

April 2020



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Louisiana FSA Newsletter

Louisiana Farm Service Agency

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State Committee:
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John Earles
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Message from Craig A. McCain, FSA State Executive Director

As always, I hope that this message finds you and your family healthy and happy. However, our current circumstances have increased our consciousness about remaining healthy. I hope that you and your family are following the "Stay at Home Order" along with "Social Distancing" and personal hygiene protocols in order to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Recognizing the necessity of agriculture to our security both financially and calorically, agriculture has been deemed as an essential service during this period of mitigation. As such, USDA Service Center Agencies will continue to provide services, albeit under precautionary protocols. While we are not doing business face to face with customers, staff is available via telephone or email to counsel you and to facilitate normal business transactions for Farm Programs, Farm Loan Programs and Conservation programs. The staff of FSA and NRCS are ready willing and able to work with you to continue to provide the assistance that you need. Thank you for

Next State Committee Meeting:

To be determined

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

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

your hard work and dedication during a very difficult time and please, be safe and follow the safety protocols.

Again, on behalf of the staff of the Louisiana Farm Service Agency, please allow me to say “Thank you” for what you do each day to serve the needs of the United States of America and of the entire World and as the Secretary says “Do Right and Feed Everyone”!

Upcoming Important Dates

- **May 15** is the last day to signup for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands
- **June 30** is the last day to signup for 2020 ARCPLC
- **Ongoing into 2020** is the signup period for WHIP+

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

Contact your local FSA Office for more information.

FSA Makes Changes to Farm Loan, Disaster, Conservation and Safety Net Programs to Make it Easier for Customers to Conduct Business

USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) county offices are open in Louisiana by phone appointment only until further notice, and FSA staff are available to continue helping agricultural producers with program signups, loan servicing and other important actions. Additionally, FSA is relaxing the loan-making process and adding flexibilities for servicing direct and guaranteed loans to provide credit to producers in need.

FSA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into to the office, they will be working with our agricultural producers by phone and using email and online tools whenever possible.

FSA is delivering programs and services, including:

- Farm loans;
- Commodity loans;
- Farm Storage Facility Loan program;
- Disaster assistance programs, including signup for the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (this includes producers now eligible because of losses due to drought and excess moisture in 2018 and 2019);
- Safety net programs, including 2020 signup for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs;
- Conservation programs; and
- Acreage reports.

Relaxing the Farm Loan-Making Process

FSA is relaxing the loan-making process, including:

- Extending the deadline for applicants to complete farm loan applications;
- Preparing Direct Loans documents even if FSA is unable to complete lien and record searches because of closed government buildings. Once those searches are complete, FSA would close the loan; and
- Closing loans if the required lien position on the primary security is perfected, even for loans that require additional security and those lien searches, filings and recordings cannot be obtained because of closed government buildings.

Servicing Direct Loans

FSA is extending deadlines for producers to respond to loan servicing actions, including loan deferral consideration for financially distressed and delinquent borrowers.

FSA will temporarily suspend loan accelerations, non-judicial foreclosures, and referring foreclosures to the Department of Justice. The U.S. Attorney's Office will make the determination whether to stop foreclosures and evictions on accounts under its jurisdiction.

Servicing Guaranteed Loans

Guarantee lenders can self-certify, providing their borrowers with:

- Subsequent-year operating loan advances on lines of credit;
- Emergency advances on lines of credit.

FSA will consider guaranteed lender requests for:

- Temporary payment deferral consideration when borrowers do not have a feasible plan reflecting that family living expenses, operating expenses and debt can be repaid; and
- Temporary forbearance consideration for borrowers on loan liquidation and foreclosure actions.

Contacting FSA

FSA will be accepting additional forms and applications by facsimile or electronic signature. Some services are also available online to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov <https://www.farmers.gov/> portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in <https://www.farmers.gov/sign-in>.

FSA encourages producers to contact their county office to discuss these programs and temporary changes to farm loan deadlines and the loan servicing options available. For Service Center contact information, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus <https://www.farmers.gov/coronavirus>.

Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Enrollment for 2020

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers to enroll now in the Agriculture Risk Loss (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs. The deadline to enroll for the 2020 crop year is June 30, 2020. By enrolling soon, producers can beat the rush as the deadline nears.

FSA offices have multiple programs competing for the time and attention of our staff. Because of the importance and complexities of the ARC and PLC programs; and to ensure FSA meets your program delivery expectations, please do not wait to start the enrollment process. Contact your FSA county office and make an appointment soon to ensure your elections are made and contracts signed well ahead of the deadline.

ARC and PLC provide financial protections to farmers from substantial drops in crop prices or revenues and are vital economic safety nets for most American farms.

