

March 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Louisiana FSA Newsletter

Louisiana Farm Service Agency

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State Executive Director:
Craig A. McCain

State Committee:
Ray Young, Chairperson
John Earles
Kristy Jones

Message from Craig A. McCain, FSA State Executive Director

We are certainly hoping that 2020 brings relief from some of the recent challenges experienced with crop prices and weather, however, thus far significant rainfall has led to high water levels on most of our major waterways. While we must hope for the best and prepare for the worst, please recognize that FSA is here to assist producers in with acquiring operating capital for the 2020 crop year as well as mitigating both future and past crop losses. If you are not aware of the opportunities available at FSA, please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit www.usda.gov.

Julie Richard
Donna Winters

Upcoming Important Dates

Next State Committee Meeting:
To be determined

- **June 30** is the last day to signup for 2020 ARCPLC
- **Sept. 11 - ongoing into 2020** is the signup period for WHIP+

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or parish.

Louisiana FSA now offers SMS texting; receive text message alerts on your cell phone regarding important deadlines, reporting requirements and updates.

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

Contact your local FSA Office for more information.

USDA Opens Signup March 23 for Added Causes of Loss Under WHIP+

USDA announced additional disaster assistance available to agricultural producers, including producers impacted by drought and excess moisture. Through WHIP+, USDA is helping producers recover from losses related to 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will open signup on March 23 for producers to apply for eligible losses of drought (D3 or above) and excess moisture. USDA is also entering into agreements with six sugar beet processing cooperatives to distribute \$285 million to grower members of those cooperatives who experienced loss.

In June 2019, more than \$3 billion was made available through a disaster relief package passed by Congress and signed by President Trump. In December 2019, Congress passed, and President Trump signed the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 that provides an additional \$1.5 billion for the continuation of disaster assistance program delivery.

WHIP+ New Qualifying Disaster Events

The bill added excessive moisture and D3 and D4 drought as qualifying losses for WHIP+ assistance.

Beginning March 23, producers who suffered either of these types of loss in 2018 and/or 2019 can apply for WHIP+ assistance at their local FSA office. For drought, a producer is eligible if any area of the county in which the loss occurred was rated D3 (Extreme Drought) or higher on the U.S. Drought .

WHIP+ for Quality Loss

In addition, producers have reported widespread crop quality loss from eligible disaster events that results in price deductions or penalties when marketing the damaged crops. The Appropriations bill expands WHIP+ to include assistance for crop quality loss. FSA is gathering data and input from producers and stakeholders regarding the extent and types of quality loss nationwide.

Eligibility

To be eligible for WHIP+, producers must have suffered losses of certain crops, trees, bushes, or vines in counties with a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or a Secretarial Disaster Designation (primary counties only) for the following named natural disaster events; hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity, snowstorms, wildfires, and now excessive moisture that occurred in 2018 or 2019. Also, losses located in a county not designated by the Secretary as a primary county may be eligible if the producer provides documentation showing that the loss was due to a qualifying natural disaster event.

For drought, counties having a D3 or D4 Drought Monitor classification in any portion of the county anytime during calendar year 2018 or 2019 will also be eligible.

A list of counties that received qualifying hurricane declarations and designations is available at farmers.gov/recover/whip-plus. The U.S. Drought Monitor is available at <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>.

Because livestock losses are covered by other disaster recovery programs offered through FSA, these losses are not eligible for WHIP+.

USDA Announces Updates for Honeybee Producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced updates to the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP). These updates include changes required by the 2018 Farm Bill as well as discretionary changes intended to improve the administration of the program and clarify existing program requirements. ELAP was previously administered based on FSA's fiscal year but will now run according to the calendar year. Producers are still required to submit an application for payment within 30 calendar days of the end of the program year. This is not a policy change but will affect the deadline. The signup deadline for calendar year 2020 losses is January 30, 2021.

