



USDA to Provide Pandemic Assistance to Livestock Producers for Animal Losses

FSA Will Begin Taking Applications for Indemnity Program July 20

Livestock and poultry producers who suffered losses during the pandemic due to insufficient access to processing can apply for assistance for those losses and the cost of depopulation and disposal of the animals. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Vilsack announced the Pandemic Livestock Indemnity Program (PLIP) in [recorded] remarks at the National Pork Industry Conference in Wisconsin Dells, WI. The announcement is part of USDA's Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative. Livestock and poultry producers can apply for assistance through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) July 20 through Sept. 17, 2021.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, authorized payments to producers for losses of livestock or poultry depopulated from March 1, 2020 through December 26, 2020, due to insufficient processing access as a result of the pandemic. PLIP payments will be based on 80% of the fair market value of the livestock and poultry and for the cost of depopulation and disposal of the animal. Eligible livestock and poultry include swine, chickens and turkeys.

PLIP Program Details

Eligible livestock must have been depopulated from March 1, 2020, through December 26, 2020, due to insufficient processing access as a result of the pandemic. Livestock must have been physically located in the U.S. or a territory of the U.S. at the time of depopulation.

Eligible livestock owners include persons or legal entities who, as of the day the eligible livestock was depopulated, had legal ownership of the livestock. Packers, live poultry dealers and contract growers are not eligible for PLIP.

PLIP payments compensate participants for 80% of both the loss of the eligible livestock or poultry and for the cost of depopulation and disposal based on a single payment rate per head. PLIP payments will be calculated by multiplying the number of head of eligible livestock or poultry by the payment rate per head, and then subtracting the amount of any payments the eligible livestock or poultry owner has received for disposal of the livestock or poultry under the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or a state program. The payments will also be reduced by any Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP 1 and 2) payments paid on the same inventory of swine that were depopulated.

There is no per person or legal entity payment limitation on PLIP payments. To be eligible for payments, a person or legal entity must have an average adjusted gross income (AGI) of less than \$900,000 for tax years 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Applying for Assistance

Eligible livestock and poultry producers can apply for PLIP starting July 20, 2021, by completing the FSA-620, Pandemic Livestock Indemnity Program application, and submitting it to any FSA county office. Additional documentation may be required. Visit farmers.gov/plip for a copy of the Notice of Funding Availability and more information on how to apply.

Applications can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. To find your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator. Livestock and poultry producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.

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 Announces Dates for Conservation Reserve Program Grasslands Signups

CRP Grasslands Signup Runs from July 12 to August 20

Agricultural producers and landowners in Alabama can apply for the [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP) Grasslands signup from July 12 until August 20. This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated signup options to provide greater incentives for

producers and increased the program's conservation and climate benefits, including setting a minimum rental rate and identifying two national priority zones.

The CRP Grassland signup is competitive, and USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide for annual rental payments for land devoted to conservation purposes.

Grasslands Signup

CRP Grasslands helps Alabama landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits.

FSA has updated the Grasslands Signup to establish a minimum rental rate of \$15 per acre, which will benefit 1,300 counties.

To focus on important wildlife corridors, FSA also identified [National Grassland Priority Zones](#), providing extra incentives to producers for enrolling grasslands in important migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas – the Greater Yellowstone Elk Migration Corridor and the Severe Wind Erosion – Dust Bowl Zone. Counties within these two zones get extra ranking points as well as \$5 added to their rental rate. The [CRP Grasslands Ranking Factors fact sheet](#) has additional information.

How to Sign Up

To enroll in the CRP Grasslands signup, producers and landowners should contact USDA by the August 20 deadline. Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Because of the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Contact your [Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

More Information on CRP

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits. The program marked its 35-year anniversary this past December.

USDA Updates Conservation Provisions for Highly Erodible Land and Wetlands

USDA published its final rule on determining whether land is considered highly erodible or a wetland, integrating input from the public and making updates in accordance with the 2018 Farm Bill. This final rule follows a focused effort by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve consistency and use of science in making determinations.

To be eligible for most USDA programs, producers must be conservation compliant with the highly erodible land and wetland provisions. These provisions aim to reduce soil loss on erosion-prone lands and to protect wetlands for the multiple benefits they provide.

The final rule was made available for public inspection today, and it will be published tomorrow in the Federal Register. This follows an interim final rule published Dec. 7, 2018.

This final rule confirms most of the changes made by the December 2018 interim final rule and makes these additional updates:

1. Adding the requirement of the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA will make a reasonable effort to include the affected person in an on-site investigation conducted prior to making a wetland violation technical determination.
2. Further clarifying how wetland hydrology is identified for farmed wetlands and farmed wetland pasture.
3. Adding clarification to the consideration of best-drained condition for wetland hydrology in keeping with the definition of prior converted cropland.
4. Relocating the provision that wetland determinations can be done on a tract, field, or sub-field basis in order to improve clarity.

NRCS has recently updated its conservation compliance webpages, adding highly erodible land and wetland determination resources for agricultural producers by state. Learn more about [conservation compliance](#) on the NRCS website.

