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| US Department of Agriculture |
| **Maine USDA Service Center Newsletter**  April 2023 |
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| [**Farm Service Agency**](https://fsa.usda.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)**|**[**Natural Resources Conservation Service**](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)**|**[**Risk Management Agency**](https://rma.usda.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) |
| **In This Issue:*** [The Maine Message](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_6)
* [Dates to Remember](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_7)
* [USDA Expands Eligibility, Enhances Benefits for Key Disaster Programs](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_9)
* [Q&A on Choosing a Tax Professional](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_5)
* [Join Us for the People’s Garden Webinar Series!](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_8)
* [Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_4)
* [Borrower Training for Farm Loan Customers](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_3)
* [Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_1)
* [Communication is Key in Lending](https://admin.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/bulletins?sortdesc=bulletinsort-sent_at&state=sent#link_2)

**The Maine Message**Spring planting is upon us, and USDA wants to share YOUR planting season on social media!   To participate, check out the additional information here:  [Share Your Plant 2023 Stories](https://www.farmers.gov/blog/share-your-plant-2023-stories?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).On April 17, 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin signing up for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through May 26, 2023.  Grassland CRP is a unique working lands program, allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while conserving grasslands and promoting plant and animal biodiversity as well as healthier soils.  Please contact your local service center to sign up or for further information. [USDA Service Centers](https://www.farmers.gov/node/28855?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)Do you have questions about the programs and services FSA offers? Ask USDA, available at [ask.usda.gov](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7C2c8275c111f941ba5a3608db3c64314c%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638170173270081485%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=UDayJHilHC1fWiIC78BO5ZiJjSHe8oz2oRwy2oRsa74%3D&url=https%3A%2F%2Fask.usda.gov%2Fs%2F%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) ask.usda.gov, is an online tool that provides information for all USDA programs and allows customers to search for and read answers about FSA programs and services. You can submit questions through email, chat, and phone for additional information. This improved customer service approach provides a one-stop shopping experience that covers all of USDA’s many programs.FSA in Maine is accepting applications for temporary assistance in Aroostook, Oxford, Penobscot and Somerset County.  Duties include general office activities supporting FSA programs administered at the field level. Successful applicants must be reliable, have a professional attitude, and enjoy working with the public.  This is a great opportunity for students!  Anyone interested can contact the FSA State Office at 207-990-9140.Happy Planting!Sherry Hamel signature file**Sherry Hamel, State Executive Director**

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**Dates to Remember**

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| **May 26** | [**Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program/crp-grasslands-signup-overview/index?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Sign up Deadline |
| **May 29** | Offices closed for Memorial Day |
| **May 31** | [**Marketing Assistance Loans and Loan Deficiency Payments**](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/mal_ldp_fact_sheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Deadline for prior year harvested corn, soybeans and other oilseeds and pulse crops. |
| **June 2** | [Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase Two](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/2023/fsa_erp_factsheet_22.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)   and[Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program](https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/documents/farmersgov-parp-factsheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) |
| **Ongoing** | [**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - Continuous**](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/crp-continuous-enrollment-period-factsheet.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) Enrollment  |

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**USDA Expands Eligibility, Enhances Benefits for Key Disaster Programs**

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| AppleThe U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) made updates to several conservation, livestock and crop disaster assistance programs to give more farmers, ranchers, and tribes the opportunity to apply for and access programs that support recovery following natural disasters.  Specifically, USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) expanded eligibility and enhanced available benefits for a suite of its programs. These updates will provide critical assistance to producers who need to rebuild and recover after suffering catastrophic losses of production and infrastructure due to natural disasters. FSA has updated the following programs: The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP), the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).    **Conservation Disaster Assistance Updates**   FSA updated ECP to:  * Allow producers who lease Federally owned or managed lands, including tribal trust land, as well as State land the opportunity to participate.
* Provide advance payments, up to 25% of the cost, for all ECP practices before the restoration is carried out, an option that was previously only available for fence repair or replacement. The cost-share payment must be spent within 60 days.

