



USDA Announces More than \$2 Billion to Strengthen Specialty Crops Sector, Expand Crop Storage for Producers Following 2024 Natural Disasters

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Support is available to producers nationwide, and will significantly assist producers of citrus and other specialty crops in the Southeast after Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 19, 2024 - Today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the creation of new programs that will help farmers who grow fruits, vegetables, and nuts overcome market barriers for their products, and help producers access necessary pre-market storage for their crops following severe weather events, including recent hurricanes. Specifically, the new Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops initiative will provide \$2 billion to assist specialty crop growers in maintaining a strong domestic supply and expanding market opportunities for their crops.

USDA is also creating the Commodity Storage Assistance Program, which will provide \$140 million to help producers gain access to a packinghouse, grain elevator, or other facility necessary for the marketing of agricultural commodities. This program is designed for farmers nationwide due to disaster-related challenges, and USDA anticipates high signup rates in the Southeast due to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Debbie, Helene and Milton.

"From providing high-quality, nutritious, American-grown fruits, vegetables, and nuts to our nation and the world, to serving as economic pillars of their communities, specialty crop producers play a critical role in the success of U.S. agriculture," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops and Commodity Storage Assistance programs will be important for producers in every corner of the United States, but they come at an especially critical time for southeastern farmers, who will face a difficult and long recovery after this season's devastating hurricanes."

These programs would complement the disaster assistance package the Biden-Harris Administration has proposed to Congress, which included a request for resources for USDA's Emergency Relief Program (ERP) and Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP), in addition to nutrition assistance, and rural infrastructure support. The ERP and ELRP provide support for disaster losses for row crop,

specialty crop, and livestock producers.

Final details, including eligibility and payment rates will be set forth in a Notice of Funding Availability for each program.

Marketing Assistance Program for Specialty Crops

The Marketing Assistance Program for Specialty Crops will expand markets by helping specialty who typically have higher marketing costs related to the tenderness and perishability of fruits, vegetables, floriculture, nursery crops and herbs; specialized handling and transport equipment with temperature and humidity control; packaging; moving perishables to market quickly; and higher labor costs. USDA anticipates applications will open in December 2024.

This initiative builds on previous investments by USDA under the Biden-Harris Administration to in support of the U.S. specialty crop industry. In January 2024, as part of its new [Regional Agricultural Promotion Program](#) (RAPP), a foreign market development and food security initiative announced in October 2023, USDA launched the Assisting Specialty Crop Exports (ASCE) initiative, which is providing \$65 million for projects that will help the specialty crop sector increase global exports and expand to new markets. USDA [awarded](#) the first \$25 million through this initiative in October.

Additionally in August 2023, USDA [announced](#) \$72.9 million in grant funding available to support the specialty crops industry through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP), which will fund innovative projects designed to bolster the competitiveness of the expanding specialty crop sector. USDA also [announced](#) \$72.9 million through SCBGP in 2022. Specialty crop exports totaled \$24.6 billion in FY2023, representing 13.8 percent of total U.S. agricultural exports.

Commodity Storage Assistance Program

USDA is creating the Commodity Storage Assistance Program to make available commercial storage facilities such as grain elevators and packinghouses necessary for the orderly marketing of commodities by producers experiencing reduced commercial storage access due to 2024 natural disasters. This program builds on the [Emergency Grain Storage Assistance Program](#) which helped producers respond to lost grain storage options after a series of tornadoes, derechos, and flooding in 2021 and 2022.

USDA is making \$140 million in Commodity Credit Corporation funds available for this program for a wide range of commodities. Producers will have to show that natural disasters caused a loss in commercial storage or marketing. Applications are expected to be available in December 2024.

USDA Offers Support, Flexibilities in the Aftermath of 2024 Natural Disasters

These investments build on USDA's wide array of disaster assistance, farm loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers impacted by natural disasters. These programs can help producers recover in a number of ways, including land and private forest rehabilitation, fence loss, debris removal, animal mortality disposal and other challenges.

Deadline Extensions

As previously announced, USDA has added flexibilities to a number of disaster assistance programs to help streamline and expedite the recovery process for producers impacted by Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton. USDA is providing flexibilities for its programs, including extended signup opportunities. The flexibilities include but are not limited to an extended signup period for the [Emergency Conservation Program](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#), which is now open at USDA Service Centers and runs through June 1, 2025.

Crop Insurance Indemnities

In total, USDA has issued more than \$6 billion in crop insurance indemnities for the 2024 crop year. Of the \$6 billion, nearly \$1 billion was paid to agricultural producers impacted by hurricanes and tropical storms in 2024. This includes \$792 million through the Hurricane Insurance Protection-Wind Index (HIP-WI) endorsement and the Tropical Storm (TS) option.

Visit farmers.gov/hurricane for a [full list of available flexibilities](#), [frequently asked questions](#), webinars and other resources.

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 safe, 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 www.usda.gov.

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