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

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) offers vital recovery options for local communities to help people reduce hazards to life and property caused by major storms, wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters. EWP provides technical and financial assistance to state, local, and tribal governments for flooding and erosion protection that threaten life and property.

Watershed impairments that the EWP Program can address include, but are not limited to:

- debris-clogged waterways,
- unstable streambanks,
- severe erosion jeopardizing public infrastructure
- wind-borne debris removal, and
- damaged upland sites stripped of protective vegetation by fire or drought.

EWP does not require a disaster declaration by federal or state government officials for program assistance to begin. The state conservationists can determine a local watershed emergency exists and initiate EWP program assistance in cooperation with an eligible sponsor.

- Sponsors must submit a formal request to the state conservationist within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence or 60 days from the date when access to the sites is possible.

NRCS may bear up to 75 percent of the eligible construction cost of emergency measures (90 percent within limited-resource areas as identified by the U.S. Census data). The remaining costs must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services. Contact State Conservation Engineer Stephen Medley at stephen.medley@usda.gov for additional information.

May 31st is National Dam Safety Awareness Day

In Arkansas, there are 1,267 dams with an average age of 59 years. This is slightly concerning considering that most dams were built with a 50-year design life. Currently, 416 dams meet the State requirements to be regulated and NRCS assists on 208 of those dams. These 208 dams were funded out of the PL-566 program and were designed and built as flood control structures. As designed, these dams have allowed communities to grow and farmland to be opened. Flashy creeks and rivers have been tamed and turned into steady flowing and clean tributaries.

This Dam Safety Awareness Day, take some time to think about all the benefits that the dams in your area provide and understand that these dams, like any other infrastructure, must be maintained and repaired to ensure that future generations continue to enjoy these assets. When dams fail, the damage caused can be overwhelming. National Dam Safety Awareness Day commemorates the failure of the South Fork Dam in Johnstown, Pennsylvania on May 31, 1889. The Johnstown disaster was the worst dam failure in the history of the United States, with over 2,200 lives lost. National Dam Safety Awareness Day not only commemorates the past, it also calls us to action. So the next time you're in the field take a little extra time to look at the dams in your area. If anything looks out of place, elevate the issue.

Important Dates to Remember:

- State Technical Committee meeting **June 8, beginning at 9:30 a.m.** at the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture- State Extension Office Building Auditorium at 2301 South University in Little Rock. In-Person registration: <https://forms.office.com/r/CRxbZ1d28S>. Zoom registration: <https://uada.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJckcuCuriMpHdzoY-R6a1TU7reFusqzYBW>
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Joint Chiefs Application **Deadline: June 9**
- Organic Transition Initiative Application **Deadline: June 15**

- EQIP- Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Application **Deadline: June 16**
- Conservation Stewardship Program - Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Application **Deadline: June 16**
- State Conservation Innovation Grant Application **Deadline: June 22**
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program applications **deadline August 18**, accepted via the [RCPP portal](#).

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

Greetings

May is Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month and Arkansas Farm Service Agency (FSA) is celebrating and honoring their history, culture, and the countless contributions of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. [The Federal Asian Pacific American Council's \(FAPAC\) 2023 AANHPIHM theme](#) is “*Advancing Leaders Through Opportunity*.” The origins of AANHPI Heritage Month can be traced back to the late 1970s, when a group of educators and community leaders began advocating for greater recognition of Asian American history and culture in California. In 1978, a Congressional resolution was passed declaring the first ten days of May as Asian Pacific American Heritage Week. In 1992, the week was expanded to a monthlong observance, and the term Asian American and Pacific Islander was added to the name of the celebration in 2009.

The spring planting season is in full swing. Please help us showcase your planting stories and photos in our #plant2023 social media campaign posts and blogs. It's easy – all you need to do is tag @farmersgov when you make a post on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, or submit stories to sm.fp.social@usda.gov. Next month, a wrap-up blog featuring some of the best submissions, will be published. To learn more about how to participate and what makes a great #Plant23 photo, visit farmers.gov.

FSA announced two new programs designed to assist producers who experienced revenue losses from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs are revenue-based and the goal is to better support farmers. Both the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) Phase Two and the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#) offer a holistic approach to disaster assistance and provide economic support for producers who bear the financial brunt of circumstances beyond their control. The deadline to apply is June 2, 2023 for both programs.

