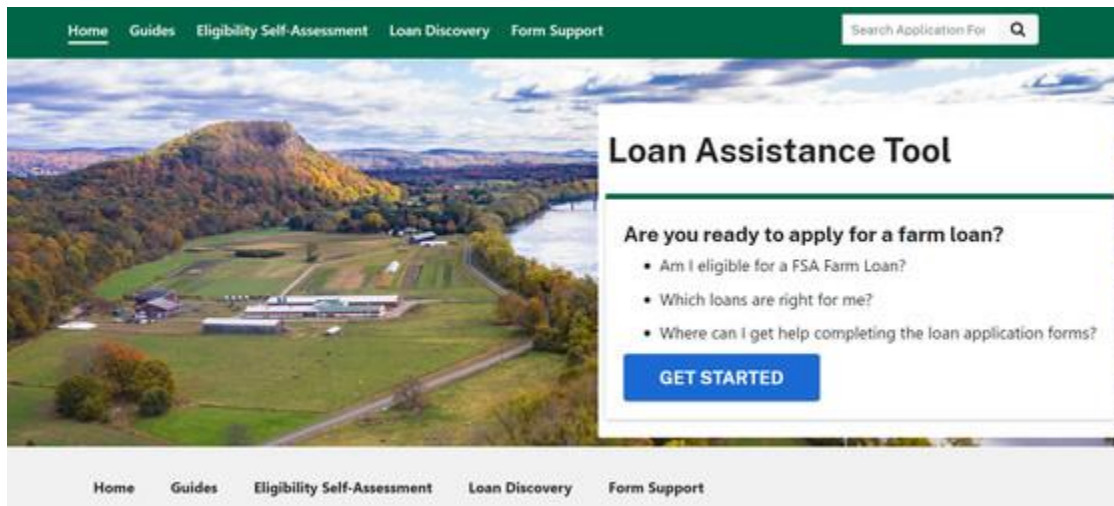
USDA wants to ensure that veterans transitioning to agriculture have the resources needed to succeed. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA Service Center. If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to [William Ferris](#), the North Carolina Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator, at william.ferris@usda.gov.

Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers

A multi-agency guide for USDA assistance for underserved farmers and ranchers is now available. If you are a farmer or rancher and are a minority, woman, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producer, you can use this booklet to learn about assistance and targeted opportunities available to you. This includes programs offered through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. [Download the guide here](#). The guide is also available in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese on farmers.gov/translations.



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 Offers Farmers.gov Features to Help Farmers Hire Workers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers features on the farmers.gov website designed to help facilitate the employment of H-2A workers.

USDA's goal is to help farmers navigate the complex H-2A program that is administered by Department of Labor, Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department so hiring a farm worker is an easier process.

The primary new H-2A features on Farmers.gov include:

- A real-time dashboard that enables farmers to track the status of their eligible employer application and visa applications for temporary nonimmigrant workers;
- Streamlining the login information so if a farmer has an existing login.gov account they can save multiple applications tracking numbers for quick look-up at any time;
- Enables easy access to the Department of Labor's (DOL) Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG);
- Allows farmers to track time-sensitive actions taken in the course of Office of Foreign Labor Certification's (OFLC) adjudication of temporary labor certification applications;
- Allowing for farmers to access all application forms on-line.

All information can be found at www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a.

In 2018, USDA unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where customers can apply for programs, process transactions and manage accounts. With feedback from customers and field employees who serve those customers, farmers.gov delivers farmer-focused features through an agile, iterative process to deliver the greatest immediate value to America's agricultural producers – helping farmers and ranchers do right, and feed everyone.

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.

USDA Reminds Farmers, Ranchers and Forest Managers of Approaching Deadline for Prospective Customer Survey



Are you a farmer, rancher or forest manager? Please share your vital feedback with USDA by taking a nationwide survey at farmers.gov/survey! The survey is completely anonymous, will take about 10 minutes to complete, is available in multiple languages, and will be open until **March 31, 2023**. The survey focuses on gathering feedback about

the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Risk Management Agency.

