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Message from State Executive Director Doris Washington



Greetings

USDA touches the lives of all Arkansans each day in so many positive ways. Arkansas agriculture benefits greatly from the tireless efforts of our dedicated employees and locally elected County Committees. Arkansas Farm Service Agency (FSA) delivered more than **\$918.7 million** in federal program payments and loans to Arkansas farmers and ranchers during fiscal year 2022.

Below is a closer look at the impact of FSA in Arkansas:

Agricultural Risk Coverage & Price Support Loss Coverage (ARC/PLC) - \$38,538,896.00

Emergency Relief Program (ERP) - \$157,340,808.00

Farm Stored Facility Loans (FSFL) - \$1,548,517.00
Marketing Assistance Loans (MAL) - \$198,615,801.00
Livestock Feed Program (LFP) - \$76,083,656.00
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - \$16,358,141.00
Non-Insured Assistance Program (NAP) - \$3,017,664.00
Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, & Fish (ELAP) - \$2,885,804.00
Direct Operating Loans - \$45,111,829
Direct Ownership Loans - \$49,575,770
Guaranteed Operating Loans - \$71,572,442
Guaranteed Ownership Loans - \$257,972,007
Emergency Loans - \$95,550

This also would not have been doable without our Outreach Partners and Stakeholders. Thank you for your participation in FSA's success. Together we are making a difference.

This month we celebrate Black History, also referred to as African American History. This is a time when our country applauds, commends, and praise the generations of Black Americans whose courage, advocacy and patriotism have enriched our communities and strengthened our country. This year, the Black History Month 2023 national theme is "Black Resistance," which explores how African Americans have battled historic and ongoing oppression, in all forms. In honoring Black trailblazers and change-makers, we gain inspiration for the work that remains. At FSA, we actively work to ensure that underserved producers have the tools, resources, and opportunity needed to be successful.

USDA encourages urban producers, innovative producers, and other stakeholders to virtually attend the second public meeting of the **Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on Feb. 23 from 3:30-6pm ET**. This Committee will discuss recommendations it intends to submit to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to remove barriers to urban and innovative producers and increase access of urban and innovative producers to USDA programs and services. To learn more, submit a comment, or register to attend visit [Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend February Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#).

Agricultural producers with perennial forage crops have an option to report their acreage once, without having to report that acreage in subsequent years, as long as there are no applicable changes on the farm. Interested producers can select the continuous certification option after FSA certifies their acreage report. Producers can contact their local FSA office to see if their crops are eligible for continuous certification or to make an appointment. Producers can make an appointment to report acres by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#).

Specialty crop producers that assistance is available to help cover certain costs of complying with regulatory and market-driven food safety certification requirements. Applications for the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program for eligible 2023 costs are being excepted from Feb. 1, 2023, to Jan. 31, 2024. Producers can visit www.farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

USDA has developed a simplified direct loan application to provide improved customer experience for producers applying for loans from FSA. The simplified direct loan application reduced the application pages from 29 to 13. Producers will also have the option to complete an electronic fillable form or prepare a traditional, paper application for submission to their local FSA farm loan office. The paper and electronic versions of the form will be available starting March 1, 2023. USDA has also launched the Loan Assistance Tool, an online step-by-step guide that provides materials to help an applicant prepare their farm loan application in one tool. Farmers can access the Loan Assistance Tool by visiting farmers.gov/farm-loan-assistance-tool and clicking the 'Get Started' button.

FSA has announced the details of additional assistance for dairy producers, including a second round of payments through the Pandemic Market Volatility Assistance Program (PMVAP) and a new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP). The update to

PMVAP and the new ODMAP will enable USDA to better support small- and medium-sized dairy operations who weathered the pandemic and now face other challenges. More information about the PMVAP production cap increase is available at www.ams.usda.gov/pmvap. Details about the Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program will be available and updated at www.farmers.gov as more details are released in a Notice of Funds Availability later this year.

Agricultural producers can begin to apply for two new important programs for revenue losses, from 2020 and 2021 natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic. Both programs equitably fill gaps in earlier assistance. First, producers may be eligible for assistance through the [Emergency Relief Program \(ERP\)](#) Phase Two if you experienced revenue losses from eligible natural disasters in 2020 and 2021. ERP Phase Two is for producers who didn't receive assistance from ERP Phase One. Producers may also be eligible for the [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program \(PARP\)](#) if you experienced revenue losses in calendar year 2020. PARP is addressing gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses. Applications for both new programs are due June 2, 2023, and you can apply for both programs during your same appointment with FSA.

