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Puerto Rico FSA Newsletter

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Dairy Producers Can Enroll to Protect Milk Production Margins

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Puerto Rico announced that dairy producers can enroll for 2017 coverage in the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy) starting July 1. The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating dairy producers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the producer.

The Margin Protection Program gives participating dairy producers the flexibility to select coverage levels best suited for their operation. Enrollment began July 1 and ends on Sept. 30, 2016, for coverage in calendar year 2017. Participating

To find contact information for your local office go to www.fsa.usda.gov/pr

farmers will remain in the program through 2018 and pay a minimum \$100 administrative fee each year. Producers have the option of selecting a different coverage level during open enrollment each year.

USDA has a web tool to help producers determine the level of coverage under the Margin Protection Program that will provide them with the strongest safety net under a variety of conditions. The online resource, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool, allows dairy farmers to quickly and easily combine unique operation data and other key variables to calculate their coverage needs based on price projections. Producers can also review historical data or estimate future coverage needs, based on data projections. The secure site can be accessed via computer, Smartphone or tablet 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To complete enrollment, producers must make coverage elections during the enrollment period and pay the annual \$100 administrative fee that provides basic catastrophic protection that covers 90 percent of milk production at a \$4 margin coverage level. For additional premiums, operations can protect 25 to 90 percent of production history with margin coverage levels from \$4.50 to \$8, in 50 cent increments. Once enrolled, dairy operations are required to participate through 2018 by making coverage elections each year. Producers can mail the appropriate form to the producer's administrative county FSA office, along with applicable fees without necessitating a trip to the local FSA office. If electing higher coverage for 2017, dairy producers can either pay the premium in full at the time of enrollment or pay 100 percent of the premium by Sept. 1, 2017. Premium fees may be paid directly to FSA or producers can work with their milk handlers to remit premiums on their behalf.

Also beginning July 1, 2016, FSA will begin accepting applications for intergenerational transfers, allowing program participants who added an adult child, grandchild or spouse to the operation during calendar year 2014 or 2015, or between Jan. 1 and June 30, 2016, to increase production history by the new cows bought into the operation by the new family members. For intergenerational transfers occurring on or after July 1, 2016, notification to FSA must be made within 60 days of purchasing the additional cows.

Dairy operations enrolling in the new program must meet conservation compliance provisions and cannot participate in the Livestock Gross Margin Dairy Insurance Program.

For more information, visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy or stop by a local FSA office to learn more about the Margin Protection Program. To find a local FSA office in your area, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Filing a Notice of Loss

The CCC-576, Notice of Loss, is used to report failed acreage and prevented planting and may be completed by any producer with an interest in the crop. Timely filing a Notice of Loss is required for all crops including grasses. For losses on crops covered by the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), you must file a CCC-576, Notice of Loss, in the FSA County Office within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 calendar days after the normal harvest date.

Producers of hand-harvested crops must notify FSA of damage or loss through the administrative County Office within 72 hours of the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent. This notification can be provided by filing a CCC-576, email, fax or phone. Producers who notify the County Office by any method other than by filing the CCC-576 are still required to file a CCC-576, Notice of Loss, within the required 15 calendar days.

If filing for prevented planting, an acreage report and CCC-576 must be filed within 15 calendar days of the final planting date for the crop.

FSAfarm+, FSA's Customer Self-Service Portal

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) has launched a new tool to provide farmers and ranchers with remote access to their personal farm information using their home computers. Farmers and ranchers can now view, print or export their personal farm data all without visiting an FSA county office.

The program, known as FSAfarm+, provides you with secure access to view your personal FSA data, such as base and yields, Conservation Reserve Program data, other conservation program acreage, Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation status information, field boundaries, farm imagery, name and address details, contact information and membership interest

and shares in the operation. This data will be available in real time, at no cost to the producer and allow operators and owners to export and print farm records, including maps. Producers also can electronically share their data with a crop insurance agent from their own personal computer.

