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## Message from Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Doris Washington

Greetings

USDA recently announced that distressed borrowers with qualifying USDA farm loans have already received nearly \$800 million in assistance, as part of the \$3.1 billion in assistance for distressed farm loan borrowers provided through Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The IRA directed USDA to expedite assistance to distressed borrowers of direct or guaranteed loans administered by Farm Service Agency (FSA) whose operations face financial risk.

The IRA announcement kicks off the process to provide assistance to distressed farm loan borrowers using several complementary approaches, with the goal of keeping them farming, removing obstacles that currently prevent many of these borrowers from returning to farming, and improving the way that USDA approaches borrowing and servicing. Through this assistance, USDA is focused on generating long-term stability and success for distressed borrowers. More details on each of the categories of assistance, including a downloadable fact sheet, are available on the [Inflation Reduction Act webpage on farmers.gov](#).

Dairy producers can now enroll for 2023 coverage through the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) Program, an important safety net program that helps producers manage changes in milk and feed prices. Last year, FSA took steps to improve coverage (especially for small- and mid-sized dairies). This included offering a new Supplemental DMC program and updating its feed cost formula to better address retroactive, current, and future feed costs. These changes continue to support producers through this year's signup, which ends Dec. 9, 2022.

In addition to DMC, other risk management tools are offered for dairy producers. Offers include the [Dairy Revenue Protection \(DRP\)](#) plan that protects against a decline in milk revenue (yield and price) and the [Livestock Gross Margin \(LGM\)](#) plan, which provides protection against the loss of the market value of livestock minus the feed costs. Both DRP and LGM livestock insurance policies are offered through the Risk Management Agency. Producers should contact their local [crop insurance agent](#) for more information. For more information on DMC, visit the [DMC webpage](#) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA is expanding its People's Garden Initiative to include eligible gardens nationwide. School gardens, community gardens, urban farms, and small-scale agriculture projects in rural, suburban, and urban areas can be recognized as a "People's Garden" if they are registered and meet the criteria. The criteria consist of benefitting the community, working collaboratively, incorporating conservation practices, and educating the public. Affiliate People's Garden locations will be indicated on a map on the USDA website, featured in USDA communications, and provided with a People's Garden sign. The location and information on each garden will be displayed on the map. USDA will send a "People's Garden" sign to each garden and invite continued engagement through photos and information sharing. Gardens on federal property, such as USDA offices, are required to donate produce. We invite these gardens to report how much is being donated. To learn more about People's Garden or to register one, visit the People's Garden webpage at [usda.gov/Peoples-Garden](https://usda.gov/Peoples-Garden).

Please take advantage of these opportunities. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).

## Message from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan

Greetings and Happy Fall!

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) continued its conservation work in Arkansas last fiscal year (FY) despite a 2022 marked with the pandemic and several natural disasters. The agency assisted farmers, ranchers and forest landowners implement conservation practices on their working lands, which help conserve natural resources such as soil, water and wildlife as well as boost producers' bottom lines.

Some of Arkansas NRCS's accomplishments in FY22 include:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** Over **6,000 applications were received**, with 1,456 contracts obligating \$56.7 million (99% of Financial Assistance allocated). We maintained high funding levels for Historically Underserved (HU) producers and increased funding for urban agriculture to help with increasing demand.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):** **3500 applications** received – CSP continues to have strong demand with over 200 new contracts on 146,000 acres for \$30.6 million; CSP Renewals - \$6.5 million obligated, 52 contracts on 35,000 acres; CSP Classic – Over 150 contracts for approximately \$22 million obligated.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):** \$3.1 million, 36% obligated to HU producers.
- **Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI):** \$13.9 million (100%) obligated in EQIP, 40% obligated to HU; \$2 million obligated in CSP.
- **Easements:** \$21 million enrolled and obligated; 22 easements totaling 6,600 acres. Eight easements enrolled with HU producers. Closed 11 easements totaling 5,670 acres (time to close 22.1 months – fifth best in the US). Restored 17 easements totaling 4,794 acres (98% restored – 2nd highest in the US). Monitoring 99%. Established and supported multiple agreements with minority led non-profits for outreach of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and RCPP projects.