The application process been simplified for the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for underserved producers. NAP provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops when natural disaster events cause low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting. This important policy change opens the door to risk management options for producers who may not have previously been able to obtain coverage to protect their crops. Our policy improvements, beginning with the 2022 crop year, means having a CCC-860 form (*Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*) on file with FSA will provide producers with basic NAP coverage for all eligible crops. Specifically, FSA is waiving all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage for producers with a CCC-860 on file prior to the application closing date for each crop. These producers are also eligible to receive a 50% premium reduction if they elect higher levels of coverage before the application closing date for each crop. If you suffered losses from natural disasters in 2022, you will need to contact your local FSA county office to file an acreage report, as well as a notice of loss, and an application for a NAP payment. If you are interested in NAP coverage for 2023 and future years, your local FSA county office staff will be more than happy to

provide information on eligibility, coverage options, and how to apply for additional coverage.

The implementation phase for the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities effort has been announced. Project partners are beginning work on formal implementation of the climate-smart production practices, marketing, and quantification, monitoring, reporting and verification of greenhouse gas benefits that are funded through the effort as agreements are finalized. As projects get underway, Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Learning Network (Partnerships Network), a collaboration of all the project partners, is being launched and will generate key lessons-learned as projects are implemented. In the coming weeks and months, partners will be opening signup under their projects for producer participation. Producers interested in participating in projects are invited to visit the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Active [Projects Dashboard](#) to find projects in their areas. This dashboard will be updated periodically with newly active projects and links to their project websites when available. USDA is investing more than \$3.1 billion for 141 projects.

Agricultural producers and landowners with certain expiring [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP) contracts can receive additional rental incentives and extend that land's role in conservation for another 30 years. The signup period for its Clean Lakes, Estuaries, And Rivers enrollment (CLEAR30) **is open through July 31, 2023**. CLEAR30 is a part of the CLEAR initiative, which prioritizes water quality practices as a part of Continuous CRP enrollment, and is one of several CRP enrollment opportunities. CLEAR30 allows producers and landowners enrolling certain water quality practices to enroll in 30-year contracts, extending the lifespan and strengthening the benefits of important water quality practices on their land. Like other CRP enrollments, CLEAR30 is a voluntary, incentive-based conservation opportunity offered by FSA.

For more information on Farm Service Agency (FSA), contact your [local USDA service center](#) or visit www.farmers.gov.

Our goal is to serve all farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners; equitably; through the delivery of effective and efficient agricultural programs.

Until next time...

Biden-Harris Administration Announces Availability of \$500 Million for Improved Regional Conservation Partnership Program to Better Support Partners, Producers as Part of Investing in America Agenda

The Biden-Harris Administration recently announced the availability of \$500 million in funding to advance partner-driven solutions to conservation on agricultural land through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). RCPP leverages a voluntary approach to conservation that expands the reach of conservation efforts and climate-smart agriculture through public-private partnerships. Increased funding for fiscal year 2023 is made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act, and this year's funding opportunity reflects a concerted effort to streamline and simplify the program. Program improvements will enable USDA to efficiently implement the \$4.95 billion in Inflation Reduction Act funding for the program while improving the experience for partners, agricultural producers, and employees.

"The Regional Conservation Partnership Program leverages the collective power and resources of public-private partnerships to deliver meaningful results for agriculture and

conservation,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “Thanks to the additional resources unlocked by the Inflation Reduction Act, as well as the improvements being made to the program, more farmers, ranchers, and foresters than ever before will be able to access and deploy conservation and climate-smart practices that will combat the climate crisis, enhance water and soil quality, protect vulnerable wildlife habitat and more.”

Arkansas has a successful history of RCPP, boasting 20 approved RCPP projects since the program inception in 2014. These projects have brought to the State a combined federal investment of more than \$84 million leveraged by \$77 million in non federal resources.

“We want to see this success continue and have staff available to meet with interested partners to discuss new RCPP project ideas,” said Arkansas Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Mike Sullivan.

RCPP Improvement Effort

The improvements included in this year's RCPP funding opportunity are part of an ongoing effort to streamline NRCS conservation programs and efficiently implement the Inflation Reduction Act. The RCPP improvement effort identified problems and central issues associated with the program and is working to develop meaningful and actionable improvements.

Based on partner listening sessions and employee and partner surveys, NRCS identified seven key focus areas for improvement, each with a dedicated team working to address identified issues and provide recommendations:

1. Simplifying and Reducing the Number of Agreements
2. Reducing Lengthy RCPP Easement Transactions
3. Improving the RCPP Portal
4. Consistent Guidance and Training for Employees and Partners
5. Simplifying the Technical Assistance Structure
6. Improving the Conservation Desktop
7. Simplifying the Partner Reimbursement Process

For more information about RCPP and a list of frequently asked questions, visit the [NRCS website](#).

