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Farm Service Agency

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Louisiana FSA Newsletter

Louisiana Farm Service Agency

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Alexandria, LA 71302

www.fsa.usda.gov/la

Acting State Executive Director:

T. Christine Normand

Next State Committee Meeting:

To be determined

Please contact your local
FSA Office for questions

New Actively Engaged Provisions for Non-Family Joint Operations or Entities

Many Farm Service Agency programs require all program participants, either individuals or legal entities, to be "actively engaged in farming". This means participants provide a significant contribution to the farming operation, whether it is capital, land, equipment, active personal labor and/or management. For entities, each partner, stockholder or member with an ownership interest, must contribute active personal labor and/or management to the operation on a regular basis.

specific to your operation or parish.

USDA Service Centers will be closed on Monday, Feb. 20 in observance of Washington's birthday.

Contact your local FSA Office for information on the new SMS Texting option available to Louisiana producers

To find contact information for your local office go to www.fsa.usda.gov/la

The 2014 Farm Bill established additional payment eligibility provisions relating to the farm management component of meeting “actively engaged in farming”. These new provisions apply to joint operations comprised of non-family members or partners, stockholders or persons with an ownership in the farming operation. Effective for 2016 and subsequent crop years, non-family joint operations are afforded to one member that may use a significant contribution of active personal management exclusively to meet the requirements to be determined “actively engaged in farming”. The person or member will be defined as the Farm Manager for the purposes of administering these new management provisions.

In some instances, additional persons or members of a non-family member joint operation who meet the definition of Farm Manager may also be allowed to use such a contribution of active personal management to meet the eligibility requirements. However, under no circumstances may the number of Farm Managers in a non-family joint operation exceed a total of three in any given crop and program year.

USDA Enrollment Period for Safety Net Coverage in 2017 Continues

Producers on farms with base acres under the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, should visit their local FSA county offices to sign contracts and enroll for the 2017 crop year. The enrollment period ends Aug. 1, 2017.

Since shares and ownership of a farm can change year-to-year, producers on the farm must enroll by signing a contract each program year.

If a farm is not enrolled during the 2017 enrollment period, the producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs for the 2017 crop should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. Producers who made their elections in 2015 must still enroll during the 2017 enrollment period.

The ARC and PLC programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for covered commodities. Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain and sweet rice), safflower seed, sesame,

soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity. For more details regarding these programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Reminds Individuals and Small Businesses in Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi that USDA Offers Disaster Assistance Programs to Help

The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](http://www.usda.gov) (USDA) reminds farmers and ranchers, families and small businesses that could potentially be affected by the recent storms that USDA has several programs that provide assistance before, during and after disasters. USDA staff in the regional, State and county offices in the states of Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi are ready to help.

USDA encourages residents and small businesses in the potential impact zones to contact the following offices to meet their individual needs:

Property and Shelter

When floods destroy or severely damage residential property, USDA Rural Development can assist with providing priority hardship application processing for single family housing. Under a disaster designation, USDA Rural Development can issue a priority letter for next available multi-family housing units. While these programs do not normally have disaster assistance authority, many of USDA Rural Development programs can help provide financial relief to small businesses hit by natural disasters, including low-interest loans to community facilities, water environmental programs, businesses and cooperatives and to rural utilities. More information can be found on the [Rural Development website](http://www.usda.gov/ruraldevelopment) or by contacting the [State Offices](http://www.usda.gov/stateoffices).

Food Safety and Food Assistance

Severe weather forecasts often present the possibility of power outages that could compromise the safety of stored food. The USDA [Food Safety and Inspection Service](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) (FSIS) recommends that consumers take the necessary [steps](#) before, during, and after a power outage to reduce food waste and minimize the risk of foodborne illness. FSIS offers [tips](#) for keeping frozen and refrigerated food safe and a [brochure](#) that can be downloaded and printed for reference at home. If you have questions about the safety of food in your home, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET or visit [AskKaren.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) to chat live with a food safety specialist, available in English and Spanish.