USDA is making available up to \$7.5 million for grants through its Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP). The competitive grants will support the development of urban agriculture and innovative production projects through two categories, Planning Projects and Implementation Projects. Please visit [USDA Announces Grants for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#) for additional information.

For more information on Farm Service Agency (FSA), contact your [local USDA service center](#) or visit www.farmers.gov.

Our goal is to serve all farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners; equitably; through the delivery of effective and efficient agricultural programs.

Until next time...

Message from State Conservationist Mike Sullivan

Greetings

February is Black History Month. Since President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized Black History Month in 1976, it has been a time to reflect and honor the contributions and diverse impact of Black Americans throughout our nation's history. This includes the lasting impact Black farmers, foresters, ranchers, landowners and communities in Arkansas have had on agriculture throughout our state.

NRCS is proud to celebrate Black History Month with communities across the state with whom we work. This month and every month, we will continue to value and support the rich and substantive contributions of all Black Americans.

The USDA has policies in place to prohibit discrimination in all programs and activities based on race, creed, or color and increase access and inclusion in programs and services. NRCS is committed to promoting equity in everything we do and ensuring Black producers have equal access to all available resources to assist with their operations.

We also prioritize creating a culture of inclusion, advancing equity, recruiting and hiring diverse, talented employees committed to assisting all of our customers put conservation on the ground. It is a responsibility that we take seriously when making hiring decisions and investing in the development of our workforce.

To learn more about NRCS's commitment to equity visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/guides-and-instructions/nrcs-equity-action-plan>.

Inflation Reduction Act

The Inflation Reduction Act was signed in August 2022 by President Joe Biden and represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history.

The law provides \$20 billion to support USDA's conservation programs that yield climate-related benefits while building resilience in agricultural operations. These are programs that are well-known to farmers and ranchers and are also oversubscribed. These investments mean that more producers will have access to conservation assistance.

This includes:

- \$8.45 billion for the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)
- \$4.95 billion for the [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#)
- \$3.25 billion for the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#)
- \$1.4 billion for the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#)
- \$1 billion for conservation technical assistance
- \$300 million to measure, evaluate, quantify carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reductions from conservation investments

These additional funds will help farmers and ranchers implement expanded conservation practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase storage of carbon in their soil and trees. The conservation funding is on top of otherwise available program funds, and the voluntary, incentive-based approach is targeted to support climate-smart agriculture mitigation and help producers build resilience in their operations.

Click this link to [Learn more about USDA and the Inflation Reduction Act](#).

Conservation at Work Video Series

A video series from NRCS and farmers.gov, *Conservation at Work*, presents short and easy to understand videos about popular conservation practices. These videos feature producers explaining how an individual practice helps their land and why they are using it.

The videos shine the spotlight on farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners from across the U.S. who explain why they've implemented the conservation practices and how they work on their land. They also provide insight into how each practice is helping them protect and improve resources and save time and money.

We've got videos showcasing high tunnels, no-till, cover crops, prescribed grazing, and many more.

Check out the *Conservation at Work* video series at farmers.gov/conserve/conservationatwork.

Save Time – Make an Appointment with NRCS

Producers are encouraged to call their local NRCS office to schedule an appointment to ensure maximum use of their time and to make sure NRCS staff is available to tend to their important business needs. Please call your local NRCS office ahead to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that might be needed during your appointment. To find your local NRCS office, visit: farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

Important Dates to Remember:

- February 17: Deadline to sign-up for Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Open Pine Landscape Restoration RCPP project

- March 1: Deadline to sign-up for applications Arkansas Water Quality Project in the Brush Creek-Roberts Creek National Water Quality Initiative project area
- March 13: Deadline to sign-up for Environmental Quality Incentives Program-High Tunnels on agricultural land
- April 3 & 4: Arkansas Women in Agriculture Conference at the Hot Springs Convention Center

Upcoming Events and Workshops

The USDA Arkansas Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to educating producers on available programs and loans. FSA representatives will be available at the following workshops and conferences. Producers interested in attending these conferences/workshops should follow the registration or RSVP instructions listed below.

Feb 27th – UAPBs Beginning Farmers Academy The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) Small Farm Program is hosting a Beginning Farmers Academy. **Nitasha Berry, Farm Loan Officer in Phillips County; and Rod Woods, County Executive Director in Jefferson County, will present on Beginning Farmer and Rancher Loans, obtaining a Farm Number, NAP, and FSA Information Resources.** This VIRTUAL Conference will be held Monday, February 27, 2023. For Additional Information, please contact the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Small Farm Program, at 870.575.7225.