“Thank You” to all our NRCS staff for their accomplishments and their dedication to Arkansas’s producers.

We’re here to provide one-on-one support to our customers at our 61 USDA Service Centers statewide. NRCS staff can help guide farmers to the best USDA assistance based on their conservation goals.

Farmers who work with us at their local USDA Service Center can:

- Verify eligibility for USDA programs
- Discuss their business and conservation goals
- Create a conservation plan
- Learn how to meet conservation compliance provisions

Additionally, NRCS launched online tools through [www.farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov) that increased the efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of crucial programs. We are committed to delivering USDA programs and services to America’s farmers, ranchers and foresters while taking safety measures in response to COVID-19. We encourage you to [check the status of your local USDA Service Center](#) and make an appointment to discuss your business needs.

#### **Important Dates to Remember:**

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program** - Farmers and landowners in Arkansas have until November 4, 2022, to submit applications to receive financial assistance to implement conservation activities through the (EQIP) for the 2023 program year. NRCS accepts program applications continuously. However, to be considered for funding during this signup applications must be received by November 4. Applications received after this date will be considered in later funding periods, subject to funding availability.

**Agricultural Conservation Easement Program** -Private landowners, tribes, land trusts and other groups wanting to restore and protect critical wetlands and protect agricultural lands and grasslands through the (ACEP) have until December 2, 2022, to apply for

funding consideration during the 2023 enrollment period. The deadline is for the Wetlands Reserve Easements and Agricultural Land Easements programs.

### **FY2023 Conservation Stewardship Program Payments**

- Participants with active CSP contracts must notify NRCS when they would like to receive their payments
- Payments received in calendar year 2022 must be approved by December 16, 2022
- Payments received in calendar year 2023 must be approved by February 24, 2023

## **Upcoming Events and Workshops**

The USDA Arkansas Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to educating producers on available programs and loans. FSA representatives will be available at the following workshops and conferences. Producers interested in attending these conferences/workshops should follow the registration or RSVP instructions listed below.

### **October 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> - 2018 ALCDC Annual Youth Day and Annual Conference**

Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) is hosting their Annual Youth Day and Annual Conference. The Annual Youth Day will be held Thursday, Oct. 27, 2022, and the Annual Conference will be held Friday, Oct. 28, 2022. **Linda Cronin, FSA National Outreach Director, will be the Luncheon Speaker.** Additional Information will be forth coming. Please visit [ALCDCs Website](#) for additional information.

### **Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> – National Black Growers Council (NBGC) Annual Meeting**

NBGC will be hosting their Annual Meeting and Conference at the Westin Hotel, Memphis, TN this year. **FSA will have an informational Booth and Employees will be available to discuss programs and answer questions.** Registration will begin December 14, 2022 and the annual meeting/conference will be held December 15-16, 2022. Please save the date! Information will be forthcoming. Please visit [NBGC's Website](#) for additional information.

**Apr 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> - Arkansas Women in Agriculture Conference (AWIA)** Arkansas Women in Agriculture is hosting the 2023 Conference on April 3 & 4, 2023. Please save the date! The conference will be held at the Hot Springs Convention Center, 134 Convention Blvd, Hot Springs, AR. **FSA will have an Information Booth and Employees will be available to discuss programs and answer questions.** Information will be forthcoming. Please visit: [AWIAs Website](#) for additional information.

## **Biden-Harris Administration Makes \$500 Million Available to Increase Innovative American-Made Fertilizer Production**

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that the Biden-Harris Administration is making \$500 million in grants available to increase American-made fertilizer production to spur competition and combat price hikes on U.S. farmers caused by the war in Ukraine.

The Biden-Harris Administration's [Fertilizer Production Expansion Program](#) is part of a whole-of-government effort to promote competition in agricultural markets. The funds are being made available through the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Eligible entities are for-profit businesses and corporations, nonprofit entities, Tribes and Tribal organizations, producer-owned cooperatives and corporations, certified benefit corporations, and state or local governments. Private entities must be independently owned and operated to apply.

