

2024 Hurricanes – Frequently Asked Questions

USDA’s Farm Production and Conservation agencies – Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) are ready to assist producers by 2024 hurricanes, including Debby, Helene and Milton.

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Not sure where to start? Here’s a [helpful guide](#) to help you navigate available programs and resources.

General

My farm was damaged by multiple hurricanes (i.e. Debby and Helene, or Helene and Milton). I’m not sure which damage is from which hurricane; I just know my farm is damaged and crops are ruined. How is USDA handling multiple hurricanes in your programs?

USDA is implementing a suite of program flexibilities to support robust recovery for losses suffered as a result of hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton.

Report crop, livestock, poultry and farm infrastructure losses to USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) at your local USDA Service Center. If you have Federal Crop Insurance, contact your crop insurance agent as soon as crop or livestock losses are apparent.

The Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2024, how does this impact Disaster Assistance Programs for USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)?

The Farm Bill expiration does not impact the ability of FSA and NRCS to support producers impacted by hurricanes through a number of programs.

FSA is able to provide support through all of our key disaster programs including the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP), Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), Tree Assistance Program (TAP) and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Additionally, FSA also continues to deliver its full suite of direct and guaranteed farm ownership and operating loan programs, including emergency loans, as the programs are funded under different funding authority. NRCS is able to provide support through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP).

Does USDA offer programs that cover contamination from flood waters?

USDA programs don't specifically address contamination from flood waters. But there are programs that help with flood recovery, including:

- The Tree Assistance Program (TAP) provides financial assistance to eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes, and vines lost by natural disasters including flooding.
- The Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) provides assistance for grazing losses, not to exceed 150 days in cases where livestock are removed from affected grazing acres as a result of flooding.
- The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides assistance for crop losses due to flooding and other natural disasters that result in lower yields, destroyed crops, or the inability to plant. NAP provides coverage equivalent to catastrophic (CAT) and additional (buy-up) levels of risk protection for producers with a NAP application for coverage or a valid form CCC-860, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, Beginning, and Veteran Farmer or Rancher Certification on file prior to the date of disaster occurrence.

Many farms are not covered by crop insurance due to their size and the diversity of crops raised. What assistance will those small farms be able to access?

FSA and NRCS offer disaster assistance, farm loan and conservation programs that can help small- and mid-sized farms as well as farms with diverse crops recover. Please contact the FSA at your local Service Center as soon as possible to report losses and to discuss the challenges on your farm.

If farms are not registered with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) before the disaster event, would they be eligible for programs moving forward?

All agricultural producers, whether they have worked with USDA previously or not, are eligible for disaster assistance, conservation and farm loan programs from impacts of eligible natural disaster events, including hurricanes. If it's your first time working with USDA, we'll work with you to get started and apply for assistance. You can find contact information for your local USDA Service Center at farmers.gov/service-locator.

If a farm is structured as a business entity does that have any bearing on eligibility for disaster assistance programs? (10/30/24)

The structure of a farm does not impede participation in disaster programs. The participant at risk, whether an individual or entity, will be the applicant. We will work with participants to complete the application process to ensure the eligible participant can access critical assistance.

What are the plans to increase USDA staffing in affected areas to provide application assistance and site visits? (10/30/24)

USDA is committed to providing support to the producers and our staff in the affected areas. USDA staff from across the nation are currently assisting those in disaster areas remotely and jump teams are being developed to further assist on the ground in hurricane-impacted states.

Additionally, producers can contact the FSA Call Center at 877-508-8364 to speak with staff.

Do farmers have to have an AD 1026 on file in order to be eligible for any/some/all emergency-related program payments? (10/30/24)

Yes, as part of applying for FSA and NRCS programs, producers will need an AD-1026. Producers and any affiliated individuals or entities to participating producers are required to comply with Highly Erodible Lands Conservation (HELC) and Wetlands Conservation (WC). FSA and NRCS are authorizing waivers and other flexibilities to expedite recovery work (such as debris removal or animal mortality emergency management), and then working with producers to ensure all forms for a complete application package are filed.

