



Together We Can End COVID-19

Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, but the light is at the end of the tunnel. The United States now has safe, highly effective vaccines that protect you and your family from getting sick. They offer an opportunity to return to normalcy in our everyday lives. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine gives you an added layer of protection and could protect your coworkers, family, and friends.

Some may have concerns, and that is perfectly reasonable. USDA believes we can trust what doctors and scientists are saying. COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and will save lives. Millions of people have already safely received these life-saving vaccines.

USDA is encouraging our employees to get the vaccine as soon as they have access to one, and as our offices begin to reopen, we also encourage customers our staff may encounter in the workplace to get one. More and more states are increasing the number of COVID-19 vaccines available to their residents.

If you want to know more about COVID-19 vaccines or search for vaccine providers near you, please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>

Help be a part of the solution. You are a key player in our nation's effort to end this pandemic for good. Together, we can do this.

USDA Reminds Historically Underserved Producers of Advance Payment Option

If you're a historically underserved producer and participating in the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), you can receive an advance conservation practice payment before you implement a practice.

A [historically underserved producer](#) is described as one of the below:

- **Beginning Farmer or Rancher** – is new to farming or ranching, or, has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10-consecutive years.
- **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher** – is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of that group without regard to their individual qualities.
- **Veteran Farmer or Rancher** – has served in the armed forces and has not operated a farm or ranch, has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10-consecutive years, or first obtained veteran status during the last 10 years.

- **Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher** – has a household income at or below the national poverty level. Eligibility can be determined by using [this online tool](#).

Under the advance payment option, such producers may request payments when they have final designs and job sheets and are ready to begin their EQIP practices. Advance payments provide at least 50 percent of the payment rate for each practice. The funds must be spent within 90 days of receipt and practices must be completed as agreed to in an EQIP plan of operations. Producers also may opt to have NRCS pay the contractors or vendors directly.

For more information, visit the [advance payments](#) webpage where you can download the [EQIP Advance Payment Fact Sheet](#).

Share Your Planting Season Experience for #Plant2021

After a long winter and a challenging year, spring has finally come. As the world around us bursts into song and color, our farmers will begin to work the soil they've protected all winter and plant the seeds they will nurture for months to come. Later this year, the fruits of their labor will become the food that feeds our communities, the fiber that clothes our families, and the fuel that powers industries.

For many, 2020 was the first year they'd ever seen an empty shelf at the grocery store. And for the first time, many people realized how much they take farming and the people who make it possible for granted. Fewer and fewer Americans understand what our farmers do, who they are, and the hard work they put in. Let's change that.

This planting season let Farmers.gov showcase your work by participating in the #Plant2021 campaign. We'll share your story on @FarmersGov on social media and a nationwide [storymap](#). Here's how:

Using your smartphone or digital camera, take photos of what's happening on your operation during planting season. Videos may be too large to email as attachment, so you can email them to us via mail drop (iPhone), Google Photos (Android), or any other file sharing service. A few ideas:

- If you're comfortable, we'd love to see the people that make it happen set against the backdrop of your agricultural operation.
- Take a photo from inside the tractor cab so we can see what you see.
- Photos at sunrise or sunset are always beautiful!
- Behind-the-scenes photos showing us the amount of planning and preparation it takes to have a successful planting season are welcomed.
- Emerging (baby) crops.

Submit your photos/videos along with the following information to us at SM.FP.Social@usda.gov:

- Your name if you're comfortable sharing.
- Location of the operation (city or county and state).

- Information about what's in the photo/video and what's being planting.
- Your thoughts about this year's planting season. Is this year different from previous years? How do you feel about the season? What are you hopeful about?
- If your operation has a Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram account, please include it so that we can tag you.

Please note that by submitting your photo/video, you are granting USDA permission to use these materials for outreach and education purposes. Follow @FarmersGov on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#), and we look forward to sharing your story!

USDA Continues Conservation Planning and Programs - NRCS Services Available by Phone Appointment Only

All USDA Service Centers, including Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) field offices, are not currently accessible to customers in person.

NRCS staff are working with customers through phone, mail and online communications, and field work continues with appropriate social distancing to help producers with conservation planning and financial assistance through Farm Bill programs. If you need information on a Farm Bill program deadline, please call your local NRCS field office.

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the [farmers.gov](#) portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at [farmers.gov/sign-in](#). Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway link](#) which can be found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](#). Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents.

For the most current updates on available services and Service Center contact information, visit [farmers.gov/coronavirus](#).

Conservation Efforts Continue on America's Farms, Ranches Amid Challenging Year

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service continued its conservation work across the country despite a tough 2020 marked with a pandemic and several natural disasters. The agency helped farmers, ranchers and forest landowners implement conservation practices on their working lands, which help conserve natural resource such as soil, water and wildlife as well as boost producers' bottom lines. Additionally, NRCS launched new online tools that increased the efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of crucial programs.

This year, NRCS worked with producers and communities to:

- Develop more than 100,000 conservation plans.

- Co-invest \$1.32 billion through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)(EQIP) to put conservation practices on 10 million acres, as well as \$507 million through the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP) to put conservation enhancements on 9.3 million acres.
- Enroll more than 430 new easements, totaling 230,000 acres, into the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) (ACEP).
- Enter into over 420 agreements with local sponsors to cooperatively implement emergency recovery measures through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) and obligated more than \$251 million in EWP funds in FY 2020.