The Department will begin accepting applications via [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Notably, there will be two opportunities for submission. Applications must be received by 11:59 pm Eastern Time (ET) on:

- 45 days (November 14, 2022) after the date of posting, for applicants requesting financial assistance for eligible projects under the program. Priority will be given to projects that increase the availability of fertilizer (nitrogen, phosphate or potash) and nutrient alternatives to agricultural producers for use in crop years 2023 and 2024; and
- 90 days (December 29, 2022) after the date of posting, for applicants requesting financial assistance for eligible projects under the program.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered for funding. An application is considered on time if it is received by the Agency by 11:59 pm Eastern Time..

## USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic, Transitioning Producers

Agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic, along with producers and handlers who are transitioning to organic production, can now apply for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Organic and Transitional Education Certification Program](#) (OTECP) and [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), which help producers and handlers cover the cost of organic certification, along with other related expenses. Applications for OTECP and OCCSP are both due October 31, 2022.

OTECP covers:

- Certification costs for organic producers and handlers (25% up to \$250 per category).
- Eligible expenses for transitional producers, including fees for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan (75% up to \$750).
- Registration fees for educational events (75% up to \$200).
- Soil testing (75% up to \$100).

Meanwhile, OCCSP covers 50% or up to \$500 per category of certification costs in 2022.

This cost share for certification is available for each of these categories: crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and State organic program fees.

Producers can receive cost share through both OTECP and OCCSP. Both OTECP and OCCSP cover costs incurred from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. Producers have until October 31, 2022 to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

To apply, producers and handlers should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at their local USDA Service Center. As part of completing the OCCSP applications, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses. Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through participating State agencies.

## USDA Expands Farmers.gov to Include Farm Records

Producers with farmers.gov accounts can now access farm records and maps online, the latest self-service feature added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website.

You can quickly and easily access your land information in real time by desktop computer, tablet or phone. Capabilities include:

- View, print and export detailed farm records such as cropland, base acres, yields, CRP acres, land ownership details, and much more;
- View, print and export farm/tract maps that can be provided to lenders, chemical or fertilizer providers, and FSA for reporting acreage and crop insurance agents; and
- Export common land unit (field) boundaries as ESRI shapefiles.

The ability to access these records on demand without a visit to the service center saves you time and money.

[Farmers.gov](#) now includes the most popular functionalities from FSAFarm+, the FSA portal for producers, while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. A new enhancement expands the scope of accessibility to include farmers and ranchers who are members of an entity, as well as people with a power of attorney form (FSA-211) on file with FSA.

### Managing USDA Business Online

Using farmers.gov, producers, entities and those acting on their behalf can also:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices, plans and contracts.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View farm loan and interest information (producers only).

Future plans include adding the ability to import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture planting boundaries.

To access your information, you'll need a [USDA eAuth account](#) to login to farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit [farmers.gov](#) and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the [Sign In/Sign Up link](#) at the top right of the website. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

In addition to the self-service features available by logging into farmers.gov, the website also has ample information on USDA programs, including pandemic assistance, farm loans, disaster assistance, conservation programs and crop insurance. Recently, USDA



updated the navigation and organization of the site as well as added some new webpages, including [“Get Involved,”](#) [“Common Forms,”](#) and [“Translations.”](#) [Learn more about these changes.](#)

## Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program Right for You?

Farmers and ranchers rely on crop insurance to protect themselves from disasters and unforeseen events, but not all crops are insurable through the USDA's Risk Management Agency. The Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides producers another option to obtain coverage against disaster for these crops. NAP provides financial assistance to producers of non-insured crops impacted by natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevents crop planting.

Commercially produced crops and agricultural commodities for which crop insurance is not available are generally eligible for NAP. Eligible crops include those grown specifically for food, fiber, livestock consumption, biofuel or biobased products, or be commodities such as value loss crops like Christmas trees and ornamental nursery, honey, maple sap, and many others. Contact your FSA office to see which crops are eligible in your state and county.

Eligible causes of loss include drought, freeze, hail, excessive moisture, excessive wind or hurricanes, earthquake, flood. These events must occur during the NAP policy coverage period, before or during harvest, and the disaster must directly affect the eligible crop. For guidance on causes of loss not listed, contact your local FSA county office.