Notice of Funding Opportunity

The application period is now open for RCPP Classic and RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA). RCPP Classic projects are implemented using NRCS contracts and easements with producers, landowners and communities, in collaboration with project partners. Through RCPP AFA, the lead partner must work directly with agricultural producers to support the development of new conservation structures and approaches that would not otherwise be available under RCPP Classic.

This RCPP Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) showcases a number of program improvements including the increase of project funding ceilings, the simplification of financial assistance and technical assistance structures, a stronger emphasis on locally led conservation, and easement deed flexibilities.

Up to \$500 million will be available through the RCPP for fiscal year 2023, of which up to \$50 million will prioritize AFAs with Indian Tribes.

Projects selected under this NOFO may be awarded funding through either the Inflation Reduction Act or Farm Bill 2018. Applications for RCPP climate-related projects will receive priority consideration for Inflation Reduction Act funding. The 2023 RCPP priorities are climate-smart agriculture, urban agriculture and projects and, as a Justice40 covered program, projects that serve underserved farmers and ranchers.

NRCS will accept applications now through August 18, 2023, via the [RCPP portal](#). Please note that to request access to the portal, you must have a level Two verified eAuthentication account with USDA. This can be obtained by following the instructions on the [USDA eAuthentication page](#).

Webinar for Interested Applicants

NRCS encourages interested applicants to participate in an upcoming webinar that will provide general information about this funding announcement. The webinar will take place on June 7, 2023, from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Central Time. Join via the links posted on the [RCPP How to Apply](#) website. Additional webinars may be announced as needed.

For additional information on RCPP, contact Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships Amanda Mathis at amanda.mathis@usda.gov.

NRCS Announces Sign-Up Application Deadline for Financial Assistance to Improve Forest Health through the Arklaoma Ozark Watershed Restoration

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest more than \$48.6 million this year through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership for projects that mitigate wildfire risk, improve water quality, restore forest ecosystems, and ultimately contribute to USDA's efforts to combat climate change. This year, the USDA Forest Service (FS) and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will invest in projects, including 14 new projects, bringing together agricultural producers, forest landowners, and National Forest System lands to improve forest health using available Farm Bill conservation programs and other authorities. NRCS and FS initially announced a multi-year partnership in 2014 to improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems across the nation.

Building on the success of three prior Joint Chiefs' projects in Arkansas, partners will continue to restore and improve forest health and water quality emphasizing prescribed burning, forest stand improvement, streambank stabilization and crossings through the Arklaoma Ozark Watershed Restoration Project. The project area includes private lands within Benton, Carroll, Madison, and Washington counties.

"With the help of USDA, producers can improve their forestry operations while realizing many other benefits, including mitigating impacts from wildfires and improving water quality and wildlife habitat," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas.

Some of the conservation practices available include forest stand improvement (thinning), prescribed burning, firebreaks, tree and shrub planting and streambank and shoreline protection.

NRCS accepts program applications on a continuous basis but sets dates to batch and rank applications as funding allows. Farmers and landowners within Benton, Carroll,

Madison, and Washington counties who submit applications to their local NRCS office by June 9, 2023, will be considered for this round of funding. Applications received after June 9, 2023, will be considered in later funding periods, subject to funding availability.

For more information visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local [USDA/NRCS Field Service Center](#). All USDA Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with NRCS should call ahead to schedule an appointment. Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal where producers can view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in.

NRCS in Arkansas Announces Sign-Up for Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Conservation Opportunities

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas announced two additional sign-ups through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program's (EQIP) Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Initiative and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

"These additional opportunities will help agricultural producers throughout Arkansas make best use of their natural resources where agricultural production is often limited by competing land uses and higher costs of utilization," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "Urban and small farmers provide critical access to healthy food for local communities, as well as jobs, increased green spaces, and community engagement."

In Arkansas, healthy food access can be limited in urban, suburban and rural areas, and small-scale, sustainable, diversified operations are vital to support local and regional food systems.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but to be included in this funding opportunity, interested producers should contact their local USDA Service Center and apply by June 16, 2023. Applicants are encouraged to work with NRCS and the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to complete eligibility requirements at their earliest convenience during the application process.

EQIP - Small Farm and Urban Agriculture

For small-scale and urban operations in this particular sign-up, NRCS offers technical and financial assistance with conservation practices, such as conservation cover; conservation crop rotation; cover crops; high tunnel systems; irrigation system, micro irrigation; Irrigation Water Management; low tunnel systems; Mulching; Nutrient management; Pest management conservation system; Prescribed grazing; Raised beds; Residue and tillage management – no-till; Residue and tillage management – reduced till; Roof Runoff Structure; Soil carbon amendment; and Wildlife habitat planting. The full list of practices is available at the NRCS office in your local [USDA Service Center](#).

