

USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Agricultural Producers in Puerto Rico Impacted by Tropical Storm Ernesto

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, Aug. 28, 2024 – Agricultural operations in Puerto Rico have been significantly impacted by Hurricane Ernesto and related weather events. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers recover from these adverse weather events. Impacted producers should contact their local USDA Service Center to report losses and learn more about program options available to assist in their recovery from crop, land, infrastructure, and livestock losses and damages.

USDA Disaster Assistance??

Producers who experience livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality or sell injured livestock at a reduced price may be eligible for the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). To participate in LIP, producers will have to provide acceptable documentation of death losses or evidence of reduced sales resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) no later than the annual program payment application date, which is 60 calendar days following the calendar year in which the loss occurred. The LIP payment application and notice of loss deadline is March 3, 2025, for 2024 calendar year losses.

Meanwhile, the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP) ELAP provides assistance for livestock feed and grazing losses, honeybee feed, colony and hive losses; and farm-raised fish feed and death losses. For ELAP, producers are required to complete a notice of loss and a payment application to their local FSA office no later than the annual program application deadline, Jan. 30, 2025, for 2024 calendar year losses.

Additionally, eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the [Tree Assistance Program](#) (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines from which an annual crop is produced for commercial purposes. TAP complements the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) (NAP) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not

the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days of the disaster event or the date when the loss of the trees, bushes or vines is apparent.

“Once you are able to evaluate the impact on your operation, be sure to contact your [local FSA county office](#) to timely report all crop, livestock and farm infrastructure damages and losses,” said Wanda Perez, State Executive Director for FSA in Puerto Rico. “To expedite FSA disaster assistance, you will likely need to provide documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses.”?

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed [farm loans](#), including operating and emergency farm loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low interest [emergency loans](#) to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs.

Additionally, FSA offers several loan servicing options available for borrowers who are unable to make scheduled payments on their farm loan programs debt to the agency because of reasons beyond their control.

Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture’s Corporación de Seguros Agrícolas (CSA) or FSA’s NAP should report crop damage to CSA or

FSA office. If they have crop insurance, producers should provide a notice of loss to CSA within 48 hours of initial discovery of damage and follow up in writing within 5 days. For NAP covered crops, a [Notice of Loss \(CCC-576\)](#) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

“Crop insurance options are offered to help producers manage risk because we never know what nature has in store for the future,” said Davina Lee, Director of USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) Regional Office that covers Puerto Rico. “The Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture’s Corporación de Seguros Agrícolas and their loss adjusters are experienced and well-trained in handling these types of events.”

Conservation?

FSA's [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, damaged farmland or forests, and remove debris from feed stocks, water supplies and feeding areas.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is always available to provide technical assistance during the recovery process by assisting producers to plan and implement conservation practices on farms and working forests impacted by natural disasters. The [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) can help producers plan and implement conservation practices on land impacted by natural disasters.

"The Natural Resources Conservation Service can be a very valuable partner to help landowners with their recovery and resiliency efforts," said Frank Velazquez, NRCS Acting State Conservationist in the Caribbean Area. "Our staff will work one-on-one with landowners to make assessments of the damages and develop approaches that focus on effective recovery of the land."

Assistance for Communities??

Additional NRCS programs include the [Emergency Watershed Protection](#) (EWP) program, which assists local government sponsors with the cost of addressing watershed impairments or hazards such as debris removal and streambank stabilization.

The EWP Program is a recovery effort aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms and other natural disasters. All projects must have an eligible project sponsor. NRCS may bear up to 75% of the eligible construction cost of emergency measures (90% within county-wide limited-resource areas as identified by the U.S. Census data). The remaining costs must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard life and property as a result of a natural disaster. Threats that the EWP Program addresses are termed watershed impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

- Debris-clogged waterways.
- Unstable streambanks.
- Severe erosion jeopardizing public infrastructure.
- Wind-borne debris removal.???

Eligible sponsors include cities, counties, towns or any federally recognized Native American tribe or tribal organization. Sponsors must submit a formal request (by mail or email) to the NRCS state conservationist for assistance within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence or 60 days from the date when access to the sites become available. For more information, please contact the NRCS Caribbean Area State Engineer Yilia Baucage Bou at yilia.baucagebou@usda.gov or 787-766-5715.

More Information

Additional USDA disaster assistance information can be found on farmers.gov, including USDA resources specifically for producers impacted by tropical storms. Those resources include the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), [Loan Assistance Tool](#), and [Natural Disasters and Crop Insurance fact sheet](#). Additionally, FarmRaise offers an [FSA educational hub](#) with LIP and ELAP decision tools as well as farm loan resource videos. For FSA and NRCS programs, producers should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the BidenHarris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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