Conservation Programs for Debris Removal

Do either the FSA or NRCS debris removal programs provide funding for farmers to purchase equipment needed to manage debris (such as wood chippers or air curtain burners) or do you only cover rental costs? (10/30/2024)

FSA's Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) provide assistance for rental costs associated with heavy/light equipment and compensate for labor costs associated with running equipment. These programs do not cover the cost of purchasing equipment.

EQIP payment rates account for the costs associated with renting equipment and do not include the costs of purchasing machine equipment.

Do farmers have to work with a contractor for debris removal? (10/30/24)

There is no requirement to work with a contractor. This work can be self-performed and you can provide documentation for reimbursement.

I saw that open burning of debris is not allowed. Can an air curtain burner be used? Or a biochar kiln? (10/30/24)

Producers can burn woody debris as part of ECP cleanup; however, the typical treatment and compensation supported by the ECP payment scenario is to load up the debris and haul it off to an approved dump site. An increased environmental review is required if the producer chooses to burn the debris on the farmland or nonindustrial private forestland.

Conservation Programs for Land Rehabilitation

Some producers are concerned by the drastic topsoil losses they've experienced on their cropland and are interested in urgently instituting practices like mulching (with biomass), soil carbon amendment, conservation cover, and cover cropping to kickstart new topsoil development and stabilize those crop fields against further erosion. Is it possible for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) to offer these practices to be instituted on a more emergent timeline (60-90 days) rather than longer timelines? (10/30/24)

Current NRCS policy allows for state conservationists to issue an early start waiver to an EQIP applicant. While the issuance of the state waiver does not guarantee funding, it does allow an applicant to commence a planned conservation practice prior to the application being approved for funding. Note that an applicant must also meet other programmatic requirements.

ECP provides assistance for cover cropping or critical area planting, which includes mulching and fertilizer, but does not include carbon amendments at this time. Learn more about our [program flexibilities](#).

Does the waiver of pre-authorization requirement apply only to emergency repairs or all disaster-related repairs? Is third-party verification of damages still required in all cases, and do the third-party verifiers need to create their own documentation?

To support critical disaster recovery efforts to farmland and nonindustrial privately owned forestland as a result of hurricanes Debby, Helene, Milton and future named storms, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has provided the following flexibilities in order to streamline producer assistance through the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP). FSA has authorized:

- a waiver of onsite inspection in order to expedite determination of need and approvals of restoration work:
 - for all ECP practices with the exception of engineering practices (pond embankments, dams, buried pipeline, etc.).
 - for all EFRP forest types to remove hazard trees not exceeding 100 acres aggregate. Restoration plans are required for all other activities (site prep, planting, etc.).
- a waiver of the requirement that producers request approval to start work prior to submitting an application for certain emergency non-ground disturbing activities such as:
 - surface debris removal
 - fence repair
 - hazard tree removal up to 100 acres aggregate

ECP and EFRP do not require third-party verification of damages in cases where an onsite inspection has been waived; however, producers are encouraged to submit dated photos, GPS points, imagery, maps, etc. of impacted area to document damages.

Where can I find specific information on which practices are eligible under the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and which practice codes at FSA they correspond to? (10/30/24)

The [ECP fact sheet](#) provides information to get you started and we recommend that you contact your local Farm Service Agency county office for how we can help with your specific needs.

Additionally, the [NRCS payment schedules website](#) is another good source for this information, but note this site includes all NRCS practices, not just the practices that are authorized for ECP.

Also see our [Comparison of USDA's Conservation Programs to Aid Recovery after Hurricanes Debby Helen and Milton](#) fact sheet.

USDA issued a waiver for onsite inspections for non-engineering practices. What are considered "non-engineering" practices?

