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## **Message from RI State Executive Director, Eric Scherer**

*"To be a successful farmer one must first know the nature of the soil." - Xenophon*

As we begin to enter into the planting season it's a good time to remind producers, old and new, that eligibility for many USDA programs requires compliance with a conservation plan or system on highly erodible land (HEL) used for the production of agricultural commodities.

This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, disaster assistance, safety net, price support, and conservation programs; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs; and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Federal crop insurance.



The term "sodbusting" is used to identify the conversion of land from native vegetation to commodity crop production after December 23, 1985. As part of the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, if you're proposing to produce agricultural commodities (crops that require annual tillage, including one pass planting operations and sugar cane) on land that has been determined highly erodible and that has no crop history prior to December 23, 1985, that land must be farmed in accordance with a conservation plan or system that ensures no substantial increase in soil erosion.

Before you clear or prepare areas not presently under production for crops that require annual tillage, you are required to file Form AD-1026 "Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification," with FSA indicating the area to be brought into production. The notification will be referred to NRCS to determine if the field is considered highly erodible land. If the field is considered HEL, you are required to implement a conservation plan or system that limits the erosion to the tolerable soil loss (T) for the predominant HEL soil on those fields.

In addition, prior to removing trees or conducting any other land manipulations that may affect wetlands, remember to update form AD-1026, to ensure you remain in compliance with the wetland conservation provisions.

And Now a Message from our friends at the National Agricultural Statistics Service:

### **BECOME A CROP WEATHER REPORTER**

If you are knowledgeable about crops across your county and have Internet access, you qualify to be a weekly crop reporter. It only takes about 10-15 minutes each week to alert USDA of the crop situation in your county using the Internet report form. We will use that information to generate the weekly report of Crop Conditions across the Northeastern Region. This report is issued weekly during the growing season, April to November, and lists planting, fruiting, and harvesting progress and overall condition of selected crops in major producing states.

You can help alert USDA about crop progress and unusual crop conditions during the growing seasons. Instead of waiting until the crop is in, you can give us an early warning of crop situations that may need our attention for possible assistance. To learn more, visit our website and click on the "Help Wanted" button found

here: [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Pennsylvania/Publications/Crop\\_Progress\\_and\\_Condition/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Pennsylvania/Publications/Crop_Progress_and_Condition/index.php)

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# Important Upcoming Deadlines

May 17, 2024 - Deadline to apply for RI NRCS Conservation Programs:

- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program Climate-Smart funding \(EQIP-IRA\)](#)
- [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP Classic\)](#)
- Conservation Easements ([ACEP](#); [RI Forest Health Works RCPP](#))
- [Sakonnet River National Water Quality Initiative \(NWQI\)](#)
- [Rhode Island Regional Conservation Partnership Projects \(RCPP\)](#)

July 15, 2024 - Deadline for FSA Acreage Reporting

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## Countdown to RI Envirothon 2024!

On Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, fourteen teams of about 70 Rhode Island students from six Rhode Island middle and high schools will show how much they know about the environment at the 30<sup>th</sup> annual **Rhode Island Envirothon**.

Rhode Island Envirothon is an exciting environmental program, perfect for middle and high school students who love the outdoors, animals, and plants, or who are just curious about the world we live in. Throughout the year, Envirothon students attend hands-on workshops that inspire learning about our natural environment and instill an appreciation of nature and the delicate environmental balances that make life possible. After studying with experts on all aspects of the environment, the program culminates each May in a one-day **Battle of the Environmental Minds!**