Starting in 2020, producers will have 15 days from when the loss is first apparent, instead of 30 days, to file a honeybee notice of loss. This change provides consistency between ELAP and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which also has a 15-day notice of loss period for honey. For other covered losses, including livestock feed, grazing and farm-raised fish losses, the notice of loss deadline for ELAP will remain 30 days from when the loss is first apparent to the producer.

Program participants who were paid for the loss of a honeybee colony or hive in either or both of the previous two years will be required to provide additional documentation to substantiate how current year inventory was acquired.

If the honeybee colony loss incurred was because of Colony Collapse Disorder, program participants must provide a producer certification that the loss was a direct result of at least three of the five symptoms of Colony Collapse Disorder, which include:

- the loss of live queen and/or drone bee populations inside the hives;
- rapid decline of adult worker bee population outside the hives, leaving brood poorly or completely unattended;
- absence of dead adult bees inside the hive and outside the entrance of the hive;
- absence of robbing collapsed colonies; and

- at the time of collapse, varroa mite and Nosema populations are not at levels known to cause economic injury or population decline.

For honeybees, ELAP covers colony losses, honeybee hive losses (the physical structure) and honeybee feed losses in instances where the colony, hive or feed has been destroyed by a natural disaster or, in the case of colony losses, because of Colony Collapse Disorder. Colony losses must be in excess of normal mortality.

ELAP also provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock and farm-raised fish including for feed and grazing losses. It covers losses because of eligible adverse weather or loss conditions, including blizzards and wildfires on federally managed lands. ELAP also covers losses resulting from the cost of transporting water to livestock due to an eligible drought.

For more information on ELAP visit farmers.gov/recover or contact your FSA County Office. To locate your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator.

USDA Announces More Than 3.4 Million Acres Selected for General Signup Conservation Reserve Program

USDA announced the acceptance of more than 3.4 million acres in the general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup recently completed, the first general signup enrollments since 2016. County offices will begin notifying producers with accepted offers no later than April 3.

Through CRP, farmers and ranchers receive an annual rental payment for establishing long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Farmers and ranchers who participate in CRP help provide numerous benefits to the nation's environment and economy. Over these 35 years, CRP has addressed multiple concerns while ensuring the most competitive offers are selected by protecting fragile and environmentally sensitive lands, improving water quality, enhancing wildlife populations, providing pollinator forage habitat, sequestering carbon in soil and enhancing soil productivity. Seventy percent of the nation's land is owned and tended privately, and America's farmers, ranchers and landowners have willingly stepped up to protect the environment and natural resources.

This general signup included offers for State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), which allows producers to install practices that benefit high-priority, locally developed wildlife conservation objectives using targeted restoration of vital habitat. Over 95 percent of SAFE offers submitted were accepted under this general signup representing more than 487,500 acres. This acceptance level highlights the commitment to SAFE as an important part of CRP.

The 2018 Farm Bill established a nationwide acreage limit for CRP, with the total number of acres that may be enrolled capped at 24.5 million acres in 2020 and growing to 27 million by 2023.

While the deadline for general CRP signup was February 28, 2020, signups for continuous CRP, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, [CRP Grasslands](#) and the [Soil Health and Income Protection Program](#) (SHIPP) are ongoing. The CRP Grasslands deadline is May 15, and the SHIPP signup begins March 30, 2020, and ends August 21, 2020.

Continuous and Grasslands enrollments are available nationwide. All counties located within the Prairie Pothole region states of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota are

eligible for SHIPP. This spring, FSA will roll out a new pilot conservation program, the Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers 30 (CLEAR 30).

USDA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only and field work will continue with appropriate social distancing. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with our producers by phone, and using online tools whenever possible. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or any other Service Center agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

For state-by-state information on general signup results, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Farm Service Agency Expands Payment Options

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) expanded its payment options to now accept debit cards and Automated Clearing House (ACH) debit. These paperless payment options enable FSA customers to pay farm loan payments, measurement service fees, farm program debt repayments and administrative service fees, as well as to purchase aerial maps.

