

**In This Issue:**

- [From Colorado FSA's State Executive Director, Kent Pepler](#)
  - [Colorado Farm Service Agency is Hiring!](#)
  - [USDA Now Accepting Applications for Available Funds to Help Cover Organic Certification Costs](#)
  - [USDA Offers Wildfire Recovery Assistance](#)
  - [Can Agriculture Improve Water Quality? With Data-Driven Voluntary Conservation, the Answer is Yes.](#)
  - [USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs](#)
  - [Applying for NAP Payments](#)
  - [USDA Announces Changes to Enhanced Coverage Option Insurance Program](#)
  - [USDA Offers Assistance and Resources for Recovery from and Prevention of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 in Dairy Herds](#)
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## From Colorado FSA's State Executive Director, Kent Pepler

I hope everyone is having a safe and prosperous summer.

The hottest news I have for all of you is that I will be accompanying some of our Farm Loan team members to Houston, Texas for training on the new Farm Loan Rule changes. I would like to talk with you in detail about the changes, but I think it would be best if we wait until after Houston. My knee jerk reaction is the rule changes are a combination of things I have seen in the past as well as some new ideas. Prior to the 1980s, we had a much more flexible and opportunistic philosophy, not only in the government, but also in private industry when it came agriculture financing. I can see producer opportunity growing in the new rules, but it also means more personal responsibility for the producer. As my dad told me when I started, "If you are going to be in this business, you need to respect a dollar bill".

Agriculture is lucky to have people like FSA Administrator, Zach Ducheneaux, and Deputy Administrator for the Farm Loan Program, Bill Cobb, to dig in and be willing to make changes. Along with that, there are many dedicated staff members that have engineered some positive changes in ag finance. The agriculture industry for the family farm is changing almost by the minute; between technology and marketing alone, it is absolutely imperative FSA give producers the tools they need to respond to an ever-changing business environment. It is so exciting to see these changes and I can't wait to learn more.

See you when I get back from Houston. Be safe!

- KP

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## Colorado Farm Service Agency is Hiring!

The Farm Service Agency is accepting applications for the following positions. Interested individuals may apply using the below links to USAJOBS:

- **County Executive Director:**
  - Alamosa, CO - [Open 08/14-08/26](#)
  - Fort Collins, CO - [Opens 08/14-08/26](#)

If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested, please share this information with them. Contact Claudia Drechsel at [claudia.drechsel@usda.gov](mailto:claudia.drechsel@usda.gov) or 720-544-2878 if you have specific questions regarding the positions.

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## USDA Now Accepting Applications for Available Funds to Help Cover Organic Certification Costs

Through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will cover up to 75% of organic certification costs at a maximum of \$750 per certification category. FSA is now accepting applications, and organic producers and handlers should apply for OCCSP by the Oct. 31, 2024, deadline for eligible expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2023, to Sept. 30, 2024. FSA will issue payments as applications are received and approved.

OCCSP was part of a [broader organic announcement](#) made by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on May 15, 2024, which also included the Organic Market Development Grant program and Organic Transition Initiative.

### Eligible Applicants, Expenses and Categories

OCCSP provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of organic agricultural commodities for expenses incurred obtaining or maintaining organic certification under USDA's [National Organic Program](#). Eligible OCCSP applicants include any certified organic producers or handlers who have paid organic certification fees to a USDA-accredited certifying agent.

Cost share assistance covers expenses including application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, inspector travel expenses, user fees, sales assessments and postage. OCCSP pays a maximum of \$750 per certification category for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling, and state organic program fees (California only).

### How to Apply

To apply, producers and handlers should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#) and be prepared to provide documentation of organic certification and eligible expenses. OCCSP applications can also be submitted through participating state departments of agriculture. For more information, visit the [OCCSP](#) webpage.

### Opportunity for State Departments of Agriculture

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA posted a [funding opportunity summary on grants.gov](#) and will electronically mail the Notice of Funding Opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture. Applications are due July 12, 2024.

If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA county offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. Producers or handlers can receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture but not both.

### More Information

USDA offers other assistance for organic producers, including the [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), which includes direct farmer assistance for organic production and processing and conservation. For more information on organic agriculture, visit [farmers.gov/organic](#).

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by logging into their [farmers.gov account](#). If you don't have an account, sign up today.

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## USDA Offers Wildfire Recovery Assistance

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers disaster assistance and low-interest loan programs to assist you in your recovery efforts following wildfires or other qualifying natural disasters.