Mar 9th – ALCDC Rural and Community Economic Development Summit Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC) is hosting a Community Economic Development Summit. **FSA will present on Loans and Inflation Reduction Act.** The conference will be held Thursday, March 9, 2023, and is free to attend. The opening session begins at 2:00pm. For those wishing to attend the conference in person, the meeting site will be Philander Smith College's Myer L. Titus Academic Center, Little Rock, Arkansas. For those wishing to attend the conference virtually, please contact ALCDC at 870.734.3005 or alcddc1934@yahoo.com for additional information. Their website is <https://alcddc.webs.com>.

Apr 3rd-4th - Arkansas Women in Agriculture Conference (AWIA) Arkansas Women in Agriculture is hosting the 2023 Conference on April 3 & 4, 2023. Please save the date! The conference will be held at the Hot Springs Convention Center, 134 Convention Blvd, Hot Springs, AR. **Chana Thompson, Farm Loan Program Chief, will sit on the USDA Panel, FSA will have an Information Booth, and other Employees will be available to discuss programs and answer questions.** Take advantage of the early bird rates before March 1, 2023. Please visit: [AWIAs Website](#) for additional information.

Borrower Training for Farm Loan Customers

Borrower training is available for all Farm Service Agency (FSA) customers. This training is required for all direct loan applicants, unless the applicant has a waiver issued by the agency.

Borrower training includes instruction in production and financial management. The purpose is to help the applicants develop and improve skills that are necessary to successfully operate a farm and build equity in the operation. It aims to help the producer become financially successful. Borrower training is provided, for a fee, by agency approved vendors. Contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager for a list of approved vendors.

UAPB to Offer Borrower Training for FSA Borrowers

Borrower training is available for all Farm Service Agency customers. This training is required for all direct loan applicants, unless the applicant has a waiver issued by the agency.

The Small Farm Program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) will be conducting financial management and production training which will satisfy the Borrower Training requirements for many new or beginning Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers.

Borrower training includes instruction in production and financial management. The purpose is to help the applicant develop and improve skills that are necessary to successfully operate a farm and build equity in the operation. It aims to help the producer become financially successful. Borrower training is provided, for a fee, by agency approved vendors. Contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager for a list of approved vendors.

The first course is scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, March 8-9, in the conference room of the UAPB S.J. Parker Agricultural Research Center. Producers will undergo two days of intensive education consisting of 12 hours of farm business training and six hours of production, crop or livestock training.

Producers will have required homework and will be tested at the end of the training. They will receive a score of 1 to 3. A score of 1 or 2 is needed to pass the course. The score will be sent to the FSA state office and to the borrower's local FSA loan officer. Most producers have two years from receipt of their first FSA loan to complete the Borrower Training.

The cost for the training is \$300 per person. Funds will go to a UAPB Small Farm Program Borrower Training Fund. Fees will be collected on the first day of the course. Only a cashier's check or money order, made payable to UAPB Small Farm Program, will be accepted.

The UAPB S.J. Parker Agricultural Research Center is located at 2101 Oliver Road in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Those interested in taking the course should contact the Small Farm Program at (870) 575-7226 or 7246.

Contact your local FSA office for additional training options.

USDA Updates Farm Loan Programs to Increase Equity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is updating its farm loan programs to better support current borrowers, including historically underserved producers. These improvements are part of USDA's commitment to increase equity in all programs, including farm loans that provide important access to capital for covering operating expenses and purchasing land and equipment.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized FSA to provide equitable relief to certain direct loan borrowers, who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official. Previously, borrowers may have been required to immediately repay the loan or convert it to a non-program loan with higher interest rates, less favorable terms, and limited loan servicing.

Now, FSA has additional flexibilities to assist borrowers in such situations. If the agency provided incorrect guidance to an existing direct loan borrower, the agency may provide equitable relief to that borrower. FSA may assist the borrower by allowing the borrower to keep their loans at current rates or other terms received in association with the loan which was determined to be noncompliant or the borrower may receive other equitable relief for the loan as the Agency determines to be appropriate.

USDA encourages producers to reach out to their local loan officials to ensure they fully understand the wide range of loan and servicing options available that can assist them in starting, expanding or maintaining their operation.

