

## **USDA Assists Farmers, Ranchers, and Communities Affected by Hurricane Ida**

**News Release | September 27, 2021**

**WASHINGTON, September 27, 2021** - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to aid recovery efforts for farmers, ranchers and residents affected by Hurricane Ida. USDA staff in offices across the country are ready to respond with a variety of program flexibilities and other assistance to producers and communities in need.

"Hurricane Ida cut a \$50 billion path of destruction from the Gulf coast to New England, destroying farms, homes, communities and businesses and taking lives along the way," said Vilsack. "USDA staff are on the ground in the hardest hit areas and are ready to help communities and agricultural operations rebuild however we can."

### **Food safety guidance:**

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is helping affected residents take steps to reduce their risk of foodborne illness as they return to their homes after severe weather and flooding.

- Drink only bottled water that has not been in contact with flood water. Screw caps are not waterproof, so discard any bottled water that may have come in contact with flood water. If you don't have bottled water, learn how to safely boil or disinfect water at [FSIS Consumer's Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes webpage](#).
- Discard any food or beverage that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance it may have been in contact with flood water. Containers with screw caps, snap lids, pull tops and crimped caps are not waterproof.
- Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches such as flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches, can be saved by following the steps at the [FSIS Consumer's Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes webpage](#).
- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, utensils and ceramic dishes that came in contact with flood water with hot soapy water. Rinse, then sanitize, by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one of tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers that may have come in contact with flood water - they cannot be saved after contact with flood water.

### **Risk management and disaster assistance for agricultural operations:**

USDA offers several risk management and disaster assistance options to help producers recover after disasters.

This includes tools for producers to manage their risk through the [Federal Crop Insurance Program](#), a public-private partnership between USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) and private companies and agents. Already, producers in certain parishes and counties with coverage under Hurricane Insurance Protection - Wind Index (HIP-WI) will receive \$27 million in indemnity payments in the coming weeks. This is in addition to coverage provided through underlying policies, which will be processed in the coming months as claims are submitted and processed.

Additionally, in certain Louisiana parishes where HIP-WI triggered, RMA has provided flexibilities to provide additional time after the September 30 sales closing date for producers to make coverage adjustments in hardest hit parishes. Producers in these parishes will now have until October 29 to adjust coverage levels.

Producers who suffer losses and are signed up for Federal Crop Insurance or [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) are asked to report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or local FSA office, respectively, within 72 hours of discovering damage and follow up in writing within 15 days.

Producers can obtain NAP coverage for the next crop year through their local USDA Service Center, and historically underserved producers are able to enroll in basic NAP coverage at no charge.

Livestock and perennial crop producers often have more limited risk management options available, so there are several disaster programs for them. Key programs offered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) include:

- The [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) and the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that were killed or severely injured by a natural disaster or loss of feed and grazing acres.
- The [Tree Assistance Program](#) provides cost share assistance to rehabilitate or replant orchards and vineyards when storms kill or damage the trees, vines or bushes. NAP or Federal Crop Insurance often only covers the crop and not the plant.
- The [Emergency Conservation Program](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

It is also critical that producers keep accurate records to document damage or loss and to report losses to their local USDA Service Center as soon as possible.

Additionally, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can provide financial resources through its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources.

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) (PDF, 4.6 MB) and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

### **Assistance for communities:**

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) also wasted no time to provide assistance to states affected by this storm. Some of the actions taken include:

- Approving Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP) in affected parts of [Louisiana](#) and [Tennessee](#).
- A Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) Program which provided food packages to 800,000 affected individuals in the state of [Louisiana](#).
- Temporarily allowing SNAP recipients to purchase hot food items (normally not allowed with the program) in areas affected by Ida in the states of Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Tennessee.
- Mass replacement of SNAP benefits in affected areas of Louisiana.
- Approving a waiver giving Alabama, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee the option to allow SNAP participants more time to report lost food, if they are not in an area where everyone is getting their benefits replaced.
- Providing additional administrative flexibilities as states work to support individuals and families in affected areas.

USDA is also assisting local government sponsors with the cost of recovery efforts like debris removal and streambank stabilization to address natural resource concerns and hazards through the [Emergency Watershed Protection Program](#). Eligible sponsors include cities, counties, towns, or any federally recognized Native American tribe or tribal organization. Sponsors must submit a formal request (via 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, contact the NRCS office at the [local USDA Service Center](#).

Communities and producers affected by Hurricane Ida are also encouraged to seek recovery information from their local [Cooperative Extension](#) offices. More information is also available through the [Extension Disaster Education Network](#) (EDEN), supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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](http://www.usda.gov).

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