Additionally, Congress also authorized the Federal government to pay 100% of the ECP and EFRP cost for damage associated with the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire in New Mexico. This fire burned over 340,000 acres from April 2022 to June 2022 and was the largest wildfire in recorded history in New Mexico. ECP and EFRP cost-share assistance is typically capped at 75%.  This policy change for 100% cost-share applies only to those locations impacted by the Hermit’s Peak/Calf Canyon Fire.  ECP and EFRP provide financial and technical assistance to restore conservation practices like fencing, damaged farmland or forests.  **Livestock Disaster Assistance Updates**  FSA also expanded eligible livestock under ELAP, LFP and LIP. Specifically, horses maintained on eligible grazing land are eligible for ELAP, LFP and LIP. Many family farms and ranches use their forage to raise horses to augment their other agriculture endeavors. FSA recognizes that animals maintained in a commercial agriculture operation, add value to the operation and could be available for marketing from the farm. FSA regulations have been updated to include these animals as eligible livestock   Horses and other animals that are used or intended to be used for racing and wagering remain ineligible.  Ostriches are also now eligible for LFP and ELAP. FSA is making this change because ostriches satisfy more than 50% of their net energy requirement through the consumption of growing forage grasses and legumes and are therefore considered “grazing animals.”  This change for ostriches is effective for the 2022 program year for both LFP and ELAP. ELAP requires a notice of loss to be filed with FSA within 30 days of when the loss is first apparent.  Because this deadline may have passed for 2022, FSA is extending the deadline for filing notices of loss through March 31, 2023.  LIP and ELAP reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage. LFP provides benefits for grazing losses due to drought and eligible wildfires on federally managed lands.   **Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance** NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters. Basic NAP coverage is equivalent to the catastrophic level risk protection plan of insurance coverage, which is based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50% of expected production at 55% of the average market price for the crop.   Previously, to be eligible for NAP coverage, a producer had to submit an application (Form CCC-471) for NAP coverage on or before the application closing date. For 2022, if a producer has a *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification* (Form CCC-860) on file with FSA, it will serve as an application for basic coverage for all eligible crops having a 2022 application closing date and all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage will be waived for these producers.   FSA will notify all eligible producers who already have the CCC-860 certification form on file of their eligibility for NAP basic coverage for 2022. To potentially receive NAP assistance, producers who suffered losses due to natural disasters in 2022 should file an acreage report as well as a notice of loss with the FSA at their local Service Center.   Producers who are interested in obtaining NAP coverage for 2023 and subsequent years should also contact their local FSA county office for information on eligibility, coverage options and applying for coverage.   **Reporting Losses**  Producers impacted by a natural disaster should report losses and damages and file an application with their [FSA county office](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). Timelines for reporting losses and applying for payments differ by program.   For LIP and ELAP, producers will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For LFP, producers must provide a completed application for payment and required supporting documentation to their FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the grazing loss occurred. For NAP, producers should contact their local FSA office for guidelines on submitting a notice of loss and filing an acreage certification. **More Information**   The updates to these programs build on other Biden-Harris administration efforts to improve disaster assistance programs, including additional flexibility in obtaining Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) basic coverage for socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource and veteran farmers and ranchers.   Previous enhancement to the ELAP provide program benefits to producers of fish raised for food and other aquaculture species as well as cover above normal expenses for transporting livestock to forage and grazing acres and transport feed to livestock impacted by qualifying drought. And earlier updates to the LIP payment rates better reflect the true market value of non-adult beef, beefalo, bison and dairy animals.   Yesterday, FSA announced it would begin accepting applications for the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase Two and the new Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) on Jan. 23, 2023, through June 2, 2023. ERP Phase Two is designed to fill gaps in the delivery of program benefits not covered in ERP Phase One and improves equity in program delivery to underserved producers.  PARP will help address gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses. Learn more in the [Jan. 9, 2023 news release](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/news-releases/2023/usda-announces-major-program-improvements-progress-and-investments-to-benefit-american-farmers-ranchers-and-producers?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).   **Additional Resources**  On [farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery), the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](https://www.farmers.gov/protection-recovery/disaster-tool?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance](https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/2021-09/fsa-disasterassistance-at-a-glance-sept.-2021.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) fact sheet, and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](https://www.farmers.gov/loans/farm-loan-discovery-tool?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) 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](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?data=05%7C01%7C%7Cbbaaa4b216174a450c3c08daef36f198%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C638085316506023321%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&reserved=0&sdata=q8JpW7axk6YRKLZtuwQ8Wi4GUH%2FenhVccvcHkZkDxSo%3D&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rma.usda.gov%2Fen%2FInformation-Tools%2FAgent-Locator-Page%3Futm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). For FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, contact the local [USDA Service Center](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).    |