Additional Updates

Equitable relief is one of several changes authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill that USDA has made to the direct and guaranteed loan programs. Other changes that were previously implemented include:

- Modifying the existing three-year farming experience requirement for Direct Farm Ownership loans to include additional items as acceptable experience.
- Allowing socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer applicants to receive a guarantee equal to 95%, rather than the otherwise applicable 90% guarantee.
- Expanding the definition of and providing additional benefits to veteran farmers.
- Allowing borrowers who received restructuring with a write down to maintain eligibility for an Emergency loan.
- Expanding the scope of eligible issues and persons covered under the agricultural Certified Mediation Program.

Additional information on these changes is available in the March 8, 2022 [rule on the Federal Register](#).

More Background

FSA has taken other recent steps to increase equity in its programs. Last summer, USDA announced it was providing \$67 million in competitive loans through its new Heirs' Property Relending Program to help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. FSA also invested \$4.7 million to establish partnerships with organizations to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, which contributed to a fourfold increase in participation by historically underserved producers in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2), a key pandemic assistance program, since April 2021.

Additionally, in January 2021, Secretary Vilsack announced a [temporary suspension of past-due debt collection and foreclosures](#) for distressed direct loan borrowers due to the economic hardship imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Producers can explore available loan options using the [Farm Loan Discovery Tool on farmers.gov](#) (also available in Spanish) or by contacting their local [USDA Service Center](#). Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. Due to the pandemic, some USDA Service Centers are open to limited visitors. Producers can [contact their local Service Center](#) to set up an in-person or phone appointment to discuss loan options.

USDA Announces Signup for Crop and Revenue Loss Assistance for Agricultural Producers

Signup begins January 23 for additional emergency relief from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the [Emergency Relief Program](#) (ERP) Phase Two.

To be eligible for 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. Eligible crops include both traditional insurable commodities and specialty crops that are produced in the United States as part of a farming operation and are intended to be commercially marketed. This also includes losses of eligible on-farm stored commodities. ERP Phase 2 applicants will use the following tax years when selecting allowable gross revenue:

- Benchmark years: 2018 and/or 2019; estimated for new producers with no 2018 or 2019 revenue or adjusted if the benchmark years are not representative of the disaster year due to a change in operation size.
- Disaster years: 2020 and/or 2021. The allowable gross revenue for the specific disaster year will be based on the tax year applicable to that revenue (2020, 2021 or 2022).

The ERP tool assists producers in calculating allowable gross revenue, as well as adjusted revenue for the benchmark years 2018 and 2019, and allowable gross revenue for representative tax years 2020-2022 which represent disaster years 2020 and 2021. Once producers complete the allowable gross revenue entries, they are able to print forms FSA-521 and FSA-521A through this tool.

The ERP Phase 2 and PARP application period is open from January 23 through June 2 2023.

For more information on payment calculations, payment limitations or how to determine allowable gross revenue, please reference the [ERP Phase 2 fact sheet](#).

USDA Announces Signup for Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program

The Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) will assist eligible producers of agricultural commodities who experienced revenue decreases in calendar year 2020 compared to 2018 or 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PARP will help address gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

USDA's Farm Service Agency will accept PARP applications from January 23, 2023, through June 2, 2023.

Eligible and Ineligible Commodities

For PARP, eligible agricultural commodities include crops, aquaculture, livestock, livestock byproducts, or other animals or animal byproducts that are produced as part of a farming operation and are intended to be commercially marketed. This includes only commodities produced in the United States or those produced outside the United States by a producer located in the United States and marketed inside the United States.

The following commodities **are not eligible** for PARP:

- Wild free-roaming animals.
- Horses and other animals used or intended to be used for racing or wagering.
- Aquatic species that do not meet the definition of aquaculture.
- *Cannabis sativa L.* and any part of that plant that does not meet the definition of hemp.
- Timber.

Program Eligibility

PARP payments will be made on a whole-farm basis, not commodity-by-commodity. 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 must have experienced a 15 percent decrease in allowable gross revenue in 2020, as compared to either:

- The 2018 or 2019 **calendar year**, as elected by the producer, if they received allowable gross revenue during the 2018 or 2019 **calendar years**, or
- The producer's expected 2020 calendar year allowable gross revenue, if the producer had no allowable gross revenue in 2018 or 2019.

PARP payments will be issued after the application period ends on June 2, 2023.

For more information on determining allowable gross revenue visit farmers.gov/coronavirus/pandemic-assistance/parp or review the [PARP fact sheet](#).

