

USDA Assists Farmers, Ranchers, and Communities Affected by Hurricane Fiona

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 29, 2022 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to aid recovery efforts for farmers, ranchers and residents affected by Hurricane Fiona. USDA staff in offices across the country are ready to respond with a variety of program flexibilities and other assistance to producers and communities in need.

Hurricane Fiona caused widespread impacts along its path, in particular in Puerto Rico, which saw its worst flooding since Hurricane Maria in 2017, and island-wide power outages, which continue in many areas.

“Our thoughts are with all of the people affected by this terrible storm, especially in Puerto Rico, which has come so far in recovering from Hurricane Maria,” said Secretary Vilsack. “I want everyone to know that USDA is ready to deliver all the resources we have available to us to assist those in need.”

Food safety guidance:

USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is helping affected residents take steps to reduce their risk of foodborne illness as they return to their homes after severe weather and flooding.

- During a power outage, the refrigerator will keep food at a safe temperature (below 40°F) for up to 4 hours. A full freezer will hold a safe temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full). Discard any perishable food items in the refrigerator and freezer after these timeframes.
- Drink only bottled water that has not been in contact with flood water. Screw caps are not waterproof, so discard any bottled water that may have come in contact with flood water. If you don’t have bottled water, learn how to safely boil or disinfect water at [FSIS Consumer's Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes webpage](#).

- Discard any food or beverage that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance it may have been in contact with flood water. Containers with screw caps, snap lids, pull tops and crimped caps are not waterproof.
- Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches such as flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches, can be saved by following the steps at the [FSIS Consumer's Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes webpage](#).
- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, utensils and ceramic dishes that came in contact with flood water with hot soapy water. Rinse, then sanitize, by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one of tablespoon unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers that may have come in contact with flood water – they cannot be saved after contact with flood water.
- For questions about food safety, call the Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-674-6854, Monday - Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET (English or Spanish), email MPHotline@usda.gov or live chat at [Ask USDA](#).

Disaster assistance for agricultural operations:

USDA offers a full suite of disaster assistance programs to help producers recover after disasters.

Livestock and perennial crop producers often have limited risk management options available, but there are several disaster programs for them. Key programs offered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) include:

- The [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) and the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybee and Farm-raised Fish Program](#) reimburses producers for a portion of the value of livestock, poultry and other animals that were killed or severely injured by a natural disaster or loss of feed and grazing acres.
- The [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) is available through the local Farm Service Agency. This risk protection includes crop production loss and tree loss for certain, eligible crops. Producers who suffer losses and are signed up for NAP are asked to report crop damage to their local FSA office, respectively, within 72 hours of discovering damage and follow up in writing within 15 days.
- The [Tree Assistance Program](#) provides cost share assistance to rehabilitate or replant orchards and vineyards when storms kill or damage the trees, vines or bushes. NAP or Federal Crop Insurance often only covers the crop and not the plant.

- The [Emergency Conservation Program](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

It is also critical that producers keep accurate records to document damage or loss and to report losses to their local USDA Service Center as soon as possible.

Additionally, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can provide financial resources through its [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help with immediate needs and long-term support to help recover from natural disasters and conserve water resources. USDA can also assist local government sponsors with the cost of recovery efforts like debris removal and streambank stabilization to address natural resource concerns and hazards through the [Emergency Watershed Protection Program](#).

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) (PDF, 1.4 MB) and [Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their [crop insurance agent](#). For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) [is already providing assistance to those communities affected](#) in Puerto Rico through household distribution of [USDA Foods](#), which provides nutritious, high-quality foods 100% grown and produced on farms in the U.S. FNS is standing by to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), states and local authorities, to provide additional [emergency nutrition assistance](#) to people in need.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris 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 www.usda.gov.

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