The programs cover the following commodities: barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Farm owners have a one-time opportunity to update PLC payment yields that take effect beginning with crop year 2020. If the owner accompanies the producer to the office, the yield update and enrollments may be completed during the same office visit.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, download our [program fact sheet](#) or our [2014-2018 farm bills comparison fact sheet](#). Online ARC and PLC election decision tools are available at fsa.usda.gov/arc/plc. To enroll, contact your [FSA county office](#) for an appointment.

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/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?LA>.

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

Farm Storage Facility Loans

FSA's Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program provides low-interest financing to producers to build or upgrade storage facilities and to purchase portable (new or used) structures, equipment and storage and handling trucks.

The low-interest funds can be used to build or upgrade permanent facilities to store commodities. Eligible commodities include corn, grain sorghum, rice, soybeans, oats, peanuts, wheat, barley, minor oilseeds harvested as whole grain, pulse crops (lentils, chickpeas and dry peas), hay, honey, renewable biomass, fruits, nuts and vegetables for cold storage facilities, floriculture, hops, maple sap, rye, milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, meat and poultry (unprocessed), eggs, and aquaculture (excluding systems that maintain live animals through uptake and discharge of water). Qualified facilities include grain bins, hay barns and cold storage facilities for eligible commodities.

Loans up to \$50,000 can be secured by a promissory note/security agreement and loans between \$50,000 and \$100,000 may require additional security. Loans exceeding \$100,000 require additional security.

Producers do not need to demonstrate the lack of commercial credit availability to apply. The loans are designed to assist a diverse range of farming operations, including small and mid-sized businesses, new farmers, operations supplying local food and farmers markets, non-traditional farm products, and underserved producers.

To learn more about the FSA Farm Storage Facility Loan, visit fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport or contact your local FSA county office. To find your local FSA office, visit offices.usda.gov.

CRP Continuous Enrollment Period

The Farm Service Agency is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Continuous Signup](#).

CRP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”), to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Continuous signup enrollment contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap.

Unlike CRP enrollments under general CRP signups or CRP Grasslands, offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods.

For more information, including a list of acceptable practices, visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) are a resource to 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.

Depending on the applicant’s needs, 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.

To be eligible, 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 FSA Loan programs, contact your local FSA office or visit fsa.usda.gov. To find your local FSA office, visit offices.usda.gov.

USDA and SCORE Joining Forces to Find Mentors

If you are a farmer or rancher, or have agricultural or business experience, join us in supporting the next generation and in investing in your local community! Your experiences and knowledge as a business owner, agricultural professional, or farmer can provide vital support to the community you live in.

USDA is collaborating with SCORE – www.score.org - the nation's largest network of volunteer, expert business mentors in an effort to expand the field of available agricultural mentors and provide free business mentoring to farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural and rural business owners. SCORE is currently looking for volunteers with experience in an agriculture-related field who would like to become a part of an extended field of volunteers. The organization's Orientation and Mentoring Certification program provides volunteers with everything needed to be a successful volunteer. Training includes background about SCORE's mission and services, as well as guidance on how to be a business mentor, including enhancement of listening, interviewing and problem-solving skills.

Current SCORE volunteer mentors have backgrounds in finance, accounting, marketing, operations, business and financial planning. The mentors provide local expertise and free one-on-one business mentoring to new and existing farmers and business owners. Together they work through the process of starting up or maintaining agricultural and rural businesses. No matter what stage a business is in, SCORE volunteer mentors can help in developing business plans, navigating financing and legal issues, identifying new markets, and other topics, in order to help their clients succeed. FSA invites you to learn more and sign up to become a mentor today at newfarmers.usda.gov/mentorship.

Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agriculture production. Loans are available for operating type loans and/or to purchase or improve farms or ranches.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of targeted underserved applicants.

A targeted underserved applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities.

For purposes of this program, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

Changing Bank Accounts

FSA program payments are issued electronically into your bank account. In order to make timely payments, you need to notify your FSA servicing office if you close your account or if your bank information is changed for whatever reason (such as your financial institution merging or being purchased). Payments can be delayed if FSA is not notified of changes to account and bank routing numbers.

For some programs, payments are not made until the following year. For example, payments for crop year 2019 through the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage program aren't paid until 2020. If the bank account was closed due to the death of an individual or dissolution of an entity or partnership before the payment was issued, please notify your local FSA office as soon as possible to claim your payment.

Current Interest Rates for April

- Farm Operating Loans — Direct 2.375%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 3.000%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher — 1.50%
- Emergency Loans — 3.375%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years) — 0.750%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) — 0.750%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) — 1.000%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) — 1.000%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) — 1.125%
- Sugar Storage Facility Loans (15 year term) — 1.250%
- Commodity Loans — 1.625%

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).