More Information

To apply for PARP, contact your [local USDA Service Center](#).

Farmers Can Now Make 2023 Crop Year Elections, Enroll in 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). Signup began Oct. 17, 2022, and producers have until March 15, 2023, to enroll in these two programs. Additionally, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has started issuing payments totaling more than \$255 million to producers with 2021 crops that have triggered payments through ARC or PLC.

2023 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 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, 2023 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.

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 and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Web-Based Decision Tools

In partnership with USDA, the University of Illinois and Texas A&M University offer web-based decision tools to assist producers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Tools include:

- [Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator](#), a tool available through the University of Illinois allows producers to estimate payments for farms and counties for ARC-CO and PLC.
- [ARC and PLC Decision Tool](#), a tool available through Texas A&M that allows producers to obtain basic information regarding the decision and factors that should be taken into consideration such as future commodity prices and historic yields to estimate payments for 2022.

2021 Payments and Contracts

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. This month, FSA processed payments to producers enrolled in 2021 ARC-CO, ARC-IC and PLC for covered commodities that triggered for the crop year.

For ARC-CO, producers can view the [2021](#) ARC-CO Benchmark Yields and Revenues online database, for payment rates applicable to their county and each covered commodity. For PLC, payments have triggered for rapeseed and peanuts.

For ARC-IC, producers should contact their local FSA office for additional information pertaining to 2021 payment information, which relies on producer-specific yields for the crop and farm to determine benchmark yields and actual year yields when calculating revenues.

By the Numbers

In 2021, producers signed nearly 1.8 million ARC or PLC contracts, and 251 million out of 273 million base acres were enrolled in the programs. For the 2022 crop year signed contracts surpassed 1.8 million, to be paid in the fall of 2023, if a payment triggers.

Since ARC and PLC were first authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and reauthorized by the 2018 Farm Bill, these safety-net programs have paid out more than \$34.9 billion to producers of covered commodities.

Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader safety net provided by USDA, which 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 have the option of purchasing 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.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

NRCS Accepting 2023 Applications for Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network Open Pine Landscape Restoration RCPP Project

Farmers and landowners in the Arkansas Louisiana Conservation Delivery Network (CDN) Open Pine Landscape Restoration Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project in Arkansas can apply to receive financial assistance in fiscal year 2023.

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas who submit applications to their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office by February 17, 2023, will be considered for this assistance.

“RCPP is a unique program that leverages non-federal investments brought by conservation partners to accelerate conservation in selected project areas,” said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. “This approach helps us maximize use of our collective resources to address locally identified concerns.”

The RCPP project and associated counties with the project are:

Conservation Delivery Network Open Pine Land Restoration Project (portions of Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Clark, Drew, Lincoln, Nevada, Ouachita counties)

The AR-LA CDN Open Pine Landscape Restoration partnership will advance the recovery of species of conservation concern by implementing Desired Forest Condition management practices across 30,000 acres of private lands in Arkansas and Louisiana. American Bird Conservancy and 19 partners plan to use several innovative tools and approaches to target funding to lands critical for the protection of species such as Northern Bobwhite, Henslow’s and LeConte’s sparrows, Louisiana Pine Snake, and Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Partnerships with the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff and other entities will help ensure that Historically Underserved farmers participate meaningfully in the project.

(Lead Partner: American Bird Conservancy)

Individuals and other entities actively engaged in agricultural production are eligible to participate in RCPP. RCPP offers a continuous application sign-up. However, to be considered for funding, applications must be received by February 17. Applicants can sign up for the 2023 program year by contacting their local USDA Service Center.

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on how well they align with project priorities using procedures to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

All USDA Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with NRCS should call ahead to schedule an appointment. Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal where producers can view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in.

For more information about RCPP, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact your local [USDA/NRCS Field Service Center](#).

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Accepting EQIP Applications through March 1 for Arkansas Water Quality Project

The -USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is investing in funding for landscape-level water quality efforts in the Brush Creek-Roberts Creek [National Water Quality Initiative](#) (NWQI) project area, located in northwest Arkansas.

The Brush Creek-Roberts Creek NWQI project area covers portions of Madison County and Washington County. NRCS accepts program applications on a continuous basis but sets dates to plan and rank applications as funding allows. Farmers and landowners in Arkansas who submit applications to their local NRCS office by March 1, 2023, will be considered for this round of funding. Applications received after March 1 will be considered in later funding periods in General Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) categories, subject to funding availability.