USDA Expands Aquaculture Disaster Assistance in Alabama to Include Fish Raised for Food

Request ELAP assistance for 2021 losses beginning June 1

In response to catastrophic aquaculture losses due to major winter storms that hit states along the U.S. Gulf Coast including Alabama in February, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced a policy change that makes food fish and other aquatic species eligible for the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish Program \(ELAP\)](#). Previously, only farm-raised game and bait fish were eligible for death loss ELAP benefits. Beginning June 1, eligible aquaculture producers can request ELAP assistance for 2021 losses. This policy change is for the 2021 and subsequent program years.

ELAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or loss conditions, including blizzards and wildfires, as determined by the Secretary.

To be eligible, losses must have occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2021. For farm-raised fish and other aquatic species death losses only that occurred prior to June 1, 2021, FSA is waiving the requirement to file a notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent. An aquaculture producer will still need to be able to provide contemporaneous records upon request to document the eligible loss event and demonstrate the beginning and ending inventory. The deadline to file an application for payment for the 2021 program year is Jan. 31, 2022.

Producers must provide acreage reports for the surface acres of water where their aquatic species are raised. Acreage reports for 2021 must be filed by Sept. 30, 2022.

More Information

USDA offers a comprehensive portfolio of disaster assistance programs. On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine all program or loan options available for disaster recovery assistance. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Offers Disaster Assistance for Producers Facing Inclement Weather

Severe weather events create significant challenges and often result in catastrophic loss for agricultural producers.

Despite every attempt to mitigate risk, your operation may suffer losses. USDA offers several programs to help with recovery.

Risk Management

For producers who have risk protection through [Federal Crop Insurance](#) or the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP), we want to remind you to report crop damage to your crop insurance agent or the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

If you have crop insurance, contact your agency within 72 hours of discovering damage and be sure to follow up in writing within 15 days. If you have NAP coverage, file a Notice of Loss (also called Form CCC-576) within 15 days of loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

Disaster Assistance

USDA also offers disaster assistance programs, which is especially important to livestock, fruit and vegetable, specialty and perennial crop producers who have fewer [risk management options](#).

First, the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP) and [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that died as a result of a qualifying natural disaster event or for loss of grazing acres, feed and forage. And, the [Livestock Forage Disaster Program](#) (LFP) provides assistance to producers of grazed forage crop acres that have suffered crop loss due to a qualifying drought. Livestock producers suffering the impacts of drought can also request [Emergency Haying and Grazing](#) on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres.

Next, the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) provides cost share assistance to rehabilitate and replant tree, vines or shrubs loss experienced by orchards and nurseries. This complements NAP or crop insurance coverage, which cover the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases.

For LIP and ELAP, you will need to file a Notice of Loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days. For TAP, you will need to file a program application within 90 days.

Documentation

It's critical to keep accurate records to document all losses following this devastating cold weather event. Livestock producers are advised to document beginning livestock numbers by taking time and date-stamped video or pictures prior to after the loss.

Other common documentation options include:

- Purchase records
- Production records

- Vaccination records
- Bank or other loan documents
- Third-party certification

Other Programs

The [Emergency Conservation Program](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

Additionally, FSA offers a variety of loans available including emergency loans that are triggered by disaster declarations and operating loans that can assist producers with credit needs. You can use these loans to replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, or refinance farm-related debts, and other needs.

Meanwhile, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial resources through its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes.

Additional Resources

Additional details – including payment calculations – can be found on our [NAP](#), [ELAP](#), [LIP](#), and [TAP](#) fact sheets. On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help you determine program or loan options.

While we never want to have to implement disaster programs, we are here to help. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center. All [USDA Service Centers](#) are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments because of the pandemic.

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.

Conservation at Work Video Series

A new video series from NRCS and farmers.gov, *Conservation at Work*, presents short and easy to understand videos about popular conservation practices. These videos feature producers explaining how an individual practice helps their land and why they are using it.

The videos shine the spotlight on farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners from across the U.S. who explain why they've implemented the conservation practices and how they work on their land. They also provide insight into how each practice is helping them protect and improve resources and save time and money.

The first 15 videos cover:

- Brush Management
- Cover Crop
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Grade Stabilization
- Grassed Waterway
- High Tunnel
- No Till
- Nutrient Management
- Prescribed Grazing
- Pumping Station
- Sprinkler System
- Trails and Walkways
- Waste Storage
- Water & Sediment Control Basin
- Wetland Restoration

The *Conservation at Work* video series can be found at farmers.gov/conserveserve/conservationatwork.

New Farmers.gov Conservation Concerns Tool Provides Customized Support for America's Farmers and Ranchers

Are you interested in keeping your working land productive for years to come? Use Natural Resources Conservation Service's new [Conservation Concerns Tool](#) to learn about conservation concerns that might impact your agricultural operation, then work with us on solutions targeted to fit your business needs. This tool is available now on our farmers.gov website, no login or account necessary.

With plain language and illustrative photos, the Conservation Concerns Tool provides a walkthrough of more than 40 conservation concerns related to soil, water, plants, animals, energy and air. Use the tool to create a list of resource concerns specific to your farm, ranch, or working forest lands, then download or print your list to share with NRCS staff at your [local USDA Service Center](#).

We have a [video available to walk you through the tool](#) so you can see how it works.

The Conservation Concerns Tool is built to run on any modern browser such as Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or Safari and is fully functional on mobile devices. Whether you work from your desktop at home or your smartphone in the field, this new tool offers personalized conservation insights to meet the needs of 21st century agriculture.

Visit farmers.gov/conserve to learn about additional USDA resources available for your working land.

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