Owners of meat and poultry producing businesses who have questions or concerns may contact the FSIS Small Plant Help Desk by phone at 1-877-FSIS-HELP (1-877-374-7435), by email at infosource@fsis.usda.gov, or 24/7 online at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulatory-compliance/svsp/sphelpdesk>.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) coordinates with state, local and voluntary organizations to provide food for shelters and other mass feeding sites. Under certain circumstances, states also may request to operate a disaster household distribution program to distribute USDA Foods directly to households in need. In addition, FNS may approve a state's request to implement a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when the President declares a major disaster for individual assistance under the Stafford Act in areas affected

by a disaster. State agencies may also request a number of disaster-related SNAP waivers to help provide temporary assistance to impacted households already receiving SNAP benefits at the time of the disaster. Resources for disaster feeding partners as well as available FNS disaster nutrition assistance can be found on the [FNS Disaster Assistance website](#).

Crop and Livestock Loss

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers many safety-net programs to help producers recover from eligible losses, including the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#), the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#), [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) and the [Tree Assistance Program](#). The FSA [Emergency Conservation Program](#) provides funding and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. Producers located in counties that received a primary or contiguous disaster designation are eligible for low-interest [emergency loans](#) to help them recover from production and physical losses. Compensation also is available to producers who purchased coverage through the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#), which protects non-insurable crops against natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses or prevented planting. USDA encourages farmers and ranchers to contact their local FSA office to learn what documents can help the local office expedite assistance, such as farm records, receipts and pictures of damages or losses.

Producers should use form FSA-576, Notice of Loss, to report prevented planting and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility. Prevented planting acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA). Producers must file a Notice of Loss for failed acres on all crops including grasses in a timely fashion, often within 15 days of the occurrence or when the losses become apparent. Producers of hand-harvested crops must notify FSA of damage or loss within 72 hours of when the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent.

Producers with coverage through the RMA administered federal crop insurance program should contact their crop insurance agent. Those who purchased crop insurance will be paid for covered losses. Producers should report crop damage within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days.

Community Recovery Resources

For declared natural disasters that lead to imminent threats to life and property, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can assist local government sponsors with the cost of implementing recovery efforts like debris removal and streambank stabilization to address natural resource concerns and hazards through the [Emergency Watershed Protection Program](#). NRCS staff is coordinating with state partners to complete damage assessments in preparation for sponsor assistance requests. NRCS also can help producers with damaged agricultural lands caused by natural disasters such as floods. The NRCS [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) provides financial assistance to repair and prevent excessive soil erosion that can result from high rainfall events and flooding. Conservation practices supported through EQIP protect the land and aid in recovery, can build the natural resource base, and might help mitigate loss in future events.

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides support for disaster education through the Extension Disaster Education Network ([EDEN](#)). EDEN is a collaborative multi-state effort with land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension Services across the country, using research-based education and resources to improve the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters. EDEN's goal is to improve the nation's ability to mitigate, prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from disasters. EDEN equips county-based Extension educators to share research-based resources in local disaster management and recovery efforts. The EDEN website offers a searchable database of Extension professionals, resources, member universities and disaster

agency websites, education materials to help people deal with a wide range of hazards, and food and agricultural defense educational resources.

For complete details and eligibility requirements regarding USDA's disaster assistance programs, contact a local [USDA Service Center](http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app) (<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>). More information about [USDA disaster assistance](http://www.usda.gov/documents/fact-sheet-usda-programs-assist-individuals-small-businesses.pdf) (<http://www.usda.gov/documents/fact-sheet-usda-programs-assist-individuals-small-businesses.pdf>) as well as other disaster resources is available on the USDA Disaster Resource Center website. In a continuing effort to better serve the public, USDA has developed a new and improved central resource for disaster related materials. In partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other disaster-focused organizations, USDA created a [Disaster Resource Center](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=disaster-help) (<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=disaster-help>) website, utilizing a new online searchable knowledgebase. This knowledgebase is a collection of disaster-related resources that are powered by agents with subject-matter expertise. The Disaster Resource Center website and web tool now provide an easy access point to find USDA disaster information and assistance.

Contact your local USDA Service Center to determine eligibility for these programs.

USDA Announces Additional Financial Incentives for Conservation Reserve Program Participants to Improve Forest Health and Enhance Wildlife Habitat

In an effort to improve wildlife habitat and the health of private forest lands, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced additional incentives available for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants to actively manage forest lands enrolled in the program.

Under the provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill, \$10 million is available nationwide to eligible CRP participants. Those selected will be encouraged to thin, prescribe burn or otherwise manage their forests in order to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. This will encourage the development of grasses, forbs and legumes, benefitting numerous species including pollinators and grassland-dependent birds such as the northern bobwhite.