All farmers, ranchers and forest managers are encouraged to take the survey. USDA would especially like to hear from prospective customers: those who don't know about USDA or have yet to work with USDA, and those who were unable to participate in the past. The survey will help USDA enhance support, improve programs and services, increase access, and advance equity for new and existing customers.

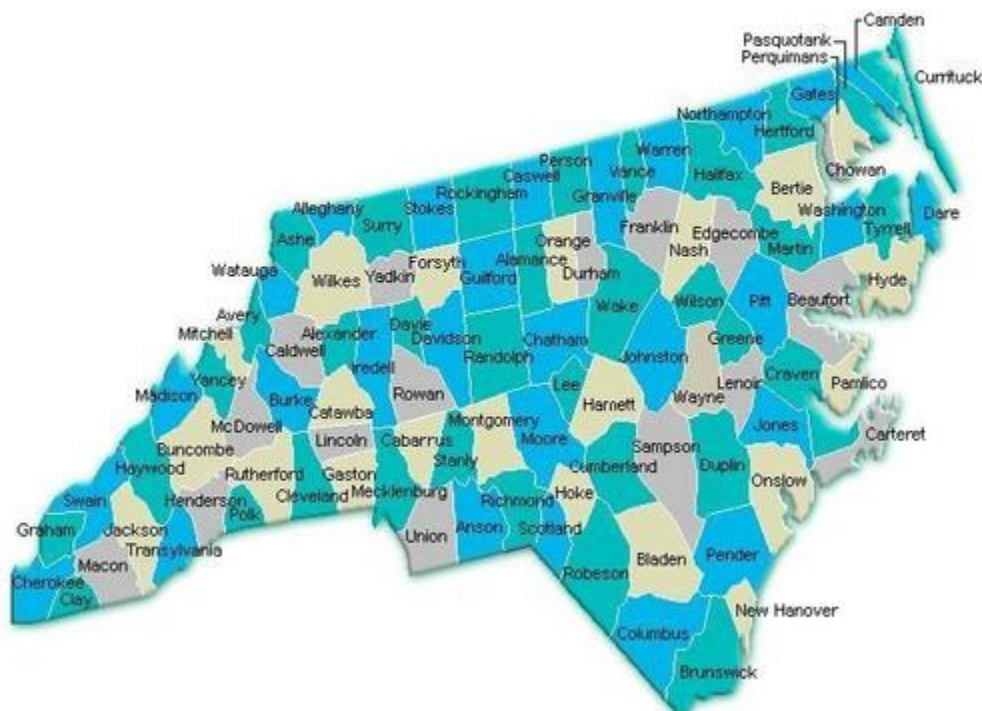
Upcoming Events

- March 14: FSA Conservation Reserve Program Presentation with the [Sustainable Forestry & Land Retention Project](#) at The Maxwell Center, 3114 Wayne Memorial Drive, Goldsboro
- March 25: FSA Booth at the [2023 Chatham County Spring Ag Fest](#) inside the Chatham County Agriculture & Conference Center, 1192 US 64 W Business, Pittsboro
- March 31: FSA Conservation Reserve Program Presentation with the [Sustainable Forestry & Land Retention Project](#) at Halifax Community College, 100 College Drive, Bldg. 400, Weldon
- March 28: General FSA Programs and Loans Presentation at [North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University](#) at the CAES Extension and Research Farm Pavilion, 3020 McConnell Road, Greensboro

Find Your Local FSA Service Center

Farm Service Agency

North Carolina Counties



Need help locating your local FSA service center? Too easy!

The USDA Service Centers website will provide the address of a USDA Service Center and other Agency offices serving your area, along with information on how to contact them. Click on the image above to take you to the locator website or visit [USDA Service Center Locator](#).

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