



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA News - Lone Star State Edition - May 20, 2024

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From the FSA State Executive Director

Areas of the state have experienced significant rainfall over the past few weeks. These rain events have adversely impacted families and their agricultural operations. I hope that you and your family are safe. If your operation experienced losses, you can utilize USDA's [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#) to learn about disaster assistance programs available to help you recover.

USDA is currently conducting the Soybean Request for Referendum until May 31, 2024. The Soybean Promotion, Research and

Consumer Information Act requires USDA to conduct a Request for Referendum every five years to determine if producers want to vote on continuation of the Soybean Checkoff



Program. To be eligible to participate, you must certify and provide documentation that you produced soybeans and paid an assessment(s) on your soybeans during the period of January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023. If you are eligible to participate, contact your administrative FSA office before the deadline.

FSA announced last week the opening of signup for the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP). For 2024, OCCSP reimburses 75% of a certified operation's allowable certification costs, up to a maximum of \$750 per category. For additional information, you should contact your local FSA office.

On a final note, FSA in Texas is hiring. We currently have several job announcements posted for locations across the state. Visit [USAJobs.gov](#) to view these and other FSA career opportunities.

Sincerely,

Kelly Adkins
State Executive Director
Farm Service Agency - Texas

From the NRCS State Conservationist



As we head into summer, I know many areas of our state have experienced devastating weather. These have included wildfires, tornados, flooding and drought. Our thoughts are with you and your operation. NRCS staff is ready to help you recover from their effects with both technical and financial assistance programs ([Disaster at a Glance](#) brochure). For more information, contact your county [USDA NRCS office](#).

USDA is seeking [nominations regarding four positions on the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#). USDA will accept nominations from May 7, 2024, to July 7, 2024. The 12-member Committee, which first convened in March 2022, is part of USDA's efforts to increase support for urban agriculture and innovative production. Members of the Committee provide input on policy development and help identify barriers to urban agriculture. USDA is committed to promoting urban farming and the economic opportunities it provides in cities across the country.

USDA launched a new [Translated Resources for Non-English-Speaking Producers](#) library on Farmers.gov. This new page is searchable and can be filtered by language to better serve staff and producers alike. The library includes publications on conservation, disaster recovery, loans, and other topics, translated into 10 languages, with more to come. This library will grow quickly over the next few months as all the translated materials from each FPAC agency will be added.

Our partner, Texas AgrAbility, will be hosting a [Battleground to Breaking Ground Intro to Agriculture Bootcamp](#) July 15-19 in College Station. Battleground to Breaking Ground is a training program under Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, geared toward veterans and other

new/beginning farmers and ranchers. Learn more about the program and how it helps veterans and beginning producers on our [NRCS YouTube channel](#).

In Texas, we are privileged to work with top-notch producers. Many are being recognized for their contributions to the agricultural community.

Congratulations to Carroll Collier who owns and operates Collier Farms in Chico, Texas, along with his daughter Jeanette Shaw. He was awarded the 2023 Hugh Hammond Bennett Award for Conservation Excellence, South Central Regional Producer of the Year. He is the first Texas producer to receive this award. Read the full story at [Texas Rancher Wins Regional Hugh Hammond Bennett Excellence in Conservation Award](#).

In addition, learn how Tammy Jo Nine Stotts and her husband Leroy, have turned their [Cropland Back to Grass](#) with assistance from NRCS. Operating in the northern Texas Panhandle and western Oklahoma, these fifth-generation ranchers have a conservation success story that needs to be heard.

Sincerely,

Kristy Oates
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service - Texas



Bee in the Know on World Bee Day – May 20

World Bee Day is celebrated each year on May 20th. Bees help feed and fuel communities by pollinating crops. In fact, some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees. From plants to final product, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has programs to help bee and honey producers every step of the way. Our programs can help protect and conserve habitat, protect your investments and recover from disasters impacting your operation.

[Learn More](#)

Soybean Request for Referendum to Begin May 2024

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will conduct the Soybean Request for Referendum May 6 through May 31, 2024, in county Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices.

The Soybean Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act requires USDA to conduct a Request for Referendum every five years to determine if producers want to vote on continuation of the Soybean Checkoff Program. The last Request for Referendum was conducted in 2019.

Individual producers and other producer entities may request a referendum at the county FSA office where their administrative farm records are maintained. Producers who do not participate in FSA programs may request a referendum through the county FSA office where they own or rent land.

To be eligible to participate, producers must certify and provide documentation that they produced soybeans and paid an assessment(s) on their soybeans during the period of January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023. Producers may obtain Form LP-51-1, Soybean Promotion and Research Order Request for Referendum, by postal mail, fax or in person from their FSA county office. The form will be available on the [United Soybean Board](#) page of the AMS website, from May 6, 2024, to May 31, 2024.

Completed forms and supporting documentation must be returned to the appropriate county FSA office by fax or in person no later than close of business May 31, 2024. Mailed forms must be postmarked by midnight May 31, 2024, and received in the county FSA office by close of business, June 7, 2024.

USDA will conduct a referendum if a least 10 percent of the nation's 413,358 soybean producers support a referendum. Not more than one-fifth of the producers who support having a referendum can be from any one state.