For ECP, non-engineering practices include surface debris removal, grading/shaping/leveling of non-irrigated land, fence repair/replacement, soil erosion control, clean up and replanting of shelterbelts and windbreaks. Engineering practices requiring an onsite inspection include but are not limited to pond embankment, dams, buried pipeline, etc.

For EFRP, onsite inspections are only waived for the removal of hazard trees. Restoration plans and onsite inspections are required for all other activities, including site prep, planting, etc.

We had significant damage to marketable timber. What resources are available to cover the loss of timber value?

Unfortunately, the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) does not extend to losses of marketable timber, but rather provides cost share to rehabilitate nonindustrial private forestland.

When will emergency funds be available for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for hurricane recovery efforts? Will there be a special signup period for those in need of emergency EQIP funds? How soon can folks realistically expect to receive assistance?

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) expects funds to be available in October. NRCS is currently accepting applications for EQIP, and producers are encouraged to contact their local NRCS Field Office at their local USDA Service Center to get the application process started. Depending on the practice, work could begin in October with an early start waiver.

Will folks need to undergo a full nine-step conservation plan to receive Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds? Or will there be some expedited process, separate from Act Now?

Yes, applicants will need to meet all applicable program eligibility requirements for EQIP to receive funding for eligible conservation practices, which includes a conservation plan. Progressive planning allows planners to incrementally evaluate and address resource concerns.

Will advance payments be available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)? And if so, what percentage can be received in advance?

Yes, EQIP advance payments are available to historically underserved producers, which includes beginning, socially disadvantaged, limited resource and military veteran producers. The advanced payment provides up to 50% of the contract payment.

Will a prior award of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding affect a farm's eligibility to reapply for EQIP funding for storm impact related needs/projects? Will farms who had prior EQIP funded projects (example, a high tunnel) be able to apply for additional funding if it was destroyed?

EQIP can provide assistance to reapply practices that were destroyed and part of an active contract with additional funding through the same contract.

If conservation practices were installed with EQIP but the contract is no longer active, the producer may reapply for assistance.

If you have an active Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract that has been disrupted, are there similar procedures for re-applying for additional funding?

The flexibilities for reapplying conservation practices apply to both Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and CSP. *(answer continued on next page)*

Participants should work with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at their local USDA Service Center regarding the implementation of their existing CSP contract and the provisions regarding their contract being impacted due to significant disaster or related condition.

Have there been any conversations about expanding the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program Floodplain Buyout program to the affected areas instead of it being just available in Limited Resource Areas?

EWP Buyouts are an available option for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist to work with local project sponsors to determine if buyouts make sense as an EWP tool. EWP Buyouts are available for all areas affected.

Are there any limitations to EWP buyouts by land use?

EWP emergency measures, which include buyouts, are not limited by land use.

Is EWP funding for easements in a separate pool within EWP?

No, EWP funds are appropriated to carry out emergency measures, which include floodplain easements.

What are the exigency provisions under EWP? Many roads are threatened due to landslides.

The EWP exigency provisions:

- prioritize funding for exigent situations;
- allow temporary correction measures; and
- require a rapid construction time limit. All other EWP Program requirements apply to exigencies.

What role does the US Forest Service have in the Emergency Watershed Protection Program? (10/30/24)

NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service work together to implement the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. NRCS administers watershed protection on state, tribal, and private lands, and the Forest Service administers watershed protection on national forest system lands. The local NRCS state conservationist and FS Forest Manager work together when EWP activities are needed across the areas of responsibility.

Programs for Livestock and Poultry Producers

I am a contract grower. What is the USDA definition for ownership share/interest? Is it that the producer has to have some % of actual ownership in the birds? Or does their owning building and time spent caring for them get them something we can call “ownership share”?

Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) assistance extends to contract growers of poultry and swine and other confinement livestock in cases where the contract grower has an ownership share or interest in the livestock lost. Interest includes producers who do not own the poultry or swine, but whose income is at risk with the production or loss of the animal.