Available programs and loans include:

- **Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)** - provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters including excessive wind and qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing).
- **Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)** - offers payments to eligible producers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather.
- **Tree Assistance Program (TAP)** – provides assistance to eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers for qualifying tree, shrub and vine losses due to natural disasters including excessive wind and qualifying drought.
- **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)** - provides emergency relief for losses due to feed or water shortages, disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, which are not adequately addressed by other disaster programs.
- **Emergency Loan Program** – available to producers with agriculture operations located in a county under a primary or contiguous Presidential or Secretarial disaster designation. These low interest loans help producers recover from production and physical losses.
- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** - provides emergency funding for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate land severely damaged by natural disasters; includes fence loss.

For more information on these programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit [fsa.usda.gov/disaster](https://fsa.usda.gov/disaster).

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## Can Agriculture Improve Water Quality? With Data-Driven Voluntary Conservation, the Answer is Yes.

Agriculture offers a major potential to support water quality improvements nationwide. At USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we deliver science and data, one-on-one technical support, and cost share opportunities to ensure this potential is realized.

This blog by Chief Terry Cosby details some of the key ways NRCS supports producers and conservation partners in improving water quality and strengthening agricultural operations through voluntary conservation.

[Read Chief Cosby's Blog](#)

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## USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers that Farm Loan Programs can be used to support a variety of climate-smart agriculture practices, which build on many practices that farmers and ranchers already use, like cover cropping, nutrient management and conservation tillage.

Climate-smart agricultural practices generate significant environmental benefits by capturing and sequestering carbon, improving water management, restoring soil health and more. Farm loan funding complements other tools to help producers adopt climate-smart practices, such as FSA's [Conservation Reserve Program](#), [crop insurance options](#) that support conservation, and [conservation programs](#) offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

FSA offers [multiple types of loans](#) to help farmers and ranchers start, expand or maintain a family agricultural operation. These loans can provide the capital needed to invest in climate-smart practices and equipment including the establishment of rotational grazing systems, precision agriculture equipment or machinery for conversion to no-till residue management. Additionally, for programs like Conservation Reserve Program and NRCS conservation programs where USDA and the producer share the implementation cost, a farm loan could be used for the producer's share, if consistent with the authorized loan purpose.

Some additional ways farm loans can be leveraged to invest in climate-smart

agriculture practices or equipment include:

- **Precision Agriculture Equipment** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment like GPS globes, monitors, or strip till fertilizer equipment.
- **Cover Crops** - Eligible producers could use an Annual Operating Loan for seed costs.
- **No/Reduced Till** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment.
- **Livestock Facility Air Scrubber or Waste Treatment** - Eligible producers could use a Farm Ownership Loan for capital improvements to livestock facilities.
- **Cross Fencing** - Eligible producers could use an Annual or Term Operating Loan to purchase fencing and installation equipment.

Visit the [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry webpage on farmers.gov](#) to learn more and see detailed examples of how an FSA farm loan can support climate-smart agriculture practices.

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[Top of page](#)

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## Applying for NAP Payments

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides financial assistance to you for crops that aren't eligible for crop insurance to protect against lower yields or crops unable to be planted due to natural disasters including freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, flood, excessive heat and qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing), among others.

In order to participate, you must obtain NAP coverage for the crop year by the applicable deadline using form CCC-471 "Application for Coverage" and pay the service fee. Application closing dates vary by crop. Producers are also required to submit an acceptable crop acreage report. Additionally, NAP participants must provide:

- The quantity of all harvested production of the crop in which the producer held an interest during the crop year
- The disposition of the harvested crop, such as whether it is marketable, unmarketable, salvaged or used differently than intended
- Acceptable crop production records (when requested by FSA)

Producers who fail to report acreage and production information for NAP-covered crops could see reduced or zero NAP assistance. These reports are used to calculate the approved yield.

If your NAP-covered crops are affected by a natural disaster, notify your FSA office by completing Part B of form CCC-576 "Notice of Loss and Application for Payment." This must be completed within 15 calendar days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent or 15 days of the final harvest date. For hand-harvested crops and certain perishable crops, you must notify FSA within 72 hours of when a loss becomes apparent.

To receive benefits, you must also complete Parts D, E, F and G of the CCC-576 "Notice of Loss and Application for Payment" within 60 days of the last day of coverage for the crop year for any NAP covered crops. The CCC-576 requires acceptable appraisal information. Producers must provide evidence of production and note whether the crop was marketable, unmarketable, salvaged or used differently than intended.

Eligible crops must be commercially produced agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops.

For more information on NAP, visit [fsa.usda.gov/nap](https://fsa.usda.gov/nap).

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## USDA Announces Changes to Enhanced Coverage Option Insurance Program

## Coverage Option Insurance Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced changes to the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) beginning with the 2025 crop year. USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is expanding coverage options to additional crops as well as increasing premium support to make the policy more affordable for producers.

ECO is currently approved for 36 crops and RMA is expanding coverage options to almonds, apples, blueberries, grapes, and walnuts for the 2025 crop year and to citrus crops where the Supplemental Coverage Option is currently available in California and Arizona for the 2026 crop year.

