



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rhode Island Service Center Newsletter - January 2023

[Farm Service Agency](#) | [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) | [Risk Management Agency](#)

**In This Issue:**

- [Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer](#)
- [Producers in Rhode Island May be Eligible for Emergency Conservation Program Assistance](#)
- [The 2022 Census of Agriculture is Underway](#)
- [Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers](#)
- [Forest Landowners in Rhode Island eligible for funding to permanently protect their land](#)
- [Public Scoping Meetings for Wood-Pawcatuck Rivers Watershed Flood Protection Project to be held January 26, 2023](#)
- [What are Your 2023 Conservation Resolutions?](#)
- [NRCS Unveiled New Website in 2022](#)

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**Message from RI State Executive Director J. Eric Scherer**

Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals.

– Aldo Leopold

Happy New Year, this is the time we start 'anew' with our thoughts, actions and for us, programs. As you become busy again with your life, those of reflecting on last year's trials and tribulations, and plan on this coming years efforts, please let us know if you need any help. This is an important time, the new Farm Bill is coming out and it will affect not only farmers, but many Americans. I highlighted some upcoming highlights of the 2023 Farm Bill I read from an article (see below). The new Farm Bill will govern how we deliver programs to you over the next five years.



As important as the Farm Bill is, equally important are the yearly tasks that farmers need to do to be able to be eligible for farm programs. Please continue to read on below information on **Annual review of payment eligibility, Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting and Farmers Can Now Enroll in 2023 Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs** for some highlights.

In this message I have included some very important information that I hope you can take advantage of. To be realistic, it's not an 'easy read' and we in the offices are still getting up to speed on the details and will be attending an intensive training week later this month.

But I wanted to give all of our producers who might find these two new efforts of help in addressing the impacts of drought and the pandemic. I also promised to send out a shout to our livestock growers on a survey being done for future SARE grants, this will be the last part of my message.

Thanks for reading and please, do not hesitate to connect with our offices if you have questions. We often hear from producers who missed a program deadline and often our hands are tied to help at that point.

Best,

Eric

If you have ANY questions, please contact the County Office (see contact information below).

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## USDA 2023 FARM Bill

(These comments are excerpted from an article by *Kent Thiesse is a government farm programs analyst and a vice president at MinnStar Bank in Lake Crystal, Minn. He may be reached at (507) 726-2137 or [kent.thiesse@minnstarbank.com](mailto:kent.thiesse@minnstarbank.com).*)

The 2023 crop year will be the final year for the current Farm Bill, which is set to expire on Sept. 30, 2023 — unless there is an extension.

A Farm Bill is one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation passed by Congress. Passage of a new Farm Bill is very complex, with programs ranging from farm commodity programs to food and nutrition programs, from conservation programs to rural development programs, and several more.

Following are a few insights on the 12 Titles included in the current Farm Bill:

**Title II: Conservation** — The current Farm Bill set the maximum Conservation Reserve Program acres at 27 million acres, with additional focus on the Grassland Reserve Program. The Farm Bill also set the maximum CRP rental rates at 90 percent of the average Farm Service Agency “prevailing” rental rates for Continuous CRP contracts and at 85 percent for General CRP. There will likely be considerable support for expansion of the maximum CRP acres, as well as for increasing the maximum annual CRP rental rates to incentivize enrollment into the CRP program. The large 2022 Inflation Reduction Act contained several provisions which provided added funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program, which are part of the Conservation Title.

**Title V: Credit** — This Title sets parameters and provides funding for the FSA direct and guaranteed loan programs, which have become quite important to farm operators and ag lenders. The direct FSA farm ownership loans are especially important to provide beginning farmers low interest loans to purchase farmland. Recently, there have been greater efforts to reach underserved farmers and ranchers with the FSA loan programs.

**Title X: Horticulture** — USDA funding for farmers markets and other local food programs, as well as for the national organic certification program, are provided under this Title. The last Farm Bill legitimized industrial hemp as an agricultural commodity, thus making hemp eligible for crop insurance and other USDA programs. However, this did not affect federal regulations for hemp raised for marijuana production.