Eligibility for Nominations for the 2021 County Committee Elections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs.

Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision making and farm program delivery process.

A county committee is composed of three to 11 elected members from local administrative areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. To be eligible for nomination and hold office as a committee member or alternate, a person must fulfill each of the following requirements: (1) be a producer with an interest in farming or ranching operations, (2) participate or cooperate in any FSA program provided for by law, (3) be a U.S. citizen, (4) be of legal voting age, (5) meet the basic eligibility requirements, and (6) reside in the county or multi-county jurisdiction in which they will be serving. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation(s) but may not have applied or received FSA program benefits.

All nomination forms for the 2021 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by Aug. 2, 2021. For more information on FSA county committee elections and

appointments, refer to the FSA fact sheet: *Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a COC Member* available online at: fsa.usda.gov/elections.

New Rule Makes Enhancements to Environmental Quality Incentives Program

USDA released the [final rule](#) for its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP). NRCS provides producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement conservation practices through EQIP. Popular EQIP practices include cover crops, nutrient management, forest stand improvement, prescribed grazing, irrigation efficiency improvement, and water quality improvement practices. Implementing conservation practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil, and better wildlife habitat while improving agricultural operations.

Based on feedback from 600 comments on the interim rule, NRCS made the following changes in the final rule include:

- Revise its purpose statement to expressly include addressing resource concerns for organic producers, avoiding the need for more regulatory programs, and helping producers transition from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- Authorize reduced matching requirements for Conservation Innovation Grant projects aimed at helping historically underserved producers
- Creating incentive contracts and payments for incentive practices to better support locally led conservation needs.
- Requiring NRCS to offer an advance payment option for historically underserved producers.
- Raising the payment cap for producers participating in the Organic Initiative to \$140,000 for contracts entered into for fiscal years 2019 through 2023. Previously, it was \$20,000 per year and \$80,000 for any six-year period.
- Expanding the Conservation Innovation Grant program, which is funded through EQIP, to include opportunities for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials and Soil Health Demonstration Trials.

For a full list of updates, view the [final rule on the Federal Register](#). Visit your state website from nrcs.usda.gov or contact your [local NRCS field office](#) to learn how to apply for EQIP.

Making Farm Reconstitutions

When changes in farm ownership or operation take place, a farm *reconstitution* is necessary. The reconstitution — or recon — is the process of combining or dividing farms or tracts of land based on the farming operation.

To be effective for the current Fiscal Year (FY), farm combinations and farm divisions must be requested by **August 1 of the FY** for farms subject to the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program. A reconstitution is considered to be requested when

all of the required signatures are on FSA-155 and all other applicable documentation, such as proof of ownership, is submitted.

Total Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and non-ARC/PLC farms may be reconstituted at any time.

The following are the different methods used when doing a farm recon:

- **Estate Method** — the division of bases, allotments and quotas for a parent farm among heirs in settling an estate
- **Designation of Landowner Method** — may be used when (1) part of a farm is sold or ownership is transferred; (2) an entire farm is sold to two or more persons; (3) farm ownership is transferred to two or more persons; (4) part of a tract is sold or ownership is transferred; (5) a tract is sold to two or more persons; or (6) tract ownership is transferred to two or more persons. In order to use this method, the land sold must have been owned for at least three years, or a waiver granted, and the buyer and seller must sign a Memorandum of Understanding
- **DCP Cropland Method** — the division of bases in the same proportion that the DCP cropland for each resulting tract relates to the DCP cropland on the parent tract
- **Default Method** — the division of bases for a parent farm with each tract maintaining the bases attributed to the tract level when the reconstitution is initiated in the system.

For questions on your farm reconstitution, contact your County USDA Service Center.

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/conserve/conservationatwork.

USDA Launches Strategy to Continue Conserving the Gopher Tortoise and its Critical Habitat

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) released its new 5-year plan to conserve the Southeast's threatened gopher tortoise by focusing on the conservation and restoration of its key habitat—longleaf pine forests, and fire will play a leading role in the efforts. The initiative has already conserved 274,302 acres of gopher tortoise habitat since 2017, and the new plan's goal is to conserve an additional 975,687 acres by the end of 2024. The gopher tortoise is one of nine species to represent the USDA's premier wildlife conservation program—Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW).

The fate of the gopher tortoise is linked to habitat quality, and efforts to conserve habitat on private lands will be critical to its continued survival. WLFW conservation actions are based on resource needs and generally prioritize the following:

- Promoting increased use of prescribed burning
- Improving vegetation management to include both timber stand and understory management
- Establishing longleaf pine stands through plantings
- Supporting prescribed grazing to manage gopher tortoise habitats in pine savannas and grasslands

This new [Gopher Tortoise FY 2020 – 2024 Implementation Strategy](#) will build upon those successes and prescribed burning will be the dominant conservation action in this new strategy to recover quality habitats and promote healthy native forest stands. Learn more about USDA's wildlife conservation efforts with [Working Lands for Wildlife](#).

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.



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