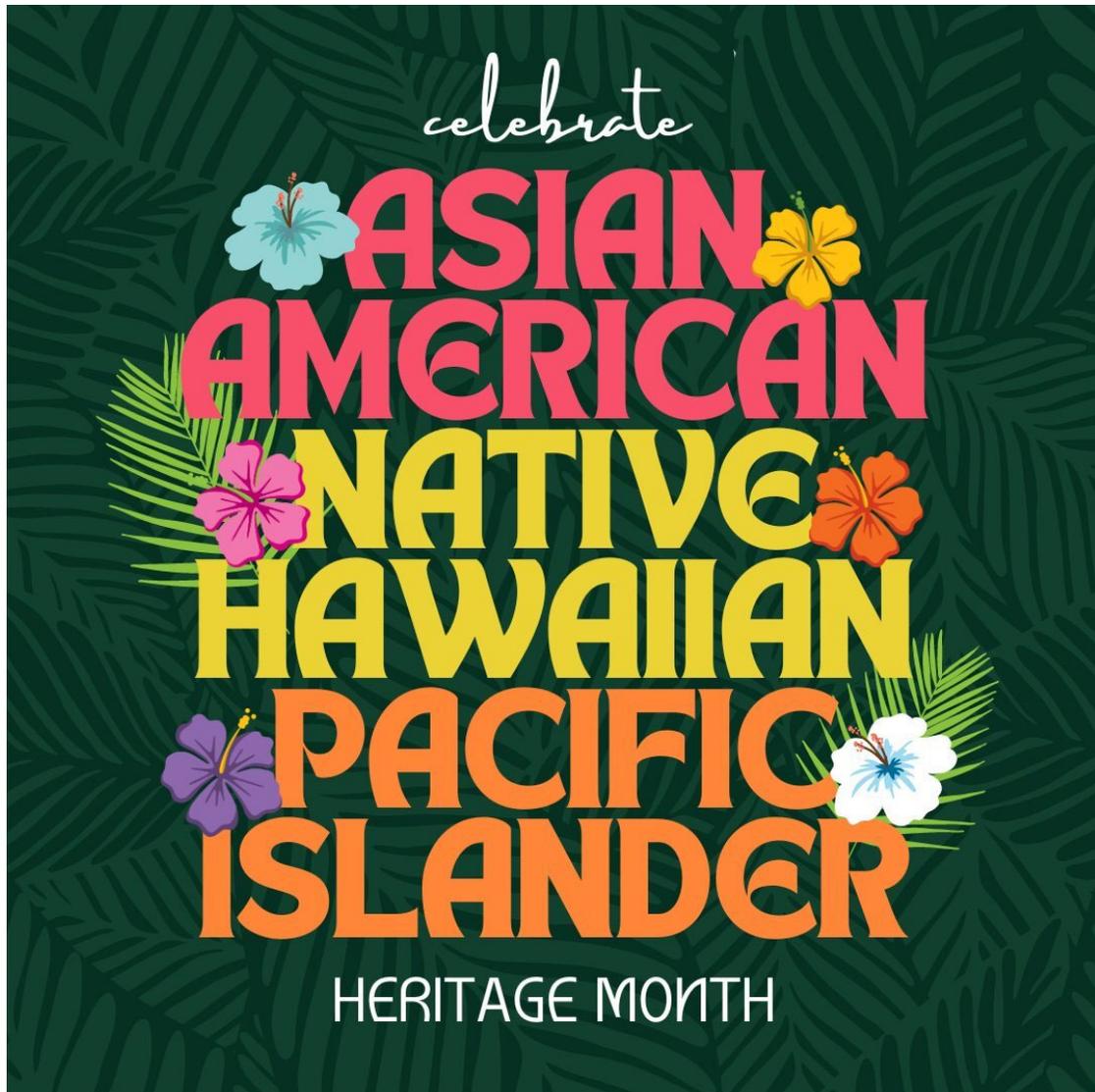


The outdoor competition will be held this year at Camp Hoffman at 2850 Ministerial Road (Route 110) in South Kingstown, where the teams will rotate through five stations to answer written questions and engage in hands-on activities like soil analysis, wildlife habitat assessment, tree identification, and water quality measures. At the last station, the Environmental Issue, they will deliver a 12-15-minute presentation on “**Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future**” in their community to a panel of judges. **Learn more...**

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## Happy Asian American, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Heritage Month!



*Every May, USDA celebrates the vibrant cultures and invaluable contributions of our Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. From cultivating traditions to innovation, your diversity strengthens our agricultural landscape.  
#AAPIHeritageMonth #AANHPI*

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**Farm Service Agency (FSA)**

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**USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs**

FSA reminds RI farmers that Farm Loan Programs can be used to support a variety of climate-smart agriculture practices, which build on many practices that farmers and ranchers already use, like cover cropping, nutrient management and conservation tillage.



Climate-smart agricultural practices generate significant environmental benefits by capturing and sequestering carbon, improving water management, restoring soil health and more. Farm loan funding complements other tools to help producers adopt climate-smart practices, such as FSA's [Conservation Reserve Program](#), [crop insurance options](#) that support conservation, and [conservation programs](#) offered by NRCS.

FSA offers [multiple types of loans](#) to help farmers and ranchers start, expand or maintain a family agricultural operation. These loans can provide the capital needed to invest in climate-smart practices and equipment including the establishment of rotational grazing systems, precision agriculture equipment or machinery for conversion to no-till residue management. Additionally, for programs like Conservation Reserve Program and NRCS conservation programs where USDA and the producer share the implementation cost, a farm loan could be used for the producer's share, if consistent with the authorized loan purpose. [Learn more...](#)

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## Farmer Service Agency Call Center

Farmers and ranchers can contact a call center to receive one-on-one assistance from FSA employees ready to help. By calling **877-508-8364**, customers can ask questions about FSA programs. The call center was created as a way to better serve customers, especially those who have not worked with FSA previously.



Customers who contact the call center can expect to receive the same great service they would receive as if they were in their FSA county office. FSA Call Center staff can also provide service to non-English speaking customers. Customers using the call center will still call **877-508-8364** and select 1 for English and 2 to speak with a Spanish-speaking employee. For other languages, customers select 1 and indicate their language to the call center staff.

