

Louisiana USDA-FSA Updates - January 2024

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From the Desk of the State Executive Director

FSA traces its roots back to the Great Depression, when the Farm Security Administration was created to help American farmers amid a challenging time. While the agency's mission has grown over the years, its commitment to helping farmers in the good times and the bad has not changed.

Over the years, FSA's available programs expanded to include safety net, farm loan, conservation, and disaster assistance programs. Since its inception, FSA programs have been locally led, through County Committees, which enable input from farmers on delivery of the agency's critical programs. These committees continue today, with more than 7,700 elected members nationwide.

The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to advancing equity as a key priority, and this announcement aligns with USDA's commitment to root out generations of systemic racism, center equity in decision-making and policymaking, lower barriers to access, and ensure USDA programming is inclusive of all employees and all customers.

These investments are made by Section 1006 of the American Rescue Plan Act, as amended by Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides direction and over \$1 billion in funding for USDA to take action to ensure underserved communities have the tools,

programs, and technical support they need to succeed, with equity at the center of decision-making and policymaking.

USDA received approximately 164 unique applications at an estimated \$2.49 billion from various government entities including Tribes, not-for-profit educational institutions, and non-profit organizations. To learn more about type of project, a full list can be found at fsa.usda.gov.

Farmers Can Now Enroll for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs the 2024 Crop Year

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting Dec. 18, 2023. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.



On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

2024 Elections and Enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

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, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

2022 Crop Year Payments

This fall, FSA issued payments totaling more than \$267 million to agricultural producers who enrolled in the 2022 ARC-CO option and the ARC ARC-IC option for covered commodities that triggered a payment. Payments through the PLC option did not trigger for the 2022 crop year.

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. These payments help

mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. Payments for crops that may trigger for the 2023 crop year will be issued in the fall of 2024.

Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

Web-Based Decision Tools

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

Farmers can use USDA farm ownership microloans 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. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013.

Microloans can also help with farmland 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, contact your local Parish USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

Disaster Assistance for 2023 Livestock Forage Losses

Producers in Louisiana are eligible to apply for 2023 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on Native Pasture, Full Season Improved Pasture, and Full Season Improved Mixed.

LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land or fire on federally managed land.

County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire.

You must complete a CCC-853 and the required supporting documentation no later than January 30, 2024, for 2023 losses.

For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact your Local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.



Farmers.gov Local Dashboard Now Available for Producers in Louisiana

Farmers in Louisiana can now access county specific farming data and USDA resources all in one place via the new <https://www.farmers.gov/> local dashboard. Your new [farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov/) local dashboard includes farming data and USDA resources including USDA news, commodity pricing, weather forecasts, historical climate data, past storm events, USDA service center locator and additional state resources for Louisiana and your parish. The dashboard transforms complex data sets into easy-to-read charts and graphs to help you quickly find information that matters to you.



USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched an [online application for Direct Loan customers](#). More than 26,000 customers who submit a Direct Loan application each year can now use an online, interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax returns, complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan. This tool is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, improve customers service, and expand credit access.

The online farm loan application replicates the support an applicant would receive when completing a loan application in person with an FSA Farm Loan Officer, while continuing to provide customers with one-on-one assistance as needed. This tool and other process

improvements allow farmers and ranchers to submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete and withdrawn applications.

Through a personalized dashboard, borrowers can track the progress of their loan application. It can be accessed on farmers.gov or by completing FSA's Loan Assistance Tool at farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool. To use the online loan application tool, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). For the initial stage, the online application tool is only available for producers who will be, or are currently, operating their farm as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

Farm Loan Improvement Efforts

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate Farm Loan Program customer-facing business processes. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a Direct Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool on farmers.gov](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the Direct Loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.

More Information

FSA continues to accept and review individual requests for assistance from borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans or those who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance.

The Inflation Reduction Act, a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for agricultural communities, provided \$3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with certain FSA direct and guaranteed loans and to expedite assistance for those whose agricultural operations are at financial risk. Since October 2022, USDA has provided approximately \$1.6 billion in immediate assistance to more than 27,000 financially distressed direct and guaranteed FSA loan borrowers.

Foreign Buyers Notification

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. Foreign persons who have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the [AFIDA form](#) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements. The data gained from these disclosures is used in the preparation of periodic reports to the President and Congress

concerning the effect of such holdings upon family farms and rural communities. Click [here](#) for more information on AFIDA.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish

ELAP provides recovery assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish losses due to an eligible adverse weather or loss condition, including blizzards, disease, water shortages and wildfires. ELAP covers grazing and feed losses, transportation of water and feed to livestock and hauling livestock to grazing acres. ELAP also covers certain mortality losses for livestock including honeybees and farm-raised fish as well as honeybee hive losses. ELAP is designed to address losses not covered by other FSA disaster assistance programs.



For 2023, FSA is waiving the regulatory requirement for producers who are eligible for ELAP to file a notice of loss with FSA within 30 calendar days from when the loss first became apparent for livestock and farm-raised fish and 15 calendar days for honeybees. Under this waiver, notices of loss are to be completed by the eligible producer and submitted to FSA no later than the annual program application deadline of January 30 following the program year in which the loss occurred. Therefore, producers who incurred ELAP-eligible losses in 2023, will need to submit a notice of loss by Jan. 30, 2024.

Important Dates 2024

- Jan. 30, Deadline to apply for 2023 LFP assistance
- Jan. 30, Deadline to apply for 2023 ELAP assistance
- Jan. 31, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program
- Feb. 28, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) Sales Closing Date- Spring Seeded Crops, Hemp
- Mar 15, Agricultural Risk Coverage/Price Loss Coverage Deadline

FSA now offers SMS texting; receive text message alerts on your cell phone regarding important deadlines, reporting requirements and updates. Call your local Service Center to schedule an appointment. You can find contact information at farmers.gov/service-locator.

Current Interest Rates for January 2024

- [Commodity Loans](#)(less than one year disbursed): 6.125%
- [Farm Storage Facility Loans](#):

- Three-year loan terms: 4.375%
- Five-year loan terms: 4.125%
- Seven-year loan terms: 4.250%
- Ten-year loan terms: 4.125%
- Twelve-year loan terms: 4.250%
- [Sugar Storage Facility Loans](#)(15 years): 4.375%

Interest rates for Operating and Ownership loans for January 2024 are as follows:

- [Farm Operating Loans](#)(Direct): 5.625%
- [Farm Ownership Loans](#)(Direct): 5.875%
- [Farm Ownership Loans](#)(Direct, Joint Financing): 3.875%
- [Farm Ownership Loans](#)(Down Payment): 1.875%
- [Emergency Loan](#) (Amount of Actual Loss): 3.750%

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LOUISIANA STATE FSA COMMITTEE

Julie Baker-Richard-Chairperson
Brian Guidry-Member
Monica Hernandez-Member
Kristy Jones-Member
Willis Nelson-Member

The STC is scheduled to meet the second Tuesday of each month at the LA State Office, 3737 Government Street, Alexandria, LA 71302 unless the meeting is conducted virtually. Anyone wishing to attend should verify the meeting will take place as scheduled, by calling 318/473-7721.