Farm operators and owners first will need “Level 2 eAuthentication” to access the webportal. This level of security ensures that personal information is protected for each user. Level 2 access can be obtained by going to www.eauth.usda.gov, completing the required information and then visiting your local FSA office to finalize access.

For more information on FSAfarm+, the customer self-service portal, contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA county office, click <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Provides Funds to Geographically Disadvantaged Agricultural Producers

Program helps offset transportation costs for farmers and ranchers outside the contiguous U.S.

USDA will issue payments to agricultural producers enrolled in the Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program (RTCP) for fiscal year 2015. USDA will provide \$1.9 million nationally to help offset transportation costs for geographically disadvantaged producers.

The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorized the program, which allows farmers and ranchers in Alaska, Hawaii and insular areas including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau and the Virgin Islands of the United States to recover transportation costs.

Payments are calculated based on the costs incurred for transportation of the agricultural commodity or inputs, subject to an \$8,000 limit per producer per federal fiscal year. The payments are scheduled to begin June 6, 2016. Because total claims exceeded available funds, payments to recipients will be reduced by 0.6621465 percent.

Enrollment for fiscal year 2016 will begin on July 18, 2016, and end on Sept. 9, 2016. Applicants must submit their application to their administrative county FSA Office by Sept. 9, 2016. Applicants will have until Nov. 2, 2016, to provide supporting documentation. Payments for fiscal year 2016 will be made once all supporting documentation has been reviewed and approved.

For more information on RTCP, farmers and ranchers in the eligible areas can visit their FSA county office or the FSA website at www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

During National Pollinator Week, USDA Announced Key Measures to Improve Pollinator Health

USDA's Conservation Reserve Program Currently Provides 15 Million Acres of Healthy Forage for Pollinators, and New Partnership Will Ensure Additional High-Quality Habitat in the Future

During National Pollinator Week, USDA announced two initiatives in support of the [President's National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honeybees and Other Pollinators](#), announced just over one year ago. A review of USDA's most popular conservation program found that farmers and

ranchers across the country are creating at least 15 million acres of healthy forage and habitat for pollinators, and the department has also entered into a new partnership with leading honey bee organizations that will help to ensure future conservation projects continue to provide benefits to these important species.

USDA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two honey bee organizations, the American Honey Producers Association and the American Beekeeping Federation, to facilitate an ongoing partnership that will ensure USDA's conservation initiatives are as advantageous as possible to pollinators and that beekeepers understand how they can benefit from USDA's conservation and safety net programs.

FSA plays a critical role in the delivery of programs that provide a safety net for beekeepers who experience losses due to natural disasters, and the agency administers the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program, which provides assistance for the loss of honeybee colonies, in excess of normal mortality, due to Colony Collapse Disorder or other natural causes. These groups have helped to ensure that these safety net programs work well, and they have helped focus research to learn more about the impacts of USDA programs and make continuous improvements. This MOU creates a framework to ensure ongoing, meaningful information sharing to help beekeepers and honey bees into the future.

The National Strategy called for seven million acres of land to be enhanced or restored for pollinators. Since then, USDA has more than tripled the acreage enrolled in CRP's pollinator initiative, through which USDA helps to cover the cost of planting pollinator-friendly wildflowers, legumes and shrubs, and USDA has increased the limit on this initiative in response to landowner demand so that more acres can be enrolled in the future.

This [fact sheet](#) contains more information about USDA's work to keep pollinators buzzing and contributing to a diverse domestic and global food supply.

To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation or contact a local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Offers Targeted Farm Loan Funding for Underserved Groups and Beginning Farmers

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers that FSA offers targeted farm ownership and farm operating loans to assist underserved applicants as well as beginning farmers and ranchers.