Eligible livestock contract grower means a person or entity, who meets all the terms and conditions of eligible livestock owner but whose interest in the livestock is not as owner but as a person or entity whose interest is in poultry or swine, as of the day of the eligible loss condition and day the poultry or swine died, had:

- a written agreement with the owner of eligible livestock, setting the specific terms, conditions, and obligations of the parties involved regarding the production of livestock
- control of the eligible livestock
- risk of loss in the animal.

If an integrator provides some compensation to a contract poultry grower for birds in the barn when a hurricane hit, is the grower still eligible for the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)?

While contract growers are eligible for livestock losses under LIP in cases where the contract grower has an ownership share or a financial interest in the livestock lost and shares in the risk of production, any compensation received from the integrator will be considered when calculating LIP assistance. For contract growers under LIP, the contract must demonstrate the grower has risk in the product. Typically, the contract will state who suffers the revenue loss if a loss occurs.

Can NRCS help with disposal of dead poultry and livestock?

NRCS can provide technical and financial assistance to poultry and livestock producers, through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help with emergency animal mortality disposal for poultry. Because of the need to dispose of poultry and livestock quickly to mitigate environmental and disease impacts, hurricane-impacted producers can begin disposing of poultry once an initial application is submitted. NRCS is using the flexibility of an early-start waiver to producers once an initial application is submitted. An initial application includes a call, letter or email to NRCS with producer name(s); farm location(s) address; farm number, if available; phone number; and estimated number and type of poultry or livestock.

Will the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) also be usable to compensate for farmers for forage losses?

ELAP provides assistance for grazing losses on acres affected by hurricanes/flooding. Additionally, ELAP assists with above normal feed purchases attributed to losses of harvested or purchased forage.

Are there any qualifications to qualify for the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)? Specifically, do farms have to be in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) to qualify for ELAP? (10/30/24)

ELAP qualifications trigger based on the disaster event itself (hurricane, flooding, etc.) and ELAP does not require participants be in NAP to qualify. Producers who currently do not do business with FSA are eligible for assistance under ELAP and FSA stands ready to assist new producers with this process; i.e. registering farm with FSA, updating name and address, filing an application, etc.

Does Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) assistance for transportation also apply to donors that are trucking hay and feed into impacted regions to assist producers in need? (10/30/24)

ELAP transportation assistance extends to donated feed as this is feed obtained (purchased) above normal quantities. Assistance for feed transportation is limited to the livestock producer.

Specialty Crop Producers

What programs will be made available for oyster and clam farms? (10/30/24)

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides assistance for losses of oysters and clams (farm-raised fish). The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) also provides assistance for oysters and clams if the participant had an application for coverage in place prior to the sales closing date for the crop.

Crop Insurance and Other Risk Management

How does whole farm revenue protection effect a farm's eligibility for the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)?

Producers with NAP coverage can receive assistance for eligible covered crops; however, any assistance received under NAP may be considered in determining the producer's Whole Farm Revenue Program indemnity.

Is there any ability to get Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) payments limits raised/waived for producers who have been impacted by multiple storms in one crop year (Debby and Helene)?

Unfortunately, the \$125,000 per crop year payment limitation for NAP is statutory.

With such widespread destruction from multiple hurricanes, will RMA be streamlining any procedures for loss claims?

RMA recognizes the catastrophic impact that Debby, Helene and Milton have had on producers across the Southeast and has already authorized emergency procedures in response to these storms. These procedures streamline certain determinations to accelerate the adjustment of losses and issuance of indemnity payments to crop insurance policyholders in impacted areas. They also allow flexibilities for producers who are unable to comply with policy requirements due to power outages or damage to communication infrastructure. The emergency procedures can be found on the [Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton webpage](#).

RMA will continue to work with our approved insurance providers (AIPs) and stakeholders in the impacted areas, and if additional areas of need arise we will address them in future emergency procedures.

When will RMA release which counties triggered a payment for the Hurricane Insurance Protection (HIP-WI) endorsement?

RMA has released this information for hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton. The information can be found on rma.usda.gov.