Previously, only cash, check, money orders and wires were accepted. By using debit cards and ACH debit, transactions are securely processed from the customer's financial institution through [Pay.gov](https://pay.gov), the U.S. Treasury's online payment hub.

While traditional collection methods like cash and paper checks will continue, offering the new alternatives will improve effectiveness and convenience to customers while being more cost effective.

This marks the beginning of a multi-phased roll-out of new payment options for USDA customers. Ultimately, payment option flexibility will be extended to allow farmers and producers to use debit cards and ACH debit payments to make payments for all FSA programs, including farm storage facility loan repayments, farm loan facility fees, marketing assistance loan repayments, Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) administrative fees and premiums and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) fees.

To learn more, contact your [FSA county office](#), visit farmers.gov, or download the "[Make Your FSA Payments Instantly](#)" fact sheet.

USDA Acreage Reporting Deadline for Perennial Forage Changes to July 15

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has established a new acreage reporting deadline for perennial forage for 2019 and subsequent years. Previously set in the fall, the new deadline is July 15 for all states, except for Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

Timely and accurate acreage reports for all crops and land uses, including prevented planting or failed acreage, are the foundation for many FSA program benefits, including disaster programs for livestock owners. Producers must report their acreage to maintain program eligibility.

Producers who have coverage for perennial forage under the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) must report their crop acreage by the earlier of any of the following:

- the established acreage reporting date (July 15)
- 15 calendar days before the onset of harvest or grazing of the specific crop acreage being reported
- the established normal harvest date for the end of the coverage period.

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

A new online tool can help farmers and ranchers find information on U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) farm loans that may best fit their operations. USDA has launched the new *Farm Loan Discovery Tool* as the newest feature on farmers.gov, the Department's self-service website for farmers.

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. Compared to this time last year, FSA has seen an 18 percent increase in the amount it has obligated for direct farm ownership loans, and through the 2018 Farm Bill, has [increased the limits](#) for several loan products.

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 be provided 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.

With feedback from customers and field employees who serve those customers, farmers.gov delivers farmer-focused features through an agile, iterative process to deliver the greatest immediate value to America's agricultural producers – helping farmers and ranchers do right, and feed everyone.

For more information or to locate your USDA Service Center, visit farmers.gov.

USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

Producers, Including Beginning and Underserved Farmers, Have a New Option to Gain Access to Land

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering farm ownership microloans, creating a new financing avenue for farmers to buy and improve property. These microloans are especially helpful to beginning or underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

The microloan program has been hugely successful, providing more than 16,800 low-interest loans, totaling over \$373 million to producers across the country. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013. Seventy percent of loans have gone to new farmers.

Now, microloans will be available to also help with farm land and building purchases, and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

To learn more about the FSA microloan program visit www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans, or contact your local FSA office.

The Importance of Responding to NASS Surveys

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture.

Producers who receive survey questionnaires should respond quickly and online if possible.

The results of the surveys help determine the structure of USDA farm programs, such as soil rental rates for the Conservation Reserve Program and prices and yields used for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs. This county-level data is critical for USDA farm payment determinations. Survey responses also help associations, businesses and policymakers advocate for their industry and help educate others on the importance of agriculture.

NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents and publishes only aggregate data, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

NASS data is available online at www.nass.usda.gov/Publications and through the searchable [Quick Stats database](#). Watch a video on how NASS data is used at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-4zjnh26io&feature=youtu.be>.

Selected Interest rates for March 2020

- Farm Operating Loans — Direct 2.625%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 3.250%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher — 1.50%
- Emergency Loans — 3.625%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years) — 1.375%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) — 1.375%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) — 1.500%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) — 1.625%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) — 1.625%
- Sugar Storage Facility Loans (15 year term) — 1.750%
- Commodity Loans — 2.500%

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).