



USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Arizona Farmers and Livestock Producers Impacted by Wildfires

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Recovery Assistance Available for Livestock, Feed, Forage, and Infrastructure Loss

PHOENIX, Ariz., Sept. 4, 2024 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers across Arizona recover from recent wildfires. Producers impacted by these natural disasters should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about program options available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure and livestock losses and damages.

USDA Disaster Assistance for Wildfire Recovery

Producers who experience livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality or sell injured livestock at a reduced price may be eligible for the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP). To participate in LIP, producers will have to provide acceptable documentation of death losses or evidence of reduced sales resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) no later than the annual program payment application date, which is 60 calendar days following the calendar year in which the loss occurred. The LIP payment application and notice of loss deadline is March 3, 2025, for 2024 calendar year losses. Livestock producers who experience losses related to wildfire should check with their local FSA office for LIP eligibility criteria.

Meanwhile, the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides eligible producers with compensation for feed and grazing losses and transportation cost associated with transporting feed/forage to livestock and livestock to feed. For ELAP, producers are required to complete a notice of loss and a payment application to their local FSA office no later than Jan. 30, 2025, for 2024 calendar year losses.

Additionally, eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines. TAP complements the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days of the disaster event or the date when the loss of the trees, bushes or vines is apparent.

"We understand that as you work to recover, you'll be pulled in many directions, so when you're able, please reach out to your local FSA county office to report losses and damages - the sooner we have the information, the sooner we can get county committee action on your requests for assistance and issue payments," said Ginger Sykes Torres, State Executive Director for FSA in Arizona. "When you visit our offices, remember to bring loss documentation with you. Our staff will work with the documentation you have available including farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures or video of damages or losses."

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed farm loans, including operating and emergency farm loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low-interest emergency loans to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs.

Additionally, FSA offers several loan servicing options available for borrowers who are unable to make scheduled payments on their farm loan programs debt to the agency because of reasons beyond their control.

The Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFL) provides low-interest financing so producers can build, repair, replace, or upgrade facilities to store commodities. Loan terms vary from three to 12 years. Producers who incurred damage to or loss of their equipment or infrastructure funded by the FSFL program should contact their insurance agent and their local USDA Service Center. Producers in need of on-farm storage should also contact USDA.

Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through federal crop insurance or FSA's Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office, respectively. If they have crop insurance, producers should provide a notice of loss to their agent within 72 hours of initial discovery of damage and follow up in writing within 15 days.

For NAP covered crops, a Notice of Loss (CCC-576) form must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

"Because there is always the possibility of losses from wildfires and other natural disasters, USDA offers crop insurance and risk management to help producers mitigate the financial impact of losses resulting from disaster events, like these, that are beyond their control," said Jeffrey Yasui, Director of RMA's Regional Office that covers Arizona. "Our agents, loss adjusters, and Approved Insurance Providers are prepared to support you through the challenging disaster recovery process."

Conservation

FSA's Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) can assist landowners with financial and technical assistance to remove debris from farmland such as woody material, sand, rock and materials from collapsed hoop houses/high tunnels on cropland or pastureland. Through the program, FSA can provide assistance toward the restoration or replacement of fences including livestock cross fences, boundary fences, cattle gates or wildlife exclusion fences on agricultural land. Farmers and ranchers should check with their local FSA office to find out about sign-up periods, which are set by the FSA County Committee.

Technical and financial assistance is available through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help Arizona producers reinstall eligible conservation practices installed through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that have been destroyed by fire. If the practices are part of an active EQIP contract, producers can request a modification to their existing contract. If the practices were installed on an EQIP contract that has been completed and is now expired, producers can sign up through their local field office for the reapplication of destroyed practices.

Assistance for Communities

NRCS also administers the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, which provides assistance to local government sponsors with the cost of addressing watershed impairments or hazards such as debris removal and streambank stabilization. The EWP Program is a recovery effort aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms and other natural disasters. All projects must have an eligible project sponsor. NRCS may bear up to 75% of the eligible construction cost of emergency measures (90% within county-wide limited-resource areas as identified by the U.S. Census data). The remaining costs must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard life and property as a result of a natural disaster. Threats that the EWP Program addresses are termed watershed impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

- Debris-clogged waterways.
- Unstable streambanks.
- Severe erosion jeopardizing public infrastructure.
- Wind-borne debris removal.

Eligible sponsors include cities, counties, towns or any federally recognized Native American tribe or tribal organizations. Sponsors must be able to provide the local construction share, obtain permits and site access and agree to perform operations and maintenance of the constructed projects. Willing sponsors must submit a formal request (by mail or email) to the state conservationist for assistance within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence or 60 days from the date when access to the sites become available. For more information, potential sponsors should contact their local NRCS office.

"At USDA, we serve as a partner to help landowners with their resiliency and recovery efforts," said Keisha Tatem, NRCS State Conservationist in Arizona. "Our staff will work one-on-one with landowners to make assessments of the damages and develop methods that focus on effective recovery of the land."

In addition to EWP, Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is another valuable service that NRCS can provide following a wildfire. NRCS technical assistance can help fire victims with planning cost-effective post fire restoration practices.

More Information

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on farmers.gov, including USDA resources specifically for producers impacted by wildfire. Those resources include the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet, Loan Assistance Tool, and Natural Disasters and Crop Insurance fact sheet. Additionally, FarmRaise offers an FSA educational hub with LIP and ELAP decision tools as well as farm loan resource videos. For FSA and NRCS programs, producers should contact their local USDA Service Center. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their crop insurance agent.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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