“We have learned that when we work with producers and partner to install conservation practices within critical watersheds, we see a positive impact,” said NRCS State Conservationist in Arkansas Mike Sullivan. “Through these partnerships, we accelerate and maximize the delivery of our conservation efforts which yields greater results to water quality and benefits the public, our natural resources and farmers’ bottom lines.”

NRCS has strengthened its focus on watershed assessment and partner engagement in selecting priority small watersheds in recent years. Partners are encouraged to work with Arkansas NRCS for new project area interests.

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on local, state and nationally developed criteria to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

For more information, visit <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/> or contact the local your local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Accepting 2023 EQIP- High Tunnel Applications through March 13

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas will provide at least \$1 million in fiscal year 2023 for the utilization and implementation of high tunnels on agricultural land through the Environment Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

High Tunnels are designed to help producers extend the growing season, increase productivity, keep plants at a steady temperature, and conserve water and energy. The EQIP high tunnel signup will be administered through the ACT NOW approach, which is a targeted, rapid, and streamlined application and contract approval process.

The EQIP-High Tunnel application deadline is March 13, 2023, however through the streamlined application and contract approval approach, applications will be assessed and ranked as they are submitted to the [USDA Field Service Center](#). Based on funds availability, application assessments with a ranking score of 100 points or greater will be preapproved immediately for the first batch of funding. Producers are encouraged to apply for the High Tunnel funds at their earliest convenience. Additional sign-up batches may be announced at a later date, subject to the availability of funding.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business. Visitors wishing to conduct business with NRCS should call ahead and schedule an appointment. To locate a local field office, visit <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

Updates to Crop Insurance Plans Broaden Access for Specialty Crop, Organic, Direct Market and Other Producers

USDA is improving two of its most comprehensive risk management safety net programs, Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) and Micro Farm, making them more accessible to America's agricultural producers. This includes doubling the maximum insurable revenue under WFRP, now \$17 million, more than tripling the size of farm operations eligible for Micro Farm, now \$350,000 and reducing paperwork requirements for WFRP. These improvements are in direct response to feedback from stakeholders as USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) recognizes the important role these insurance options play for many producers, including specialty crop, organic and direct market producers.

Whole-Farm Revenue Protection

The [WFRP](#) program provides protection for all eligible commodities on a farm under one insurance policy. Now, producers can insure up to \$17 million in revenue (formerly \$8.5 million).

Other updates to WFRP include:

- Allowing a producer to report and self-certify yield at the beginning of the year for commodities without other insurance options in a way similar to those with individual crop policies. This will significantly reduce the amount of paperwork required to apply for WFRP.
- Eliminating expense reporting to reduce paperwork burden. In place of expense reporting, WFRP will reduce the expected revenue of commodities a producer is unable to plant to 60%, similar to prevented planting for other programs.

These updates build on others recently made to WFRP, including [expanded coverage and flexibilities for organic producers](#).

Micro Farm

The [Micro Farm program](#), offered through WFRP, provides a risk management safety net for all eligible commodities on a farm under one insurance policy, but on a smaller scale. Now, producers with farm operations up to \$350,000 in approved revenue (formerly \$100,000) can get coverage. RMA introduced the new Micro Farm program in 2021 to better serve direct market and small-scale producers. While the program is well received and feedback has been largely positive, industry partners and small, diversified producers have informed RMA that the current limit is too low to meet the needs of many interested producers. In response, the FCIC approved the increase in size for eligible farm operations.

The updates to WFRP and Micro Farm take effect in crop year 2023.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the [RMA Agent Locator](#). Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov.

Rates and Dates

Selected Interest Rates for February 2023			
90-Day Treasury Bill	4.375		
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	4.750		
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	4.750		
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.500	Dates to Remember	
Emergency Loans	3.750	02/28/2023	NAP application deadline for multiple crops. Contact local FSA office for list of crops.
Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years)	4.000		
Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years)	3.625	03/15/2023	ARCPLC signup deadline
Commodity Loans 1996-Present	5.750		



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NRCS Fax: 855-681-7044

*Please contact your local Office for questions specific to your operation or county.
To find contact information for your local office visit one of the websites below.*

www.farmers.gov

www.fsa.usda.gov

www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Arkansas/index

www.nrcs.usda.gov

www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov

FSA State Executive Director
Doris Washington

NRCS State Conservationist
Mike Sullivan

FSA State Committee Meeting: 3rd Tuesday of each month

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in this meeting/event should contact Rita Smith-Clay at 501-301-3200 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

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