

USVI FSA, NRCS, Updates for November 2023-FSA Encourages Farmers and Ranchers to Vote in County Committee Elections

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USVI FSA Updates November 15, 2023

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Farm Service Agency

FSA Encourages Farmers and Ranchers to Vote in County Committee Elections

The 2023 Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections began on Nov. 6, 2023, when ballots were mailed to eligible voters. The deadline to return ballots to local FSA offices, or to be postmarked, is Dec. 4, 2023.

County committee members are an important component of the operations of FSA and provide a link between the agricultural community and USDA. Farmers and ranchers elected to county committees help deliver FSA programs at the local level, applying their knowledge and judgment to make decisions on commodity price support programs; conservation programs; incentive, indemnity and disaster programs for some commodities; emergency programs and eligibility. FSA committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal laws.

To be an eligible voter, farmers and ranchers must:

- Be of legal voting age or, if not of legal voting age, supervise and conduct the farming operation of an entire farm.
- Have an interest in a farm or ranch as either:
- An individual who meets one or more of the following:
- Is eligible and capable to vote in one's own right.
- Is a partner of a general partnership.
- Is a member of a joint venture.
- Participates or cooperates in any FSA program that is provided by law. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information to FSA about their farming or ranching operation(s) but may not have applied or received program benefits.

Eligible voters in Local Administrative Area 2, who do not receive a ballot can obtain one from their local FSA county office. Customers can identify which LAA they or their farming operation is in by using our new GIS locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Newly elected committee members will take office Jan. 1, 2024.

The candidates in this year's election are:

Elmo L. Rabsatt Sr., is nominated in LAA 2, St. John County, to serve as committee member for a 3-year term. Rabsatt, Sr. resides in St. John and has produced local herbs, seedlings, honey, Mango, Soursop and other local fruit trees for 40 years.

More information on county committees can be found at fsa.usda.gov/elections or by contacting the St. Croix County FSA office.

Tax Resources for USDA Program Participants

Navigating filing taxes can be challenging, especially if you are new to running a farm business, participating in disaster programs for first time, or trying to forecast the farm's tax bill. Receiving funds from USDA through activities such as a conservation program payment or a disaster program is considered farm income that includes a tax liability for farm businesses. USDA technical assistance is free and creates no tax implications.

At the end of the tax year, USDA issues tax forms 1098 and 1099 forms for farm loans, conservation programs administered by the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service including the Conservation Reserve Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program, crop disaster payments, and the Market Facilitation Program. USDA also issues tax forms for recipients of assistance for distressed borrowers, including through Section 22006 of the Inflation Reduction Act.

If you have received tax forms related to your operation, USDA cannot and does not provide tax advice but wants you to be aware of options that may help manage your tax liability. USDA has partnered with experts to provide resources to help you make the right tax decisions for your operation. Monthly webinars are available for registration and to view on demand at <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/taxes>.

The [Tax Estimator Tool](#) is an interactive spreadsheet that producers can download to estimate tax liability. It is for informational and educational purposes and should not be considered tax or legal advice. Producers may need to work with a tax professional to determine the correct information to be entered in the Tax Estimator Tool.

We encourage you to visit <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/taxes> for more information on how to find and work with a tax preparer as well as instructions on how to request copies of USDA documents and links to other helpful tax resources.

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 St. Croix County USDA Service Center at 340-773-9146 or visit fsa.usda.gov/microloans.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA Increases Minimum Annual Payment for Conservation Stewardship Program

USDA is increasing the minimum annual payment to producers in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) from \$1,500 to \$4,000 in fiscal year 2024. The increase will address inflation and other challenges faced by small scale, underserved, and urban producers and improve equity in the program by making participation more financially beneficial for smaller operations. The new minimum payment amount will be available for new and renewed CSP contracts. Applications for the program in the Caribbean Area will be accepted until January 26, 2024.

Read the Caribbean Area fiscal year 2024 conservation program deadlines news release on the [NRCS Caribbean Area website](#).

NRCS Caribbean Area Announces Fiscal Year 2024 Program Application Deadlines

NRCS Director Luis Cruz-Arroyo announced the fiscal year 2024 application deadlines for the Caribbean Area for the Environmental Quality Incentives, Agricultural Conservation Easements, and the Conservation Stewardship programs. These are all voluntary programs that provide technical and financial assistance to address natural resources issues or concerns in agricultural and forest lands.

Applications for these programs are accepted year-round, however, a deadline per program is established each fiscal year to process the received applications. Applications submitted after

the deadline will be considered in the next funding period, which is determined depending on funding availability.

The first 2024 application deadlines are the following:

- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) - **November 30, 2023**
- [Agricultural Conservation Easements Program \(ACEP\)](#) - **December 28, 2023**
- [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) - **January 26, 2024**

Read the full press release on the [NRCS Caribbean Area website](#).

From Career Events to USA Jobs Workshops, NRCS Caribbean Area Spreads the Word About Career Opportunities in the Agency

Throughout the week of October 16-21, NRCS Caribbean Area staff, in collaboration with Florida, California, and Pennsylvania NRCS staff, were part of different career events and job fairs to promote student internship positions, recent graduate positions, and other fulltime opportunities within the agency. Events included the 21st Inter Fair at the Interamerican University-Bayamón and the 35th Job Fair at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez, as well as presentations and information table events at Ana G. Mendez-Cupey, Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, and University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras, and more. Approximately, 530 people were reached and educated about NRCS career opportunities, such as the [Pathways Program](#).



Staff also organized [USAjobs.gov](#) assistance workshops through which participants had the opportunity to learn how to navigate the web portal, resume building, and interview techniques. Participants were able to gain valuable professional insight from NRCS recruiters about how they can secure a position that aligns with their career's goals in the future.

The career events and activities were a great opportunity to make an impact in the field of natural resources conservation. Participants understood that working with NRCS means becoming a defender of our planet and making a lasting impact on the preservation of natural resources and the environment.

NRCS Caribbean Area Joined the 2023 Feds Feed Families Campaign!

NRCS coordinated the collection and delivery of over 500 pounds of donations during the 2023 [Feds Feed Families \(FFF\)](#) campaign. On August 22, about 420 pounds of donations were delivered for the nonprofit *Cocina Proyecto San Martín de Porres* in an effort led by Resource Conservationist Esperanza Avilés Estrada in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico (PR). Additionally, on September 22, about 512 pounds were collected, in partnership with Rural Development, and delivered to [El Comedor de la Kennedy](#) in San Juan, PR. While the FFF campaign ended on September 30, 2023, there are always opportunities to spread kindness, help feed people and enhance food security. Learn more about the [Feds Feed Families](#) campaign and how you can help families in need. Thanks to all contributors to this amazing campaign.



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