USDA defines underserved applicants as a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities. For farm loan program purposes, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Underserved or beginning farmers and ranchers who cannot obtain commercial credit from a bank can apply for either FSA direct loans or guaranteed loans. Direct loans are made to applicants by FSA. Guaranteed loans are made by lending institutions who arrange for FSA to guarantee the loan. FSA can guarantee up to 95 percent of the loss of principal and interest on a loan. The FSA guarantee allows lenders to make agricultural credit available to producers who do not meet the lender's normal underwriting criteria.

The direct and guaranteed loan program provides for two types of loans: farm ownership loans and

farm operating loans. In addition to customary farm operating and ownership loans, FSA now offers Microloans through the direct loan program. The focus of Microloans is on the financing needs of small, beginning farmer, niche and non-traditional farm operations. Microloans are available for both ownership and operating finance needs. To learn more about microloans, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

To qualify as a beginning producer, the individual or entity must meet the eligibility requirements outlined for direct or guaranteed loans. Additionally, individuals and all entity members must have operated a farm for less than 10 years. Applicants must materially or substantially participate in the operation.

For more information on FSA's farm loan programs and targeted underserved and beginning farmer guidelines, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans.

USDA Financial Assistance Available to Help Organic Farmers Create Conservation Buffers

USDA is assisting organic farmers with the cost of establishing up to 20,000 acres of new conservation buffers and other practices on and near farms that produce organic crops.

The financial assistance is available from the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

For conservation buffers, funds are available for establishing shrubs and trees, or supporting pollinating species, and can be planted in blocks or strips. Interested organic producers can offer eligible land for enrollment in this initiative at any time.

Other USDA FSA programs that assist organic farmers include:

- The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program that provides financial assistance for 55 to 100 percent of the average market price for organic crop losses between 50 to 65 percent of expected production due to a natural disaster.
- Marketing assistance loans that provide interim financing to help producers meet cash flow needs without having to sell crops during harvest when market prices are low, and deficiency payments to producers who forgo the loan in return for a payment on the eligible commodity.
- A variety of loans for operating expenses, ownership or guarantees with outside lenders, including streamlined microloans that have a lower amount of paperwork.
- Farm Storage Facility Loans for that provide low-interest financing to build or upgrade storage facilities for organic commodities, including cold storage, grain bins, bulk tanks and drying and handling equipment.
- Services such as mapping farm and field boundaries and reporting organic acreage that can be provided to a farm's organic certifier or crop insurance agent.

Visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic to learn more about how FSA can help organic farmers. For an interactive tour of CRP success stories, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/CRPis30 or follow #CRPis30 on Twitter. To learn more about FSA programs visit a local FSA office or www.fsa.usda.gov. To find

your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Direct Loans

FSA offers direct farm ownership and direct farm operating Loans to producers who want to establish, maintain or strengthen their farm or ranch. FSA loan officers process, approve and service direct loans.

Direct farm operating loans can be used to purchase livestock and feed, farm equipment, fuel, farm chemicals, insurance and other costs including family living expenses. Operating loans can also be used to finance minor improvements or repairs to buildings and to refinance some farm-related debts, excluding real estate.

Direct farm ownership loans can be used to purchase farmland, enlarge an existing farm, construct and repair buildings, and to make farm improvements.

The maximum loan amount for both direct farm ownership and operating loans is \$300,000 and a down payment is not required. Repayment terms vary depending on the type of loan, collateral and the producer's ability to repay the loan. Operating loans are normally repaid within seven years and farm ownership loans are not to exceed 40 years.

Please contact your local FSA office for more information or to apply for a direct farm ownership or operating loan.

Save Time – Make an Appointment with FSA

To insure maximum use of your time and to insure that you are afforded our full attention to your important business needs, please call our office ahead of your visit to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that you may need to have with you when you arrive for your appointment. For local FSA Service Center contact information, please visit:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

Selected Interest Rates for July 2016

Farm Operating Loans — Direct 2.25%

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 3.50%

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher 1.50%

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).