CSP - Small Farm and Urban Agriculture

CSP offers additional opportunities to expand on existing conservation efforts through enhancements. Interested producers should submit applications including the NRCS-CPA-1200 and maps that identify and delineate the boundaries of all eligible land uses

and acres included in the operation to their local NRCS office. The full list of enhancements is available at your [local NRCS office](#).

More Information

Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers and landowners make conservation improvements on their land that benefit natural resources, build resiliency, and contribute to the nation's broader effort to combat the impacts of climate change. More broadly, these efforts build on others across USDA to encourage use of conservation practices.

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.

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.

May 22nd – UAPBs Beginning Farmers Academy The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) Small Farm Program is hosting a Beginning Farmers Academy. **FSA Representatives will present on FSA Loans and Requirements, obtaining a Farm Number, FSA Farm Programs, and FSA Information Resources.** This VIRTUAL Conference will be held Monday, May 22, 2023 at 9am. For Additional Information, please contact the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Small Farm Program, at 870.575.7225.

Avoid Scams Related to USDA Financial Assistance for Farmers Facing Discrimination

The Inflation Reduction Act provides \$2.2 billion in financial assistance for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA's farm lending programs prior to January 1, 2021.

USDA has become aware of some lawyers and groups spreading misleading information about this process, pressuring people to sign retainer agreements, and asking people to fill out forms with private and sensitive information.

Application forms for this program **are not yet available** and the **application filing period has not started**. Before the application process opens, USDA will publish a list of trusted community organizations located across the country that will provide **FREE** help completing applications.

Please beware of organizations seeking to file your application for a fee. Filing an application for the program will be **FREE**. You **will not** need a lawyer to file an application for this program. If you feel the need for legal advice, seek the assistance of a trusted, licensed attorney.

Beware of solicitations by mail, email, or phone calls from individuals claiming to be connected to USDA. **USDA will not solicit you for information.**

The most up-to-date information on this program will be posted at www.farmers.gov/22007, a USDA website. Please check there for any concerns or reach out to your local FSA office. To find your local office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator.

If you believe there is an organization conducting a scam related to this process, please contact the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) or any other appropriate authorities. The USDA OIG hotline can be accessed online at <https://usdaoig.oversight.gov/hotline> and by phone at (800) 424-9121.

USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.

- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the Federal Register](#).

More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) ([also available in Spanish](#)) or by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

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 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 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

USDA Offers Options for Signing and Sharing Documents Online

Farmers and ranchers working with USDA’s Farm Service Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service can now sign and share documents online in just a few clicks. By using Box or OneSpan, producers can digitally complete business transactions without leaving their homes or agricultural operations. Both services are free, secure, and available for multiple FSA and NRCS programs.

Box is a secure, cloud-based site where FSA or NRCS documents can be managed and shared. Producers who choose to use Box can create a username and password to access their secure Box account, where documents can be downloaded, printed, manually signed, scanned, uploaded, and shared digitally with Service Center staff. This service is available to any FSA or NRCS customer with access to a mobile device or computer with printer connectivity.

OneSpan is a secure eSignature solution for FSA and NRCS customers. Like Box, no software downloads or eAuthentication is required for OneSpan. Instead, producers interested in eSignature through OneSpan can confirm their identity through two-factor authentication using a verification code sent to their mobile device or a personalized question and answer. Once identity is confirmed, documents can be reviewed and e-signed through OneSpan via the producer’s personal email address. Signed documents immediately become available to the appropriate Service Center staff.

Box and OneSpan are both optional services for customers interested in improved efficiency in signing and sharing documents with USDA, and they do not replace existing systems using eAuthentication for digital signature. Instead, these tools provide additional digital options for producers to use when conducting business with FSA or NRCS.

USDA Service Center staff are available to help producers get started with Box and OneSpan through a few simple steps. Please visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find your local office and let Service Center staff know you’re interested in signing and sharing

documents through these new features. In most cases, one quick phone call will be all that is needed to initiate the process.

Visit farmers.gov/mydocs to learn more about Box and OneSpan, steps for getting started, and additional resources for conducting business with USDA online.

USDA Simplifies Application Process for Noninsured Crops for Underserved Producers; Improves Risk Management Accessibility

A Message from FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux

Earlier this year, Farm Service Agency (FSA) made several updates to disaster assistance programs to give more farmers, ranchers, and Tribes equitable access to recovery programs. Specifically, we made changes to the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) and simplified the application process for underserved producers.

This important policy change opens the door to risk management options for producers who may not have previously known about or been able to obtain coverage to protect their crops.

NAP provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops when natural disaster events cause low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting.