Both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House Ag Committees held hearings on a new Farm Bill during 2022 and more hearings will likely be planned early in the new Congressional session in 2023. The Congressional leadership has been very committed with plans to have a new Farm Bill completed by Sept. 30, 2023, with very little talk of an extension to the current Farm Bill. Ultimately, there will likely be a compromise reached, and a new five-year Farm Bill will be passed. However, given the political division that currently exists in Congress, a one-year extension of the current Farm Bill is certainly a possibility by the end of 2023.

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### **Annual review of payment eligibility**

All participants of FSA programs who request program benefits are required to submit a completed CCC-902 (Farming Operation Plan) and CCC-941 Average Gross Income (AGI)

Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information to be considered for payment eligibility and payment limitation applicable for the program benefits.

Participants are not required to annually submit new CCC-902s for payment eligibility and payment limitation purposes unless a change in the farming operation occurs that may affect the determination of record. A valid CCC-902 filed by the participant is considered to be a continuous certification used for all payment eligibility and payment limitation determinations applicable for the program benefits requested. Participants are responsible for ensuring that all CCC-902 and CCC-941 and related forms on file in the county Office are correct at all times.

Participants are required to timely notify the county office of any changes in the farming operation that may affect the determination of record by filing a new or updated CCC-902 as applicable. Changes that may require a NEW determination include, but are not limited to, a change of: Shares of a contract, which may reflect: A land lease from cash rent to share rent, land lease from share rent to cash rent (subject to the cash rent tenant rule), A modification of a variable/fixed bushel-rent arrangement.

The size of the producer's farming operation by the addition or reduction of cropland that may affect the application of a cropland factor. The structure of the farming operation, including any change to a member's share. The contribution of farm inputs of capital, land, equipment, active personal labor, and/or active personal management. Farming interests not previously disclosed on CCC-902 including the farming interests of a spouse or minor child.

Financial status that may affect the 3-year average for the determination of average AGI or other changes that affects eligibility under the average adjusted gross income limitations. Participants are encouraged to file or review these forms within the deadlines established for each applicable program for which program benefits are being requested.

### **Policy Updates for Acreage Reporting**

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) recently made several policy updates for acreage reporting for cover crops, revising intended use, late-filed provisions, grazing allotments as well as updated the definitions of "idle" and "fallow." Cover crop types can be chosen from the following four categories: Cereals and other grasses, legumes, brassicas and other broadleaves, or Mixtures.

**Acreage Reports:** In order to maintain program eligibility and benefits, producers must timely file acreage reports.

Failure to file an acreage report by the crop acreage reporting deadline may result in ineligibility for future program benefits. FSA will not accept acreage reports provided more than a year after the acreage reporting deadline.

For more information, contact the County FSA office (see contact information below).

### **Farmers Can Now Enroll in 2023 Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs**

Agricultural producers can now change election and enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage programs for the 2023 crop year, two key safety net programs offered by

the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA 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 2023 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2023, they must sign a new contract. If producers do not submit their election by the March 15 deadline, their election remains the same as their 2022 election for crops on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the farm. For more information, contact the County FSA office (see contact information below).

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### **Providing relief for producers impacted by disaster and the pandemic.**

SAN JUAN, P.R., January 9, 2023 — Today, at the American Farm Bureau Federation annual convention, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced several major developments at the U.S. Department of Agriculture that will benefit farmers, ranchers and producers across the nation.

“At USDA, our goal is to provide all farmers, including new and underserved producers, with the opportunity to receive the assistance they need to continue farming, to build and maintain their competitive-edge, and to access more, new, and better markets,” said Vilsack, who spoke at the American Farm Bureau Federation annual convention today. “Working together we can ensure American agriculture is as resilient as ever and will do so by implementing a holistic approach to emergency assistance, by lowering input costs through investments in domestic fertilizer production, and by promoting competition in agricultural markets.”