Interested producers must apply for coverage using FSA form [CCC-471](#), “Application for Coverage,” and pay the applicable service fee at the FSA office where their farm records are maintained. These must be filed by the application closing date. Closing dates vary by crop, so it is important to contact your local FSA office as soon as possible to ensure you don't miss an application closing date.

At the time of application, each producer will be provided a copy of the [NAP Basic Provisions](#), which describes how NAP works and all the requirements you must follow to maintain NAP coverage. NAP participants must provide accurate annual reports of their production in non-loss years to ensure their NAP coverage is beneficial to their individual operation.

Producers are required to pay service fees which vary depending on the number of crops and number of counties your operation is located in. The NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Premiums also apply when producers elect higher levels of coverage with a maximum premium of \$15,750 per person or legal entity depending on the maximum payment limitation that may apply to the NAP covered producer. The service fee can be waived for beginning, qualifying veteran, and limited resource farmers and rancher., These farmers and ranchers can also receive a 50 percent reduction in the premium.

For more detailed information on NAP, download the [NAP Fact Sheet](#). To get started with NAP, we recommend you contact your [local USDA service center](#).

# Farmers.gov Feature Helps Producers Find Farm Loans that Fit Their Operation

Farmers and ranchers can use the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* on farmers.gov to find information on USDA farm loans that may best fit their operations.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of loan options to help farmers finance their operations. From buying land to financing the purchase of equipment, FSA loans can help.

USDA conducted field research in eight states, gathering input from farmers and FSA farm loan staff to better understand their needs and challenges.

## How the Tool Works

Farmers who are looking for financing options to operate a farm or buy land can answer a few simple questions about what they are looking to fund and how much money they need to borrow. After submitting their answers, farmers will receive information on farm loans that best fit their specific needs. The loan application and additional resources also will be provided.

Farmers can download application quick guides that outline what to expect from preparing an application to receiving a loan decision. There are four guides that cover loans to individuals, entities, and youth, as well as information on microloans. The guides include general eligibility requirements and a list of required forms and documentation for each type of loan. These guides can help farmers prepare before their first USDA service center visit with a loan officer.

Farmers can access the *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* by visiting [farmers.gov/fund](https://farmers.gov/fund) and clicking the "Start" button. Follow the prompts and answer five simple questions to receive loan information that is applicable to your agricultural operation. The tool is built to run on any modern browser like Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or the Safari browser, and is fully functional on mobile devices. It does not work in Internet Explorer.

## About Farmers.gov

In 2018, USDA unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where farmers will be able to apply for programs, process transactions, and manage accounts.

The *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* is one of many resources on farmers.gov to help connect farmers to information that can help their operations. Earlier this year, USDA launched the *My Financial Information* feature, which enables farmers to view their loan information, history, payments, and alerts by logging into the website.

USDA is building farmers.gov for farmers, by farmers. In addition to the interactive farm loan features, the site also offers a Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool. Farmers can visit [farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1](https://farmers.gov/recover/disaster-assistance-tool#step-1) to find disaster assistance programs that can help their operation recover from natural disasters.

For more information, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov).



# FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) can help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

There are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#) option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a joint financing loan is \$600,000, and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

The operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about farm loans, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

## Maintaining Good Credit History

Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans require applicants to have a satisfactory credit history. A credit report is requested for all FSA direct farm loan applicants. These reports are reviewed to verify outstanding debts, see if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash flow.

Information on your credit report is strictly confidential and is used only as an aid in conducting FSA business.

Our farm loan staff will discuss options with you if you have an unfavorable credit report and will provide a copy of your report. If you dispute the accuracy of the information on the credit report, it is up to you to contact the issuing credit report company to resolve any errors or inaccuracies.

There are multiple ways to remedy an unfavorable credit score:

- Make sure to pay bills on time
  - Setting up automatic payments or automated reminders can be an effective way to remember payment due dates.
- Pay down existing debt
- Keep your credit card balances low
- Avoid suddenly opening or closing existing credit accounts

FSA's farm loan staff will guide you through the process, which may require you to reapply for a loan after improving or correcting your credit report.

## USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Accepting 2023 EQIP Applications through November 4, 2022

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas have until **November 4, 2022**, to submit applications to receive financial assistance to implement conservation activities through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for the 2023 program year. Applicants can sign up at their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Service Center <https://www.farmers.gov/>.

Assistance is available to help farmers and landowners plan and implement conservation practices to improve water quality, build healthier soil, improve grazing and forest lands, conserve energy, enhance organic operations, establish or improve wildlife habitat and achieve other environmental benefits on the landscape. NRCS accepts program applications continuously. However, to be considered for funding during this signup applications must be received by November 4, 2022. Applications received after this date will be considered in later funding periods, subject to funding availability.

EQIP contracts provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices to improve soil health, water quality, improve grazing and forest lands, and establish or improve wildlife habitat. EQIP can also assist Arkansas producers meet Federal, State, and local environmental regulations.

Additionally, NRCS offers special initiatives, including:

- **Organic Initiative** - helps producers install conservation practices on certified organic operations or those working toward organic certification.
- **On-Farm Energy Initiative** - helps producers conserve energy on their operations.
- **StrikeForce Initiative**— additional assistance for underserved producers in 48 persistent poverty counties: **Arkansas, Bradley, Chicot, Clark, Colombia, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Monroe, Nevada, Newton, Ouachita, Phillips, Randolph, Searcy, Sevier, St. Francis, Woodruff, Ashley, Clay, Conway, Craighead, Crittenden, Franklin, Fulton, Independence, Izard, Jefferson, Johnson, Lincoln, Madison, Miller, Montgomery, Poinsett, Polk, Scott, Sebastian, Sharp, Stone, Union, and Van Buren.**
- **Strikeforce Healthy Forest (Keeping It In the Family) Initiative** – additional assistance for underserved producers to improve forestlands with forestry conservation practices in 18 counties: **Bradley, Calhoun, Clark, Cleveland, Columbia, Dallas, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Jefferson, Lafayette, Little River, Miller, Nevada, Ouachita, Pike, Sevier, Union.**
- **Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative** - provides financial and technical assistance to producers to enhance early successional habitat to aid in bobwhite quail recovery.
- **Arkansas Groundwater Initiative (AGWI)** - targeted approach to address critical groundwater decline issues in the Arkansas Delta, providing assistance to agricultural producers in seven counties: Arkansas, Prairie; and portions of Craighead, Cross, Lonoke, Poinsett, and St. Francis.

- **National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Existing Projects** – provides financial and technical assistance to improve water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams. Projects include: Brush Creek-Roberts Creek in Washington and Madison counties.
- **Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) Existing Projects** – provides assistance to improve water quality in the following project areas: Cache – portions of Woodruff, Jackson and Cross counties, Middle Cache – portions of Jackson, Woodruff, Poinsett and Craighead counties, Lower St. Francis – portions of Crittenden, Cross and St. Francis counties, Upper Lower St. Francis – portions of Clay and Green counties, Cadron Creek Brewer Lake – portions of Conway and Faulkner counties, Candy Creek – portions of Cross, St. Francis, and Woodruff counties, Canal 43 – portions of Desha and Chicot counties, Twin Creeks – portions of Cross and Woodruff counties, IZard Lower Strawberry – portions of IZard and Sharp counties, County Line Strawberry – portions of Lawrence and Sharp counties, Flat Hills – portions of Poinsett and Cross counties, Glade-Raft-White Oak Creek – portions of White and Prairie counties, Lee County – portion of Lee county, Lower White-Bayou Des Arc – portion of Prairie county

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on local, state and nationally developed criteria to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

For more information, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local USDA/NRCS Field Service Center <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

## USDA Offers Conservation Assistance to Landowners to Protect Wetlands, Agricultural Lands and Grasslands

Private landowners, tribes, land trusts and other groups wanting to restore and protect critical wetlands and protect agricultural lands and grasslands through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) (ACEP) have until December 2, 2022, to apply for funding consideration during the 2021 enrollment period. The deadline is for the Wetlands Reserve Easements and Agricultural Land Easements programs.