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**Q&A on Choosing a Tax Professional**If you participate in USDA programs, it’s time to start preparing to file your taxes. In this Ask the Expert, Dr. Tamara Cushing answers questions about choosing a tax professional. Dr. Cushing is an Extension Forest Business Specialist from the University of Florida who works to educate landowners, foresters and tax professionals about the economics of growing trees, tax interactions with forestry and landowner succession.**What Qualifies Someone to Complete Your Tax Return?*** Here are some qualifications to look for: A degree in accounting and possibly in taxation; maybe a law degree.
* Certification by a state licensing body or the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This may include CPA, Licensed Tax Consultant (LTC), Licensed Tax Preparer (LTP), Enrolled Agent (EA), and tax attorney. Also, some Certified Financial Planners (CFP) can provide tax services. Some states require paid preparers to have specific qualifications to complete state tax returns and some don’t. Qualified, licensed and or certified tax preparers may be found through various locations some of which will be discussed later in this Q&A.
* Some preparers may not hold educational or other professional credentials but are IRS-authorized. These preparers will have a PTIN (Preparer tax identification number) and complete continuing education courses required by the IRS and or state regulatory agency.
* All preparers should have a PTIN.

To read the full blog visit https://www.farmers.gov/blog/ask-the-expert-qa-on-choosing-tax-professional-with-tamara-cushing.

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**Join Us for the People’s Garden Webinar Series!***Register for free National Gardening Month webinar on April 26 at 3 p.m. ET*The People’s Garden webinar series will begin on April 26 at 3 p.m. ET and will feature experts from USDA and beyond who will share planting tips and resources that benefit community gardens. We’ll also share on-the-ground stories of gardens making a difference by growing fresh, nutritious food for their communities. Webinars will be recorded and available for viewing on our website.Register for the April 26 webinar and preview topics for upcoming monthly webinars at   [People’s Garden Webinars | USDA](https://www.usda.gov/peoples-garden/webinars?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

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**Before You Break Out New Ground, Ensure Your Farm Meets Conservation Compliance**The term “sodbusting” is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985.  As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you’re proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.Eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 “Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification,” with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.Prior to purchasing or renting new cropland acres, it is recommended that you check with your local USDA Service Center to ensure your activities will be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions.For additional information on highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation compliance, contact [your local USDA Service Center](https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

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**Borrower Training for Farm Loan Customers**Borrower training is available for all Farm Service Agency (FSA) customers. This training is required for all direct loan applicants, unless the applicant has a waiver issued by the agency. Borrower training includes instruction in production and financial management. The purpose is to help the applicants develop and improve skills that are necessary to successfully operate a farm and build equity in the operation. It aims to help the producer become financially successful. Borrower training is provided, for a fee, by agency approved vendors. Contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager for a list of approved vendors.

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**Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers**A multi-agency guide for USDA assistance for underserved farmers and ranchers is now available. If you are a farmer or rancher and are a minority, woman, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producer, you can use this booklet to learn about assistance and targeted opportunities available to you. This includes programs offered through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. [Download the guide here](https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/farmersgov-historically-underserved-factsheet-07-20-2022.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). The guide is also available in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese on [farmers.gov/translations](http://www.farmers.gov/translations?utm_campaign=underservedfarmers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

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**Communication is Key in Lending**Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be successful. FSA staff will provide guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower’s graduation to commercial credit. While it is FSA’s commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower’s responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:* Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation
* Any significant changes to family income or expenses
* The development of problem situations
* Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

If a farm loan borrower can’t make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.For more information on FSA farm loan programs, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery).

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Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in any meeting/event/function should contact Mary Anne Coffin at 207-990-9140 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339. |
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