The call center is just one of many ways USDA has adjusted and added flexibilities to meet the needs of our customers. One thing remains the same, USDA stands committed to offering exceptional customer service to our nation's farmers and ranchers.

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## USDA Reminds State Producers to File Crop Acreage Reports

Agricultural producers in Rhode Island who have not yet completed their [crop acreage reports](#) after planting should make an appointment with their FSA service center before the applicable deadline. An acreage report documents a crop grown on a farm or ranch and its intended uses. Filing an accurate and timely acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage, can prevent the loss of benefits.



### How to File a Report

Acreage reporting dates vary by crop and by county. Contact your local FSA office for a list of acreage reporting deadlines by crop. To file a crop acreage report, please provide:

- Crop and crop type or variety.
- Intended use of the crop.
- Number of acres of the crop.
- Map with approximate boundaries for the crop.
- Planting date(s).
- Planting pattern, when applicable.
- Producer shares.
- Irrigation practice(s).
- Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable.
- Other information as required.

Producers can make an appointment to report acres by contacting the Rhode Island FSA County Office at 401-828-3120, Option 1.

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## 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 FSA. To learn more about the FSA microloan program, contact your Rhode Island FSA County Office at 401-828-3120, Option 2, or visit [fsa.usda.gov/microloans](https://fsa.usda.gov/microloans).

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## Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

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### Rhode Island Farmers & Forest Landowners can Act Now for NRCS Combustion System & Energy Initiative Funding

Rhode Island NRCS has extended the application deadline for the **EQIP-IRA Combustion System & Energy Initiative** through the Act Now process to **May 17**. NRCS is using [Act Now](#) to deliver conservation contracting faster by allowing NRCS to quickly approve and obligate ranked applications in designated ranking pools when they meet or exceed a minimum threshold, ranking score. Through Act Now, eligible applications are batched and processed in the order they're received, with selections made weekly. Applications eligible for the **IRA-EQIP Combustion System and Energy Initiative** ranking pool will be accepted on a continuous sign-up basis until **May 17, 2024**, or until funds are expended. [Initiative](#) practices include:



Through Act Now, eligible applications are batched and processed in the order they're received, with selections made weekly. Applications eligible for the **IRA-EQIP Combustion System and Energy Initiative** ranking pool will be accepted on a continuous sign-up basis until **May 17, 2024**, or until funds are expended. [Initiative](#) practices include:

- Combustion System Improvement (CPS 372)
- Pumping Plant (CPS 533)
- Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation (CPS 374)
- Energy Efficient Lighting System (CPS 670)
- Energy Efficient Building Envelope (CPS 672)

[Join our May 8th Webinar from 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. to learn how to replace your old farm equipment!](#)

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### Rhode Island NRCS Announces Third Signup for Climate-Smart Agriculture & Forestry funding



NRCS announces additional funding opportunities for FY 2024 for Rhode Island farmers and forest landowners. NRCS is opening a third signup for [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA) climate-smart agriculture and forestry funding under the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#).

Interested Ocean State farmers, forest landowners, and urban growers should apply by the **May 17, 2024**, ranking cutoff date. Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help farmers and forest landowners make [climate-smart conservation](#) improvements on their land to benefit natural resources, build resiliency, and help combat the impacts of climate change. [Learn more...](#)

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## Save Rhode Island's Farmland, Forestland and Wetlands with USDA Conservation Easements

Rhode Island NRCS announces a third application sign up period for the **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** and the **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) RI Forest Health Works**.



- [ACEP Agricultural Land Easements](#) (ACEP-ALE) help private and tribal landowners, land trusts, and state and local governments to protect croplands and grasslands on working farms and ranches through conservation easements.
- [ACEP Wetland Reserve Easements](#) (ACEP-WRE) help private and tribal landowners protect, restore and enhance wetlands that have been previously degraded by agricultural uses.
- The [RI Forest Health Works RCP](#) aims to permanently protect over 1,300 acres of Rhode Island's critical, privately owned forest lands to combat fragmentation and improve wildlife habitat. The project is accepting applications to protect forestland

through entity-held easements, where landowners contract with land trusts or other entities to place a conservation easement.

Apply by **May 17, 2024**, to be considered for this third round of fiscal year 2024 funding. Applications received after this ranking date will be automatically deferred to the next funding period. [Learn more...](#)

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## USDA conservation program third signup open for Rhode Island farmers and forest landowners

NRCS announces additional financial assistance opportunities for fiscal year 2024 for Rhode Island farmers and forest landowners under the Farm Bill's [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#), [National Water Quality Initiative \(NWQI\)](#) and [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#).