"For over 25 years, NRCS has worked with landowners in Arkansas to protect their wetlands and agricultural lands," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "Conservation easements are important tools for people who are trying to improve soil health, water and air quality and wildlife habitat on their land."

ACEP provides assistance to landowners and eligible entities helping conserve, restore and protect wetlands and productive agricultural lands and grasslands. NRCS accepts ACEP applications year-round, but applications are ranked and funded by enrollment period.

### Wetland Reserve Easements

Through ACEP Wetland Reserve Easements, NRCS helps landowners and tribes restore, enhance and protect wetland ecosystems. NRCS and the landowner work together to develop a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the easement.

“Seventy-five percent of the nation’s wetlands are situated on private and tribal lands,” Sullivan said. “Wetlands provide many benefits, including critical habitat for a wide array of wildlife species. They also store floodwaters, clean and recharge groundwater, sequester carbon, trap sediment and filter pollutants for clean water.”

Wetland conservation easements are either permanent, for 30 years or the maximum extent allowed by state law. Tribal landowners have the added option of enrolling in 30-year non-easement restoration contracts. Eligible lands include:

- Farmed or converted wetlands that can successfully be restored;
- Croplands or grasslands subject to flooding; and
- Riparian areas that link protected wetland areas.

### **Agricultural Land Easements**

Through ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ALE), NRCS provides funds to eligible entities to purchase easements on private working lands. This program helps keep working lands working, especially in areas experiencing development pressure.

Eligible cooperating entities include state or local agencies, non-profits and tribes. Landowners continue to own their property but voluntarily enter into a legal agreement with a cooperating entity to purchase an easement. The cooperating entity applies for matching funds from NRCS for the purchase of an easement from the landowner, permanently protecting its agricultural use and conservation values. Landowners do not apply directly to NRCS for funding under ALE.

Easements are permanent. Eligible lands include privately owned cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and forestlands.

### **More Information**

ACEP remains a major part of the 2018 Farm Bill and program implementation will continue during fiscal year 2023.

Landowners and tribes interested in wetland reserve easements and partners interested in agricultural land easements should contact their [local USDA service center](#). To learn about ACEP and other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or [www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov).

## **Biden-Harris Administration Announces Historic Investment in Partnerships for 70 Climate-Smart Commodities and Rural Projects**

*USDA to Triple Commitment with Initial \$2.8 Billion Investment Piloting New Revenue Streams for America’s Climate-Smart Farmers, Ranchers and Forest Landowners, with Additional Projects to Come.*

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that the Biden-Harris Administration through the U.S. Department of Agriculture is investing up to \$2.8 billion in 70 selected projects under the first pool of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity, including 20 projects that applicants indicate will impact the state of Arkansas, with projects from the second funding pool to be announced later this year.

Ultimately, USDA's anticipated investment will triple to more than \$3 billion in pilots that will create market opportunities for American commodities produced using climate-smart production practices. These initial projects will expand markets for climate-smart commodities, leverage the greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart commodity production and provide direct, meaningful benefits to production agriculture, including for small and underserved producers. Applicants submitted more than 450 project proposals in this first funding pool, and the strength of the projects identified led USDA to increase its investment in this opportunity from the initial \$1 billion Vilsack announced earlier this year.

Earlier this year, Vilsack announced that USDA had allocated \$1 billion for the program, divided into two funding pools. Because of the unprecedented demand and interest in the program, and potential for meaningful opportunities to benefit producers through the proposals, the Biden-Harris administration increased the total funding allocation to more than \$3 billion, with projects from the second funding pool to be announced later this year.

Funding for Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities will be delivered through USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation in two pools. Projects announced are from the first funding pool, which included proposals seeking funds ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million. USDA received over 450 proposals from more than 350 entities for this funding pool, including nonprofit organizations; for-profits and government entities; farmer cooperatives; conservation, energy and environmental groups; state, tribal and local governments; universities (including minority serving institutions); small businesses; and large corporations. Applications covered every state in the nation as well as tribal lands, D.C. and Puerto Rico. The tentative selections announced reflect this broad set of applicants and geographic scope, and the proposals include plans to match on average over 50% of the federal investment with nonfederal funds.

