USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Farmers and Livestock Producers in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands Impacted by Hurricane Fiona

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Washington, Oct 04, 2022 - Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands agricultural operations have been significantly impacted by Hurricane Fiona and related weather events. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover. Impacted producers 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.

"Production agriculture is vital to the economies of both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and USDA stands ready to assist in the recovery from Hurricane Fiona," said Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). "I assure you that USDA employees are working diligently to deliver FPAC's extensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs and services to all impacted agricultural producers."

USDA Disaster Assistance

Producers who experience livestock deaths may be eligible for the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).

Meanwhile, for hurricane recovery, the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides eligible producers with compensation for feed and grazing losses. For ELAP, producers will need to file a notice of loss within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days.

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 lost. This complements Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for noninsurable crops, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days.

"Once you are able to safely evaluate the impact on your operation, be sure to contact your local FSA office to timely report all crop, livestock and farm infrastructure damages and losses," said Wanda

Perez, State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Puerto Rico. "Because USDA Service Centers in some locations have also been impacted by the hurricane, we recommend calling ahead to our offices to discuss assistance needs."

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.

"For FSA disaster assistance, you will likely need to provide documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses," said Deborah Tannenbaum, State Executive Director for FSA in the U.S. Virgin Islands. "Gathering the documents in advance of your visit with our staff will enable us to expedite delivery of program benefits."

Conservation

FSA's Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, damaged farmland or forests.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is always available to provide technical assistance in the recovery process by assisting producers to plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches and working forests impacted by natural disasters. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) can help producers plan and implement conservation practices on land impacted by natural disasters.

"NRCS can be a very valuable partner to help landowners with their recovery efforts," said Luis Cruz-Arroyo, state conservationist for the NRCS in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. "Our staff will work one-on-one with landowners to make assessments of the damages and develop approaches that focus on effective recovery of the land."

Assistance for Communities

Additional NRCS programs include 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.

Eligible sponsors include territorial, city, county or municipal agencies. 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, sponsors should contact NRCS EWP Coordinator Lisbeth San Miguel at Lisbeth.SanMiguel-Rivera@usda.gov or 939-208-0931, or State Conservation Engineer Yilia Baucage-Bou at Yilia.Baucage-Bou@usda.gov or 787-342-6916.

"EWP provides assistance to communities to mitigate potential hazards to life and property resulting from disasters and particularly the severe erosion and flooding that can occur following hurricanes," Cruz-Arroyo said. "We can work with a local sponsor to help a damaged watershed so that lives and property are protected while preventing further devastation in the community."

More Information

On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet 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.

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 www.usda.gov.

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