Additionally, RMA is increasing premium support for all crops covered by ECO to 65% to make the policy more affordable.

ECO provides additional area-based coverage for a portion of a producer's underlying crop insurance policy deductible. ECO can be purchased as an endorsement to Yield Protection, Revenue Protection, Revenue Protection with the Harvest Price Exclusion or Actual Production History. ECO offers producers a choice of 90 or 95% trigger levels. Trigger is the percentage of expected yield or revenue at which a loss becomes payable.

ECO coverage is unaffected by participation in USDA's Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Agriculture Risk Coverage program for the same crop, on the same acres. Producers may select ECO regardless of FSA farm program election.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA Agent Locator](#). Producers can learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at [rma.usda.gov](http://rma.usda.gov) or by contacting their [RMA Regional Office](#).

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## USDA Offers Assistance and Resources for Recovery from and Prevention of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 in Dairy Herds

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the detection of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also known as H5N1, in dairy cattle in 12 states including **Colorado**, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Mexico, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. To protect the U.S. livestock industry from the threat posed by HPAI H5N1 USDA is taking a number of actions with our federal partners.

On April 24, APHIS announced a federal order that includes mandatory testing for interstate movement of dairy cattle and mandatory reporting of influenza A detections in livestock. In addition to the Federal Order mandates, USDA provides several voluntary testing and monitoring options, including the [HPAI Dairy Herd Status Program](#) announced on May 31, 2024. APHIS has released a list of [requirements and recommendations](#) that apply to interstate moving of lactating dairy cattle, [testing guidance](#) for livestock, and answers to [frequently asked questions](#). Producers are encouraged to visit the APHIS HPAI Livestock Detection [website](#) for information about these programs and requirements, as well as the most comprehensive and timely updates about this rapidly evolving situation.

### Assistance for Milk Loss

#### *Confirmed H5N1 Positive Test Results Required for Recovery Assistance*

Producers who incur milk losses in their dairy herds due to HPAI H5N1 can now apply for financial assistance through the USDA's updated Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) expanded ELAP policy through the rule-making process to assist with financial losses resulting from reduced milk production when cattle are removed from commercial milking in dairy herds having a confirmed positive H5N1 test. Positive tests must be confirmed through the USDA's APHIS' National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL).

To apply, **producers need to submit** the following to FSA:

- Proof of herd infection through a confirmed positive H5N1 test (based on

- Proof of herd infection through a confirmed positive H5N1 test (based on USDA's APHIS [H5N1 case definition](#)) on individual animal or bulk tank samples confirmed by APHIS' NVSL;
- A notice of loss indicating the date when the loss is apparent, which is the sample collection date for the positive H5N1 test; and
- An application for payment certifying the number of eligible adult dairy cows removed from production, the month the cows were removed from production, and the producer's share in the milk production.

The final date to file a notice of loss and application for payment for eligible losses is 30 days after the end of the prior calendar year, which is **January 30**.

**Note:** To determine livestock and producer eligibility for ELAP H5N1 assistance, to submit an application or if you've not previously conducted business with FSA, contact your local FSA county office for details. [Find your local office](#). Other online resources include [frequently asked questions](#) and a [fact sheet](#).

#### Loans for Biosecurity Implementation

FSA also provides direct and guaranteed loans for farmers and ranchers that can assist with implementation of biosecurity measures for their operations. Loans can assist with:

- Installing physical barriers to facilitate quarantine, to prevent livestock interaction with wildlife, and to prevent unauthorized access by visitors
- Purchase of disinfectant, footbaths, and disposable footwear and clothing;
- Veterinary costs related to vaccination and general animal health;
- Testing of feed and water sources for toxins and other disease;
- Costs associated with responsible manure disposal and management;
- Costs associated with cleaning and disinfecting livestock transportation equipment; and
- Other biosecurity measures recommended by USDA or other applicable agencies.

To learn more about loans, producers can use the:

- [Loan Assistance Tool](#) – helps producers better navigate the farm loan process. The online Loan Assistance Tool provides producers needing agricultural financing with an interactive, step-by-step guide.
- [Farm Loans Overview Factsheet](#) – provides an overview of all FSA direct and guaranteed loans, and eligibility requirements.
- [Farm Loans Homepage](#) – gives in-depth farm loan information, including fact sheets, for those who don't want to use the online Loan Assistance Tool.

To learn more about ELAP or farm loans, producers should contact the FSA at the [local USDA Service Center](#).

To learn more about APHIS requirements and resources, visit APHIS' [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Detections in Livestock webpage](#).

[Top of page](#)

## USDA Service Center

### Colorado State Office

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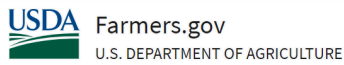
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