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### **New Programs to fill gaps in 2020/2021 Natural Disaster Assistance (Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase 2) and 2020 Pandemic Assistance (Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP)).**

USDA is announcing two new programs that wrap-up and fill remaining gaps in previous natural disaster and pandemic assistance. To be eligible for ERP Phase Two, producers must have suffered a decrease in allowable gross revenue in 2020 or 2021 due to necessary expenses related to losses of eligible crops from a qualifying natural disaster event. Assistance will be primarily to producers of crops that were not covered by Federal Crop Insurance or NAP, since crops covered by Federal Crop Insurance and NAP were included in the assistance under ERP Phase One.

To be eligible for PARP, an agricultural producer must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a 15% or greater decrease in allowable gross revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to a baseline year.

**The ERP Phase 2 and PARP application period is open from January 23<sup>rd</sup> through June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.**

For more information, producers should contact the USDA FSA County Office (see contact information below) or reference the

[ERP Phase Two Fact Sheet](#),

[PARP Fact Sheet](#),

or the [ERP Phase Two-PARP Comparison Fact Sheet](#).

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### **Tri-State (CT, MA, RI) SARE Professional Development Program**

The Tri-State (CT, MA, RI) SARE Professional Development Program is planning activities for the next three years – through 2026. The project will focus on training agricultural service providers as well as farmers in CT, MA and RI on sustainable livestock production practices. Specific content areas will be determined based on the feedback and needs of those who participate in this survey and attend the workshops. Although voluntary, it would be appreciated if livestock producers could complete a 5-minute anonymous needs assessment by **Thursday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>** (linked it [here](#)).

Please reach out directly to Rachel Bespuda, Project Director, Tri-State SARE Project ([rachel.bespuda@uconn.edu](mailto:rachel.bespuda@uconn.edu)) with any questions or comments. Thank you for your time!

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### **Producers in Rhode Island May be Eligible for Emergency Conservation Program Assistance**

The USDA Secretary of Agriculture has issued a Drought Disaster Declaration on August 15 (and August 22), 2022, thereby triggering the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) ability to provide emergency loans and disaster assistance to Rhode Island's farming community. These efforts include providing water conservation

and enhancement measures needed to permit livestock grazing of pasture and forage and supply emergency water for existing irrigation systems serving orchards and vineyards.

If you've suffered severe damage, you may be eligible for assistance under the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) administered by the Rhode Island Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Rhode Island has been approved for EC-6 (Drought) for 60 days beginning on November 15, 2022. Producers will have until March 17, 2023, to apply for drought program assistance through ECP.

For land to be eligible, the natural disaster must create new conservation problems that, if untreated, would:



- be so costly to rehabilitate that Federal assistance is or will be needed to return the land to productive agricultural use
- is unusual and is not the type that would recur frequently in the same area
- affect the productive capacity of the farmland
- impair or endanger the land

If you qualify for ECP assistance, you may receive cost-share levels not to exceed 75 percent of the eligible cost of restoration measures. Eligible socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers can receive up to 90 percent of the eligible cost of restoration. No one is eligible for more than \$500,000 cost sharing per natural disaster occurrence.

If you've suffered a loss from drought, producers may contact the Rhode Island FSA County Office to request assistance.

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## The 2022 Census of Agriculture is Underway

America's farmers and ranchers now have the opportunity to be represented in the nation's only comprehensive and impartial agriculture data for every state, county and territory. USDA has mailed the 2022 Census of Agriculture to all known agriculture producers across the nation and Puerto Rico. Producers have the option to respond securely and conveniently online at [agcounts.usda.gov](https://agcounts.usda.gov) or by mail. The deadline for response is Feb. 6, 2023.

Collected in service to American agriculture since 1840 and now conducted every five years by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census of Agriculture tells the story and shows the value of U.S. agriculture. The data inform decisions about business, programs, rural development, research, and more. These are things that directly impact producers, and better data can lead to better decisions. That is why it is so important for every producer's voice to be counted.

Responding to the Census of Agriculture is required by law under Title 7 USC 2204(g) Public Law 105-113. The same law requires NASS to keep personally-identifiable information confidential, to use the data only for statistical purposes, and only publish in aggregate form to prevent disclosing the identity of any individual producer or farm operation. NASS will release the results of the ag census in 2024.