USDA will work with the applicants for the 70 identified projects to finalize the scope and funding levels in the coming months. A complete list of projects identified for this first round of funding, including the 20 projects that may impact Arkansas, is available at [usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities](https://usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities). These projects include:

- **Rice Stewardship Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities** – This project will build climate-smart rice markets and work to reduce methane emissions in rice production through the adoption of alternate wetting and drying, furrow irrigation, and other climate-smart practices and support historically underserved producers by improving critical infrastructure necessary to implement climate-smart practices in the future. **Lead Partner:** USA Rice Federation, Inc.
- **Tyson Foods, Inc. Climate-Smart Commodities Project** – This project will expand climate-smart markets and increase carbon sequestration and reduce emissions in the production of beef and row crops for livestock feed. Small and underserved producers will receive technical assistance and incentive payments to increase their capacity to reduce emissions and adopt climate-smart practices. **Lead Partner:** Tyson Foods, Inc.
- **Growing Value for Producers** – This project will create and pilot-test a farmer-friendly system that builds capacity with institutions interacting with a range of producers, including underserved producers, to support adoption of climate-smart practices and interact with commodity buyers in climate-smart markets. **Lead Partner:** Winrock International Institute for Agriculture Development
- **Climate-Smart Cotton through a Sustainable & Innovative Supply Chain Approach** – This project will implement methods to restore soil and ecosystem health in cotton production through regenerative farming and best practices based on specific regions and needs. **Lead Partner:** Ecom USA, LLC

Spanning up to five years, these 70 projects will:

- Provide technical and financial assistance to producers to implement climate-smart production practices on a voluntary basis on working lands;
- Pilot innovative and cost-effective methods for quantification, monitoring, reporting and verification of greenhouse gas benefits; and
- Develop markets and promote the resulting climate-smart commodities.

The projects announced recently will deliver significant impacts for producers and communities nationwide. USDA anticipates that these projects will result in:

- **Hundreds of expanded markets and revenue streams** for producers and commodities across agriculture ranging from traditional corn to specialty crops.
- **More than 50,000 farms reached, encompassing more than 20-25 million acres of working land** engaged in climate-smart production practices such as cover crops, no-till and nutrient management.
- **More than 50 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent sequestered over the lives of the projects.** This is equivalent to removing more than 10 million gasoline-powered passenger vehicles from the road for one year.
- **More than 50 universities, including multiple minority-serving institutions,** engaged and helping advance projects, especially with outreach and monitoring, measurement, reporting and verification.
- Proposals for the 70 selected projects include plans to **match on average over 50% of the federal investment with nonfederal funds.**

Projects were selected based on a range of criteria, with emphasis placed on greenhouse gas and/or carbon sequestration benefits and equity. The [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) included a complete set of project proposal requirements and evaluation criteria.

USDA is currently evaluating project proposals from the second Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding pool, which includes funding requests from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999. Projects from this second funding pool will emphasize the enrollment of small and/or underserved producers, and/or monitoring, reporting and verification activities developed at minority-serving institutions. USDA expects to announce these selections later this Fall.

### More Information

Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities is part of USDA's broader strategy to position agriculture and forestry as leaders in climate change mitigation through voluntary, incentive-based, market-driven approaches. Visit [usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities](https://usda.gov/climate-smart-commodities) to learn more about this effort, and [usda.gov/climate-solutions](https://usda.gov/climate-solutions) for climate-related updates, resources and tools across the Department.

Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our Nation's lands, biodiversity and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local and Tribal governments.

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).

## **APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories confirm avian influenza in Madison County**

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in a commercial broiler breeder chicken flock in Madison County, Arkansas.

Samples from the flock were tested and confirmed at the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa.

APHIS is working closely with state animal health officials in Arkansas on a joint incident response. State officials quarantined the affected premises, and birds on the property will be depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from the flock will not enter the food system.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the [public health risk associated with these avian influenza detections in birds](#) remains low. As a reminder, the proper handling and cooking of all poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 °F is recommended as a general food safety precaution.