Eligibility is limited to landowners and agricultural producers already enrolled in CRP with conservation covers primarily containing trees. Incentive payments, not to exceed 150 percent of the cost to implement a particular customary forestry activity as described, have been established. CRP participants meeting eligibility requirements and interested in making offers to participate should visit their local FSA county office.

For more information about FSA conservation programs, visit the FSA office at the local USDA service center or go to www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

Cover Crop Guidelines

Recently the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) worked together to develop consistent, simple and a flexible policy for cover crop practices.

The termination and reporting guidelines were updated for cover crops.

Termination:

The cover crop termination guidelines provide the timeline for terminating cover crops, are based on zones and apply to non-irrigated cropland. To view the zones and additional guidelines visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/crops/> and click "Cover Crop Termination Guidelines."

Reporting:

The intended use of cover only will be used to report cover crops. This includes crops that were terminated by tillage and reported with an intended use code of green manure. An FSA policy change will allow cover crops to be hayed and grazed. Program eligibility for the cover crop that is being hayed or grazed will be determined by each specific program.

If the crop reported as cover only is harvested for any use other than forage or grazing and is not terminated properly, then that crop will no longer be considered a cover crop.

Crops reported with an intended use of cover only will not count toward the total cropland on the farm. In these situations a subsequent crop will be reported to account for all cropland on the farm.

Cover crops include grasses, legumes, and forbs, for seasonal cover and other conservation purposes. Cover crops are primarily used for erosion control, soil health improvement, and water quality improvement. The cover crop may be terminated by natural causes, such as frost, or intentionally terminated through chemical application, crimping, rolling, tillage or cutting. A cover crop managed and terminated according to NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines is **not** considered a crop for crop insurance purposes.

Cover crops can be planted: with no subsequent crop planted, before a subsequent crop, after prevented planting acreage, after a planted crop, or into a standing crop.

USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators

Options Help More Beginning, Small and Urban Producers Gain Access to Credit

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the availability of a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. The program, called EZ Guarantee Loans, uses a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to \$100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations.

A new category of lenders will join traditional lenders, such as banks and credit unions, in offering USDA EZ Guarantee Loans. Microlenders, which include Community Development Financial Institutions and Rural Rehabilitation Corporations, will be able to offer their customers up to \$50,000 of EZ Guarantee Loans, helping to reach urban areas and underserved producers. Banks, credit unions and other traditional USDA-approved lenders, can offer customers up to \$100,000 to help with agricultural operation costs.

EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent.

More information about the available types of FSA farm loans can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans or by contacting your local FSA office.

USDA Packages Disaster Protection with Loans to Benefit Specialty Crop and Diversified Producers

Free basic coverage and discounted premiums available for new and underserved loan applicants

Producers who apply for FSA farm loans will be offered the opportunity to enroll in new disaster loss protections created by the 2014 Farm Bill. The new coverage, available from the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), is available to FSA loan applicants who grow non-insurable crops, so this is especially important to fruit and vegetable producers and other specialty crop growers.

New, underserved and limited income specialty growers who apply for farm loans could qualify for basic loss coverage at no cost, or higher coverage for a discounted premium.

The basic disaster coverage protects at 55 percent of the market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of production. Covered crops include “specialty” crops, for instance, vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, hay, forage, grazing and energy crops. FSA allows beginning, underserved or limited income producers to obtain NAP coverage up to 90 days after the normal application closing date when they also apply for FSA credit.

In addition to free basic coverage, beginning, underserved or limited income producers are eligible for a 50 percent discount on premiums for the higher levels of coverage that protect up to 65 percent of expected production at 100 percent of the average market price. Producers also may work with FSA to protect value-added production, such as organic or direct market crops, at their fair market value in those markets. Targeted underserved groups eligible for free or discounted coverage are American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and women.

FSA offers a variety of loan products, including farm ownership loans, operating loans and microloans that have a streamlined application process.

Growers need not apply for an FSA loan, nor be a beginning, limited resource, or underserved farmer, to be eligible for Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program assistance. To learn more, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/nap or www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans, or contact your local FSA office at <https://offices.usda.gov>.

Selected Interest Rates for Feb. 2017

- 90-Day Treasury Bill — .500%
- Farm Operating Loans — Direct 2.875%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 4.000%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher — 1.50%
- Emergency Loans — 3.875%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) — 2.250%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) — 2.500%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) — 2.500%
- Sugar Storage Facility Loans (15 year term) — 2.625%
- Commodity Loans — 1.875%

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).