To learn more about the Census of Agriculture, visit [nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](https://nass.usda.gov/AgCensus) or call 800-727-9540. On the website, producers and other data users can access past ag census data, [partner tools](#) to help spread the word about the upcoming ag census, special study information, and





more. For highlights of these and the latest information on the upcoming Census of Agriculture, follow USDA NASS on twitter [@usda\\_nass](#).

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## Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers

A multi-agency guide for USDA assistance for underserved farmers and ranchers is now available. If you are a farmer or rancher and are a minority, woman, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producer, you can use this booklet to learn about assistance and targeted opportunities available to you. This includes programs offered through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. [Download the guide here](#). The guide is also available in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese on [farmers.gov/translations](#).

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## Forest Landowners in Rhode Island eligible for funding to permanently protect their land

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is announcing that the [RI Forest Health Works Project](#) is accepting applications for funding for fiscal year 2023. The RI Forest Health Works Project is a [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#) agreement between NRCS, the Rhode Island Department of



Environmental Management (DEM) Division of Forest Environment and ten partners. This partnership will leverage over \$3.9 million in 5 years to protect critical forests across the state of Rhode Island. Applications can be submitted through the **February 17, 2023**, ranking cut-off.

The [RI Forest Health Works Project](#) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve forest lands and their related benefits through two distinct paths for land protection:

- **Entity-Held Easements** help private and tribal landowners, in partnership with land trusts or other entities like state and local governments, to protect forestlands by placing conservation easements. For help applying, contact Joanne Riccitelli at [joanne.riccitelli@gmail.com](mailto:joanne.riccitelli@gmail.com).



- **U.S.-Held Easements** allow individual eligible landowners to enter into producer contracts with NRCS to place conservation easements on their land to protect critical forestlands. For help applying, contact Marina Capraro, Conservation Planner, at [Marina.Capraro@usda.gov](mailto:Marina.Capraro@usda.gov).

[Learn more...](#)

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## Public Scoping Meetings for Wood-Pawcatuck Rivers Watershed Flood Protection Project to be held January 26, 2023

NRCS and the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District (project Sponsor) are holding two Public Scoping Meetings on **January 26, 2023**, to discuss the proposed Wood-Pawcatuck Rivers Watershed Flood Protection project in Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island.



- An **agency planning meeting** will be held at **10:00 a.m.** for agencies, organizations, watershed associations, etc. to participate in the planning process at the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association Headquarters at 203 Arcadia Road in Hope Valley, RI.
- A **public meeting** will be held for interested members of the general public at **6:00 p.m.** at the Chariho High School Auditorium at 453 Switch Road in Wood River Junction, RI.

At both meetings, representatives from the Southern RI Conservation District, NRCS, and their consultants will provide information on the Watershed and Flood Protection program, planning activities to date for the Wood-Pawcatuck Rivers, the various alternatives being considered for flood control, answer questions and concerns about the planned activities, and seek public input.

Federal funding has been received to assist the local sponsors in developing the plan but has not yet been secured for the design or construction of these projects. For more information, please contact Darrell Moore, NRCS State Conservation Engineer, at 401-822-8812 or [Darrell.Moore@usda.gov](mailto:Darrell.Moore@usda.gov).

*Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in this meeting should contact Darrell Moore at 401-822-8812 or [Darrell.Moore@usda.gov](mailto:Darrell.Moore@usda.gov) by January 19<sup>th</sup>; or dial 7-1-1 to access telecommunication relay services.*

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## What are Your 2023 Conservation Resolutions?



2022 is over, which means it's time to start thinking about what you want to work on in the new year. Setting resolutions can be hard, but we're here to help!

If you would like to make a #ConservationResolution for 2023, here are some options to consider:

- Incorporate cover crops into your operation.
- Extend your growing season by using a high tunnel.
- Improve your soil health by utilizing no-till practices.
- Provide recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat by restoring wetlands.
- Reduce input costs by focusing on nutrient management.
- Protect topsoil and groundwater quality by devoting environmentally sensitive agricultural land to conservation benefits instead of farming.