[Notice of the opportunity](#) to request a referendum was published in the Federal Register Feb. 2, 2024.

The soybean checkoff program is administered by a 77-member producer board and is designed to expand uses of soybeans and soybean products in domestic and foreign markets. The national program is financed by a mandatory assessment of one-half of 1 percent of the net market price of soybeans.

More information about the board is available on the [United Soybean Board](#) page and on the board's website, unitedsoybean.org. You may also contact Agricultural Marketing Specialist Jason Julian at (202) 731-2149 or Jason.Julian@usda.gov; or Jeana Harbison at (202) 527-3398 or Jeana.M.Harbison@usda.gov.

USDA Now Accepting Applications for Available Funds to Help Cover Organic Certification Costs

Through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will cover up to 75% of organic certification costs at a maximum of \$750 per

certification category. FSA is now accepting applications, and organic producers and handlers should apply for OCCSP by the Oct. 31, 2024, deadline for eligible expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2023, to Sept. 30, 2024. FSA will issue payments as applications are received and approved.

OCCSP was part of a [broader organic announcement](#) made by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on May 15, 2024, which also included the Organic Market Development Grant program and Organic Transition Initiative.

Eligible Applicants, Expenses and Categories

OCCSP provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of organic agricultural commodities for expenses incurred obtaining or maintaining organic certification under USDA's [National Organic Program](#). Eligible OCCSP applicants include any certified organic producers or handlers who have paid organic certification fees to a USDA-accredited certifying agent.

Cost share assistance covers expenses including application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, inspector travel expenses, user fees, sales assessments and postage. OCCSP pays a maximum of \$750 per certification category for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling, and state organic program fees (California only).

How to Apply

To apply, producers and handlers should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#) and be prepared to provide documentation of organic certification and eligible expenses. OCCSP applications can also be submitted through participating state departments of agriculture. For more information, visit the [OCCSP](#) webpage.

Opportunity for State Departments of Agriculture

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA posted a [funding opportunity summary on grants.gov](#) and will electronically mail the Notice of Funding Opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture. Applications are due July 12, 2024.

If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA county offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. Producers or handlers can receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture but not both.

More Information

USDA offers other assistance for organic producers, including the [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), which includes direct farmer assistance for organic production and processing and conservation. For more information on organic agriculture, visit [farmers.gov/organic](#).

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and

view other farm records data and customer information by logging into their farmers.gov [account](#). If you don't have an account, sign up today.

NRCS Texas Announces Second Sign-up for FY24 Conservation Stewardship Program - Inflation Reduction Act Funding

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Texas announced a second sign-up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) through the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA) in fiscal year 2024. Applications for this opportunity will be accepted through **June 21, 2024**.

This sign-up will be funded through [Act Now](#), which allows NRCS to immediately approve and obligate a ranked application in a designated ranking pool when an application meets or exceeds a state-determined minimum ranking score. The state determined minimum ranking score for this sign-up will be 15.

[Read more](#)

USDA Seeks Members for Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking nominations for four positions on the [Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#). USDA will accept nominations from May 7, 2024, to July 7, 2024. The 12-member Committee, which first convened in March 2022, is part of USDA's efforts to increase support for urban agriculture and innovative production. Members of the Committee provide input on policy development and help identify barriers to urban agriculture as USDA works to promote urban farming and the economic opportunities it provides in cities across the country.

Members of the Committee include representative from urban and innovative agricultural production, higher education or extension programs, non-profits, business and economic development, supply chain, and financing. Last year, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack [appointed four new members](#) to the Committee to replace members whose terms expired. The Committee's last [public meeting](#) was held in April 2024.

Nominations

USDA is seeking nominations for individuals representing a broad spectrum of expertise. Four positions are open for nominations including:

- One individual who is an agricultural producer or farmer using innovative technology.
- One individual representing an institution of higher education or extension program.

- One individual with supply chain experience, which may include a food aggregator, wholesale food distributor, food hub, or an individual who has direct-to-consumer market experience.
- One individual representing related experience in urban, indoor and other emerging agriculture production practices.

Individuals who wish to be considered for membership must submit a nomination package including the following:

- A completed [background disclosure form \(Form AD-755\)](#) signed by the nominee.
- A brief summary explaining the nominee's interest in one or more open vacancies including any unique qualifications that address the membership composition and criteria described above.
- A resume providing the nominee's background, experience, and educational qualifications.
- Recent publications by the nominee relative to extending support for urban agriculture or innovative production (optional).
- Letter(s) of endorsement (optional).

Nomination packages must be submitted by email to UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov or postmarked by July 7, 2024. If sending by mail, packages should be addressed to USDA NRCS, Attn: Brian Guse, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 4083, Washington, DC 20250. Any interested person or organization may nominate qualified individuals for membership, including self-nominations. For special accommodations, contact Markus Holliday at UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov.

Additional details are available in the [Federal Register notice](#).

