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USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Texas and Oklahoma Farmers and Livestock Producers Impacted by Wildfires

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OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla., March 7, 2024 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has technical and financial assistance available to help farmers and livestock producers across Texas and Oklahoma recover from recent wildfires. Producers impacted by wildfires 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 for Wildfire Recovery

Producers who experience livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality may be eligible for the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#) (LIP). To participate in LIP, producers will need to provide documentation of death losses and submit a notice of loss to the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) no later than the annual program payment application date. 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) provides eligible producers with compensation for feed and grazing losses and transportation cost associated with transporting feed/forage to livestock and livestock to feed. For ELAP, producers are required to complete a notice of loss and a payment application to their local FSA office no later than Jan. 30, 2025, for 2024 calendar year losses.

“Based on your reported losses or damages, our local Farm Service Agency county office staff are ready to help connect you with the programs best suited to meet your wildfire recovery needs” said Kelly Adkins, State Executive Director for FSA in Texas. “Our staff will do our best to work with the loss documentation you have available. We understand that these are trying times, and you’re pulled in many directions, so when you’re able, please get in touch with us to begin the reporting process. The sooner we have the information, the sooner we can get county committee action on your requests for assistance. Examples of loss documentation include but are not limited to 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. Depending on program funding availability, 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 [federal crop insurance](#) or FSA’s [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office, respectively. If they have crop insurance, producers should provide a notice of loss to their agent within 72 hours of initial discovery of damage and follow up in writing within 15 days.

For NAP covered crops, a [Notice of Loss \(CCC-576\) form](#) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

“Because there is always the possibility of losses from wildfires and other natural disasters, USDA offers crop insurance and risk management to help producers mitigate the financial impact of losses resulting from disaster events, like these, that are beyond their control,” said James Bellmon, Director of RMA’s Regional Office that

covers Texas and Oklahoma. “Our agents, loss adjusters, and Approved Insurance Providers are prepared to support you through the challenging disaster recovery process.”

Conservation

Outside of the [primary nesting season](#), emergency and non-emergency haying and grazing of [Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP) acres may be authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disasters. Producers interested in haying or grazing of CRP acres should contact their county FSA office to determine eligibility.

FSA’s [Emergency Conservation Program](#) (ECP) can assist landowners with financial and technical assistance to remove debris from farmland such as woody material, sand, rock and materials from collapsed hoop houses/high tunnels on cropland or pastureland. Through the program, FSA can provide assistance toward the restoration or replacement of fences including livestock cross fences, boundary fences, cattle gates or wildlife exclusion fences on agricultural land.

Additionally, the [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) can assist eligible owners of nonindustrial private forestland to also restore the land by removing debris, repairing forestland roads, and replacing fence. For both programs, farmers and ranchers should check with their [local FSA office](#) to find out about sign-up periods, which are set by the FSA County Committee.

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is always available to provide technical assistance in the recovery process by assisting producers to plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches and working forests impacted by natural disasters. The [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) can assist with financial incentive payments to implement conservation practices addressing natural resource concerns. Long-term damage from wildfires includes forage production loss in pastures and fields and increased wind erosion on crop fields not protected with soil health practices. NRCS plans to make available \$6 million in Texas to assist with emergency conservation practices. Visit your [local USDA Service Center](#) to learn more about these impacts and potential recovery tactics.

Assistance for Communities

NRCS also administers the [Emergency Watershed Protection](#) (EWP) program, which provides assistance to 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 organizations. Sponsors must be able to provide the local construction share, obtain permits and site access and agree to perform operations and maintenance of the constructed projects. Willing sponsors must submit a formal request (by mail or email) to the 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, potential sponsors should [contact their local NRCS office](#).

“At USDA, we serve as a partner to help landowners with their resiliency and recovery efforts,” said Kristy Oates, NRCS State Conservationist in Texas. “Our staff will work one-on-one with landowners to make assessments of the damages and develop methods that focus on effective recovery of the land.”

In addition to EWP, Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is another valuable service that NRCS can provide following a wildfire. NRCS technical assistance can help fire victims with planning cost-effective post fire restoration practices.

More Information

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#) 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 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 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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