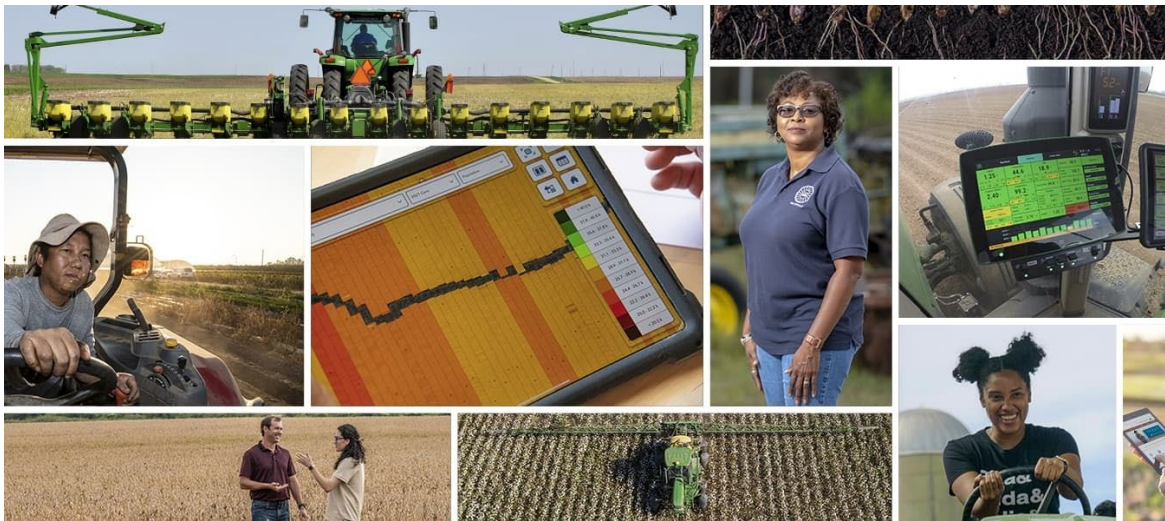
Resolutions can be daunting and hard to stick to, but here are some tips for how to make them successful.

- **Make a plan** - To get started on your #ConservationResolutions, we recommend you stop by your [local USDA service center](#) so we can discuss your vision for your land. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can provide you with free technical assistance and or advice.
- **Don't do it alone** – USDA's conservation programs available through NRCS and FSA give you the tools and resources to protect environmentally sensitive land and restore grasslands, wetlands, and forests, which leads to cleaner water and air, healthier soil, and enhanced wildlife habitat. We can also help with financial assistance to help you achieve your #ConservationResolutions

- **See what other landowners are doing** - Learn about the benefits of conservation practices directly from the farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners applying them with our series of 90-second videos. Explore the different types of conservation practices by watching our [Conservation at Work series](#). You can also read producer profiles on [farmers.gov](#).

This month, we'll be highlighting different #ConservationResolutions that can help protect our natural resources. Follow along to start yours!

## NRCS Unveiled New Website in 2022



NRCS unveiled a new website last year designed for you, whether you're a farmer, rancher or forest landowner who uses NRCS conservation programs or one of our partners who helps us deliver on the conservation mission. Our new web site has been supports and enhances our mission by delivering relevant, timely, customer-focused information in an easy-to-navigate platform.

Key features include:

- Design using the U.S. Web Design System – you'll see a certain "family resemblance" among USDA and other federal websites, including [gov](#).
- Accessibility (or 508 conformant) – the site is designed for use by people with disabilities.
- Mobile responsiveness – It should work on a phone or tablet as easily as on a desktop computer.

Be sure to check out our Rhode Island NRCS website at [www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov)! If you can't find something that you used to find on our website, [contact us](#) and we can help.



### **Rhode Island USDA**

60 Quaker Lane  
Warwick, RI 02886

RI FSA County Office:	401-828-3120 Option 1
RI FSA Farm Loan Team:	401-828-3120 Option 2
RI FSA State Office:	401-828-3120 Option 3
RI NRCS Field Office:	401-828-1300
Risk Management Agency:	919-875-4880

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