

## In This Issue:

- [USDA Releases Nationwide Farmer, Rancher and Forest Manager Prospective Customer Survey](#)
- [The 2022 Census of Agriculture is Underway](#)
- [Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers](#)
- [New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices](#)
- [USDA Offers Options for Signing and Sharing Documents Online](#)
- [USDA Launches Loan Assistance Tool to Enhance Equity and Customer Service](#)

## USDA Releases Nationwide Farmer, Rancher and Forest Manager Prospective Customer Survey

You can now take a nationwide survey to help the USDA improve and increase access to its programs and services for America's farmers, ranchers, and forest managers. The survey includes new and existing customers. USDA encourages all agricultural producers to take the survey, especially those who have not worked with USDA previously. The survey gathers feedback on programs and services available through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA).



The survey is available online at [farmers.gov/survey](https://farmers.gov/survey), and you should complete it by March 31, 2023. Stakeholder organizations are also encouraged to share the survey link through their networks. The survey is available in 14 different languages including Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hmong, Korean, Navajo, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Urdu and Vietnamese.

In addition to the online survey, the FPAC Business Center, which is administering the survey, will also mail 11,000 printed surveys to various local state stakeholder organizations and farmers markets.

## The 2022 Census of Agriculture is Underway

America's farmers and ranchers now have the opportunity to be represented in the nation's only comprehensive and impartial agriculture data for every state, county and territory. USDA has mailed the 2022 Census of Agriculture to all known agriculture producers across the nation and Puerto Rico. Producers have the option to respond securely and conveniently online at [agcounts.usda.gov](https://agcounts.usda.gov) or by mail. The deadline for response is Feb. 6, 2023.

Collected in service to American agriculture since 1840 and now conducted every five years by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census of Agriculture tells the story and shows the value of U.S. agriculture. The data inform decisions about business, programs, rural development, research, and more. These are things that directly impact producers, and better data can lead to better decisions. That is why it is so important for every producer's voice to be counted.



Responding to the Census of Agriculture is required by law under Title 7 USC 2204(g) Public Law 105-113. The same law requires NASS to keep personally-identifiable information confidential, to use the data only for statistical purposes, and only publish in aggregate form to prevent disclosing the identity of any individual producer or farm operation. NASS will release the results of the ag census in 2024.

To learn more about the Census of Agriculture, visit [nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](https://nass.usda.gov/AgCensus) or call 800-727-9540. On the website, producers and other data users can access past ag census data, [partner tools](#) to help spread the word about the upcoming ag census, special study information, and more. For highlights of these and the latest information on the upcoming Census of Agriculture, follow USDA NASS on twitter [@usda\\_nass](https://twitter.com/usda_nass).

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## 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](https://farmers.gov/translations).

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## New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers now have a one-stop shop to help ensure they are treated fairly. The new [farmerfairness.gov](https://farmerfairness.gov) portal developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) allows you to report potential violations of livestock and poultry antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently expressed concern that producers across the country have for too long faced a marketplace that benefits a few large companies over the farmers and ranchers who grow and raise our food.

For example, ranchers received more than 60 cents of every dollar a consumer spent on beef 50 years ago, compared to approximately 39 cents today. Hog farmers fared worse over the past 50 years, as their share of the consumer dollar fell from between 40 to 60 cents 50 years ago to approximately 19 cents today.

In order to assure economic opportunity and fairness for all, this portal makes it easy for farmers and ranchers to register a complaint or tip and provide details that would aid an investigation.

### Who may submit a complaint or tip?

Anyone who suspects a violation of Federal law governing fair and competitive marketing and contract growing of livestock and poultry, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

### What information should I provide?

Those reporting potential violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act and other competition laws via the online portal are asked to submit the following information:

- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that are involved,
- A description of any possible violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act or other [federal antitrust laws](#),
- Examples of the conduct that may violate one or more of these laws,
- Any other relevant details about the violation, and

- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that may be harmed by the alleged violation and how they are harmed.

### **What is the process following submission of a complaint or tip?**

Complaints and tips will go through a preliminary review by USDA Packers and Stockyards Division staff and Department of Justice staff. If a complaint raises sufficient concern under the Packers and Stockyards Act or antitrust laws, it will be selected for further investigation by the appropriate agency. This action may lead to the opening of a formal investigation.

USDA or DOJ staff will only contact complainants if additional information is needed.

### **Will my confidentiality be protected?**

Both USDA and DOJ will protect the confidentiality of the complainants to the fullest extent possible under the law. For any information provided, DOJ and USDA will follow their respective Privacy and Confidentiality Policies found at: [DOJ Confidentiality](#) and [USDA Privacy](#). Packers and Stockyards regulations regarding confidentiality also apply: [PSD Confidentiality](#). DOJ and USDA commit to supporting relevant whistleblower protections, including newly applicable protections [for criminal antitrust complainants against unlawful retaliation](#).

To submit an anonymous complaint or tip, complainants or tippers should provide appropriate details but not enter their names or contact information. Neither USDA nor DOJ will be able to contact anonymous complainants or tips to obtain additional information that might be needed to evaluate your complaint tip, or to engage in future correspondence regarding your complaint or tip.

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers deserve the benefits of fair and competitive markets for their products and services. This portal is an additional tool to support and protect these individuals who are vital to agriculture and our food supply.

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## **USDA Offers 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](https://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.

Visit [farmers.gov/mydocs](https://farmers.gov/mydocs) to learn more about Box and OneSpan, steps for getting started, and additional resources for conducting business with USDA online.

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## 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](https://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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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).