As part of existing avian influenza response plans, Federal and State partners are working jointly on additional surveillance and testing in areas around the affected flocks. The United States has the strongest AI surveillance program in the world, and USDA is working with its partners to actively look for the disease in commercial poultry operations, live bird markets and in migratory wild bird populations.

Anyone involved with poultry production from the small backyard to the large commercial producer should review their biosecurity activities to assure the health of their birds. APHIS has materials about biosecurity, including videos, checklists, and a toolkit available at: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program/df-resources/df-resources>.

USDA will report these findings to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) as well as international trading partners. USDA also continues to communicate with trading partners to encourage adherence to WOA standards and minimize trade impacts. WOA trade guidelines call on countries to base trade restrictions on sound science and, whenever possible, limit restrictions to those animals and animal products within a defined region that pose a risk of spreading disease of concern. WOA trade guidelines also call on member countries to not impose bans on the international trade of poultry commodities in response to notifications in non-poultry.

APHIS will continue to announce the first case of HPAI in commercial and backyard flocks detected in a State but will not announce subsequent detections in the State. All cases in commercial and backyard flocks will be listed on the APHIS website at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/2022-hpai>.

In addition to practicing good biosecurity, all bird owners should prevent contact between their birds and wild birds and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State/Federal officials, either through their state veterinarian or through APHIS' toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593. APHIS urges producers to consider bringing birds indoors when possible to further prevent exposures. The Animal Health Protection Act authorizes APHIS to

provide indemnity payments to producers for birds and eggs that must be depopulated during a disease response. APHIS also provides compensation for disposal activities and virus elimination activities. Additional information on biosecurity for backyard flocks can be found at <http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov>.

***Additional background*** Avian influenza (AI) is caused by an influenza type A virus which can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by free flying waterfowl such as ducks, geese and shorebirds. AI viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: hemagglutinin or “H” proteins, of which there are 16 (H1–H16), and neuraminidase or “N” proteins, of which there are 9 (N1–N9). Many different combinations of “H” and “N” proteins are possible. Each combination is considered a different subtype and can be further broken down into different strains which circulate within flyways/geographic regions. AI viruses are further classified by their pathogenicity (low or high)—the ability of a particular virus strain to produce disease in domestic poultry.

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## Rates and Dates

## Selected Interest Rates for

October 2022

90-Day Treasury Bill	2.625
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	3.875
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	4.125
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.500
Emergency Loans	3.750
Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years)	3.375
Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years)	3.125
Commodity Loans 1996-Present	4.625

### Dates to Remember

11/07/2022	COC Election Ballots mailed to Eligible Voters
11/21/2022	COC "Reminder to Vote" postcards mailed
12/05/2022	Final Date for COC Ballots to be returned to the County Office.
01/02/2023	Newly Elected COC Members take Office

## County Committee Elections 2022



**Jun. 15 2022**

Beginning of nomination period.  
Forms available at [fsa.usda.gov/elections](https://fsa.usda.gov/elections).

**Aug. 1 2022**

Last day to file nomination forms at the local FSA county office.

**Nov. 7 2022**

Ballots mailed to eligible voters.

**Dec. 5 2022**

Last day to return voted ballots to the local FSA county office.

**Jan. 1 2023**

Newly elected county committee members take office.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

**Arkansas USDA**

700 West Capitol Room 3416 Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

FSA Phone: 501-301-3000  
FSA Fax: 855-652-2082

NRCS Phone: 501-301-3100  
NRCS Fax: 855-681-7044

*Please contact your local Office for questions specific to your operation or county. To find contact information for your local office visit one of the websites below.*

[www.farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov)

[www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov)  
[www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Arkansas/index](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Arkansas/index)

[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)  
[www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov)

**FSA State Executive Director**  
*Doris Washington*

**NRCS State Conservationist**  
*Mike Sullivan*

***FSA State Committee Meeting: 2nd Wednesday and Thursday of each Quarter***

*Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in this meeting/event should contact Rita Smith-Clay at 501-301-3200 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.*

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).