Our policy improvements mean that, beginning with the 2022 crop year, having a CCC-860 form, *Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification*, on file with FSA will provide producers with basic NAP coverage for all eligible crops. Specifically, FSA is waiving all NAP-related service fees for basic coverage for producers with a CCC-860 on file prior to the application closing date for each crop. These producers are also eligible to receive a 50% premium reduction if they elect higher levels of coverage before the application closing date for each crop.

At the end of January, FSA notified producers who already have the CCC-860 certification form on file regarding their eligibility for NAP basic coverage for 2022. If you suffered losses from natural disasters in 2022, you will need to contact your local FSA county office to file an acreage report, as well as a notice of loss, and an application for a NAP payment.

If you are interested in NAP coverage for 2023 and future years, your local FSA county office staff will be more than happy to provide information on eligibility, coverage options, and how to apply for additional coverage.

While these recent policy changes are intended to remove barriers to available benefits and help underserved producers manage risk, any producer of noninsurable crops can apply for NAP coverage by completing FSA form [CCC-471](#), Application for Coverage, and paying a service fee. Your local FSA office can verify application closing dates and ensure coverage for your crops is available.

FSA is committed to revisiting program policies and finding ways, within our authorities, to remove obstacles that prevent participation. Expanding NAP to ensure all producers of noninsured crops have access to risk coverage is the result of proactive input from producers and the willingness of FSA employees to think outside of the box for the benefit of the producers we serve.

Please contact your local [USDA Service Center](#) for more information on NAP coverage options.

USDA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023

USDA announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin signing up for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) starting today and running through May 26, 2023. Among CRP enrollment opportunities, 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 soil.

More than 3.1 million acres were accepted through the 2022 Grassland CRP signup from agricultural producers and private landowners. That signup—the highest ever for the program—reflects the continued success and value of investments in voluntary, producer-led, working lands conservation programs. The current total participation in Grassland CRP is 6.3 million acres, which is part of the 23 million acres enrolled in CRP opportunities overall.

Since 2021, USDA's FSA, which administers all CRP programs, has made several improvements to Grassland CRP to broaden the program's reach, including:

- Creating two [National Priority Zones](#) to put focus on environmentally sensitive land such as that prone to wind erosion.
- Enhancing offers with 10 additional ranking points to producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers and military veterans.
- Leveraging the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP) to engage historically underserved communities within Tribal Nations in the Great Plains.

How to Sign Up for Grassland CRP

Landowners and producers interested in Grassland CRP, or any other CRP enrollment option, should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before the deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can enroll in the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter into a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

Other CRP Signups

Under [Continuous CRP](#), producers and landowners can enroll throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. Continuous CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR30) Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states but has since been expanded nationwide, giving

producers and landowners across the country the opportunity to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.

USDA Expands Margin Protection for Corn and Soybean Farmers

USDA is expanding its [Margin Protection insurance plan](#), adding more than a thousand counties to the insurance option that provides coverage against an unexpected decrease in operating margin for corn and soybean producers. This expansion, which is in direct response to growing interest among producers, will be available by June 30, 2023. Interested producers will need to purchase their coverage by Sept. 30, 2023, to be eligible for the 2024 crop year.

Margin Protection, first implemented for the 2016 crop year, protects against decreases in margin caused by reduced county yields, reduced commodity prices, increased price of certain inputs or any combination of these issues. It is area-based, using county-level estimates of average revenue and input costs to establish the amount of coverage and indemnity payments.

RMA's expansion of the Margin Protection plan will add 1,255 counties for soybeans and 1,729 counties for corn. This will add coverage in 22 states for soybeans with 34 states being covered in total. It will also make Margin Protection available for corn in the contiguous United States ([see maps](#)). The plan is available in select counties for rice (Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas), and wheat (Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota).

In the 2022 crop year, there were 1.7 million acres of corn and 1 million acres of soybeans insured under the Margin Protection insurance plan.

Margin Protection can be purchased by itself, or in conjunction with a Yield Protection or Revenue Protection policy purchased from the same Approved Insurance Provider that issued the Margin Protection policy. Margin Protection cannot be purchased with the Supplemental Coverage Option or the Enhanced Coverage Option.

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](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov or by contacting your [RMA Regional Office](#).

Rates & Dates

**Selected Interest Rates for
May 2023**

90-Day Treasury Bill	
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	
Emergency Loans	
Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years)	3.500
Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years)	3.500
Commodity Loans 1996- Present	5.625

Dates to Remember

5/26/23	Grassland sign-up deadline



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

www.fsa.usda.gov

www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Arkansas/index

www.nrcs.usda.gov

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.

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