More Information

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture and innovative production. The Committee is part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture and innovative production. Other efforts include:

- Investing \$9.1 million for [Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#) competitive grants in fiscal year 2023.
- Administering the [People's Garden Initiative](#), which celebrates collaborative gardens across the country and worldwide that benefit their communities by growing fresh, healthy food and supporting resilient, local food systems using sustainable practices and providing greenspace.
- Investing approximately \$11.5 million in [cooperative agreements](#) that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans in fiscal year 2023.

- Investing \$40 million, made possible by President Biden's American Rescue Plan, into partnerships with community-based organizations to that will conduct outreach, education and technical assistance to support urban producers.
- Investing in [risk management education](#) to broaden reach of crop insurance among urban and innovative producers.
- Organizing 27 FSA urban county committees to make important decisions about how FSA farm programs are administered locally. Urban farmers who participate in USDA programs in the areas selected are encouraged to participate by nominating and voting for county committee members.
- Establishing 17 new [Urban Service Centers](#) staffed by FSA and NRCS employees where urban producers can access farm loan, conservation, disaster assistance and risk management programs.
- Partnering with the [Vermont Law and Graduate School Center for Agriculture and Food Systems](#) to develop resources that help growers understand and work through local policies.

Learn more at www.usda.gov/urban. For additional resources available to producers, download the [Urban Agriculture at a Glance brochure](#) or visit www.farmers.gov/urban.

USDA Hosts Informational Workshops on Newly Expanded Nursery Insurance Option

USDA has [expanded its Nursery Value Select \(NVS\) crop insurance](#) program to all counties in all states, and the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) is encouraging interested nursery producers to learn more about the program through upcoming informational workshops. These sessions will be valuable for producers in the newly expanded areas and especially for the Nursery Field Grown and Container (FG&C) crop insurance program, which ends beginning with the 2026 crop year.

Nursery Value Select is a pilot program that enables nursery producers to select the dollar amount of coverage that best fits their risk management needs. Its expansion is part of RMA's efforts to provide insurance options for a broader group of producers, including specialty crop producers.

There is one more Nursery Value Select workshop on **July 18**. [See more details here](#).

RMA has administered the Nursery FG&C crop insurance program for nearly 30 years. However, the program relies on a partnership between RMA and a private contractor to update and maintain the Eligible Plant List and Plant Price Schedule and associated software packages. The private contractor will be closing after providing all necessary contractual obligations for the 2025 crop year. Without access to the price schedule and associated software, the Nursery FG&C program will no longer be available to nursery producers beginning with the 2026 crop year.

Nursery Value Select will be able to offer comparable but improved risk management options for those who currently have coverage with the Nursery FG&C program, making RMA's

informational workshops a valuable opportunity to learn more about Nursery Value Select and any required transitions.

Prior to the expansion, Nursery Value Select was only available in select counties in Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Washington. Beginning with the 2025 crop year, Nursery Value Select **will be available in all counties in all states**. The sales closing date for the 2025 crop year is May 1, 2024, or Sept. 1, 2024, as provided in the actuarial documents.

Nursery Value Select was first available in the 2021 crop year, and producers insured more than \$460 million in liabilities 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](#). Producers can learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at rma.usda.gov or by contacting their [RMA Regional Office](#).

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 the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

To learn more about the FSA microloan program, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) can help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

There are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#) option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a joint financing loan is \$600,000, and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

The operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about farm loans, contact your local USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Know your Final Planting Dates

All producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for more information on the final planting date for specific crops. The final planting dates vary by crop, planting period and county so please contact your local FSA office for a list of county-specific planting deadlines. The timely planting of a crop, by the final planting date, may prevent loss of program benefits.

Foreign Investors Must Report U.S. Agricultural Land Holdings

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds foreign investors with an interest in agricultural land in the United States that they are required to report their land holdings and transactions to USDA.

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires foreign investors who buy, sell or hold an interest in U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings and transactions to the USDA. Foreign investors must file AFIDA Report Form FSA-153 with the FSA county office in the county where the land is located. Large or complex filings may be handled by AFIDA headquarters staff in Washington, D.C.

According to CFR Title 7 Part 781, any foreign person who holds an interest in U.S. agricultural land is required to report their holdings no later than 90 days after the date of the transaction.

Foreign investors should report holdings of agricultural land totaling 10 acres or more used for farming, ranching or timber production, and leaseholds on agricultural land of 10 or more years. Tracts totaling 10 acres or less in the aggregate, and which produce annual gross receipts in excess of \$1,000 from the sale of farm, ranch, forestry or timber products, must also be reported. AFIDA reports are also required when there are changes in land use, such

as from agricultural to nonagricultural use. Foreign investors must also file a report when there is a change in the status of ownership.

The information from AFIDA reports is used to prepare an annual report to Congress. These annual reports to Congress, as well as more information, are available on the FSA [AFIDA webpage](#).

Assistance in completing the FSA-153 report may be obtained from the local FSA office. For more information regarding AFIDA or FSA programs, contact your local FSA office at phone or visit farmers.gov.

USDA in Texas



Farm Service Agency

State Executive Director

Kelly Adkins

State Committee

Debra Barrett, Committee Chair

Armando Mandujano

Angie Martin

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