Through conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help farmers and forest landowners make conservation improvements on their land to benefit natural resources, build resiliency, and combat the impacts of climate change. While NRCS accepts applications for these programs year-round, farmers and landowners should apply by the **May 17, 2024**, ranking date to be considered for this year's additional ranking opportunity. [Learn more...](#)

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## NRCS Welcomes our New Conservation Team Employees

NRCS welcomes **April Dean** as our new **Business Services Specialist**. April joined NRCS in September 2022 as an Administrative Support Assistant after graduating Magna Cum Laude with a BA in Sociology from Rhode Island College. She is a U.S. Army Veteran who served for almost 7 years, specializing in logistics and supply management. Prior to working at NRCS April worked for the Providence Veterans Affairs Medical Center.



NRCS welcomes **Annie Ragan** as our new **Financial Assistance Program Manager**. Annie will spearhead the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) for the Programs Team. Annie joined NRCS in 2022 as a Soil Conservationist. She specialized in both soils and grazing and received her Certified Planner certification in 2023. Previously, Annie worked for the Northern RI Conservation District where she wrote farm conservation plans for clients in the RI Farm, Forest, and Open Space program.

Annie received her Master's degree in Environmental Science and Management from the University of Rhode Island in 2019, specializing in wetland, watershed, and ecosystem science along with soils. She was born in Rhode Island and considers herself an adventure enthusiast who enjoys surfing, rock climbing, playing pickleball, mountain biking, hiking, and camping in her free time.



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## Risk Management Agency (RMA)

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### New Resource Available for Specialty Crop and Small-Scale Farmers

Finding the “right risk management fit” for your farm can feel overwhelming, especially for specialty and small-scale farmers and ranchers. That’s why U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) created a new resource for specialty and small-scale producers. A searchable database of crop insurance agents who sell Whole-Farm Revenue Protection and Micro Farm policies, two of the most comprehensive risk management options. Finding the “right risk management fit” just got easier. [Learn more...](#)

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### Shellfish Crop Insurance Program Offers Oyster Growers Needed Protection from Environmental Challenges and More

The new Shellfish Pilot Crop Insurance Program, offered through the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), offers Rhode Island oyster growers needed protection from environmental challenges. It also allows growers to insure for a higher price based on personal sales records. Growers are now eligible for protection against losses due to named storms, excessive heat during a low tide event, freeze during a low tide event, or low salinity due to excessive rainfall.



After the 2018 Farm Bill, shellfish growers expressed a strong desire for a crop insurance program tailored to their operations and needs, rather than modifying Whole Farm Revenue Protection options. So, in early 2020, RMA began hosting listening sessions with these producers, which led to the creation of RMA's Shellfish Development Team and a contract to develop a pilot program that RMA rolled out in a [limited area](#) for the 2024 crop year. [Learn more...](#)

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## Rhode Island USDA

60 Quaker Lane  
Warwick, RI 02886

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### Rhode Island Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director - Eric Scherer

RI FSA County Office, Suite 49  
RI FSA Farm Loan Team, Suite 62  
RI FSA State Office, Suite 62

401-828-3120 Option 1  
401-828-3120 Option 2  
401-828-3120 Option 3

#### County Committee

Joseph Polseno, Chairperson  
Erin Cabot, Member  
Gilbert Rathbun Jr., Member

John Sousa, Vice Chairperson  
William Coulter, Member  
Dawn M Spears, SDA Member

#### State Committee

Al Bettencourt, Chairperson  
Albert Brandon, Member  
Michelle Garman, Member

Maggie Cole, Member  
Cristina Cabrera, Member

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**Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
State Conservationist - Pooh Vongkhamdy  
401-828-1300 | [www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.RI.nrcs.usda.gov)**

*Eastern RI – Serving Newport and Bristol counties*

**NRCS Field Office**

Ghyllian Alter, NRCS District Conservationist  
401-822-8835 or [Ghyllian.Alger@usda.gov](mailto:Ghyllian.Alger@usda.gov)

**Conservation District Office**

401-934-0842 or  
[info@easternriconservation.org](mailto:info@easternriconservation.org)

*Northern RI – Serving Providence County*

**NRCS Field Office**

Kate Bousquet, NRCS District Conservationist  
401-822-8814 or [Kate.Bousquet@usda.gov](mailto:Kate.Bousquet@usda.gov)

**Conservation District Office**

401-934-0840  
or [mallard.nricd@gmail.com](mailto:mallard.nricd@gmail.com)

*Southern RI – Serving Kent and Washington counties*

**NRCS Field Office**

Jameson Long, NRCS District Conservationist  
401-822-8837 or [Jameson.Long@usda.gov](mailto:Jameson.Long@usda.gov)

**Conservation District Office**

401-661-5761 or [sricd.info@gmail.com](mailto:sricd.info@gmail.com)

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**Risk Management Agency (RMA)**

Risk Management Agency:

919-875-4880

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