

January 17, 2017



Having trouble viewing this email? [View it as a Web page.](#)

- [Farewell](#)
- [USDA Climate Hub 'Energy Generation and Efficiency' Building Block](#)
- [USDA Expands Grasslands Conservation Program to Small-Scale Livestock Producers](#)
- [USDA's Farm Service Agency Expands Bridges to Opportunity Nationwide](#)
- [Crop Insurance Deadline Nears in Florida](#)
- [2nd Annual Florida Agricultural Policy Outlook Conference](#)
- [USDA Makes it Easier to Transfer Land to the Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers](#)
- [Organic Producers and Handlers May Apply for Certification Cost Share Reimbursements; Expanded Eligibility for Transition and State Certification Cost](#)
- [USDA Announces Additional Financial Incentives for Conservation Reserve Program Participants to Improve Forest Health and Enhance Wildlife Habitat](#)
- [USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators](#)
- [Selected Interest Rates for January 2017](#)
- [Dates to Remember](#)

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## Florida FSA Newsletter

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### Florida Farm Service Agency

4440 NW 25th  
Place, St 1  
Gainesville, FL  
32606

### Farewell

As the Obama administration draws to a close on Friday, January 20th, we will be saying good-bye to Florida and Virgin Islands State Executive Director Rick Dantzler. Mr. Dantzler is a political appointee and his tenure ends with President Obama's. Until the Trump administration selects a new appointee, Debby Folsom will be serving as Acting State Executive Director.

[www.fsa.usda.gov/fl](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/fl)

Mr. Dantzler, thank you for your service and best wishes on your future endeavors!

### State Committee:

Martin Griswold  
Donell Gwinn  
Gayle King  
James Peeples

### Executive Director:

Rick Dantzler

### Executive Officer:

Debby Folsom

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## USDA Climate Hub 'Energy Generation and Efficiency' Building Block

Through the Agricultural Act of 2014, USDA has several authorities that encourage the adoption of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies. The Energy Generation and Efficiency Building Block supports energy efficiency improvements in rural homes and on farm operations, for example, through EQIP's National On-Farm Energy Initiative. This Building Block also provides opportunities to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from energy generation and use, for example, through the Rural Energy for America Program. To learn more about energy generation and efficiency opportunities from USDA click the

**Division Chiefs:**

following link:

[http://www.usda.gov/oce/climate\\_change/building\\_blocks/10\\_EnergyGenerationEfficiency.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/oce/climate_change/building_blocks/10_EnergyGenerationEfficiency.pdf)

**Administrative  
Officer**

Mark Cotrell

For more information about the USDA Climate Hubs click here:

<http://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/>.

**Farm Program**

Tom Hockert

**Farm Loans**

Justin Teuton

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or county.

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## USDA Expands Grasslands Conservation Program to Small-Scale Livestock Producers

USDA will accept over 300,000 acres in 43 states that were offered by producers during the recent ranking period for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands enrollment with emphasis placed on small-scale livestock operations. Through the voluntary CRP Grasslands program, grasslands threatened by development or conversion to row crops are maintained as livestock grazing areas, while providing important conservation benefits. Approximately 200,000 of the accepted acres were offered by small-scale livestock operations.

The most recent ranking period closed on Dec. 16, 2016, and included for the first time a CRP Grasslands practice specifically tailored for small-scale livestock grazing operations to encourage broader participation. Under this ranking period and for future periods, small-scale livestock operations with 100 or fewer head of grazing cows (or the equivalent) can submit applications to enroll up to 200 acres of grasslands per farm. Larger operations may still make offers through the normal process. USDA met its goal of 200,000 acres under this small-scale initiative. The new practice for small-scale livestock grazing operations encourages greater diversity geographically and in all types of livestock operations. Visit <http://go.usa.gov/x9PFS> to view the complete list of acres accepted by state.

Participants in CRP Grasslands establish or maintain long-term, resource-conserving grasses and other plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. CRP Grasslands participants can use the land for livestock production (e.g. grazing or producing hay), while following their conservation and grazing plans in order to maintain the cover. A goal of CRP Grasslands is to minimize conversion of grasslands either to row crops or to non-agricultural uses. Participants can receive annual payments of up to 75 percent of the grazing value of the land and up to 50 percent of the cost of cover practices like cross-fencing to support rotational grazing or improving pasture cover to benefit pollinators or other wildlife.

USDA selects offers for enrollment based on six ranking factors: (1) current and future use, (2) new farmer/rancher or underserved producer involvement, (3) maximum grassland preservation, (4) vegetative cover, (5) environmental factors, and (6) pollinator habitat. Offers not selected in a ranking period are rolled over into the next ranking period.

Small livestock operations or other farming and ranching operations interested in participating in CRP Grasslands should contact their local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation).

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## USDA's Farm Service Agency Expands Bridges to Opportunity Nationwide

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced the expansion of a unique service for farmers and ranchers. FSA's Bridges to Opportunity program provides a one-stop-shop that connects producers with resources, programs and educational services offered across the department, as well as from other USDA partner organizations. Bridges to Opportunity, which currently provides enhanced customer support to more than 150,000 customers in 20 states, will expand to serve customers across the country before the

end of the month using fiscal year 2016 funds.

FSA's presence in over 2,100 county offices, in nearly every rural county, puts the agency in a unique position to partner with non-governmental organizations to reach thousands of agricultural producers who can benefit from the programs and services. Bridges to Opportunity allows FSA employees to search and obtain a list of all local, state, regional and national organizations that may be able assist local producers with their specific need. For example, FSA's Houston County office in Texas partnered with many agricultural organizations to serve producers affected by severe drought. When drought-stricken agricultural producers came to the county office looking for assistance, FSA employees were able to provide traditional services, such as the Livestock Forage Program and the Emergency loan program administered by FSA, as well as connect local farmers with local, regional, and national organizations that provide drought assistance and education.

Bridges to Opportunity was developed by FSA to provide producers with a more comprehensive customer service experience by connecting them with other USDA agencies and nonfederal partners. Through Bridges to Opportunity, FSA county office employees have the tools to connect farmers, ranchers and anyone interested in agriculture with customized expertise on topics ranging including organic production, beginning farmer resources, integrated pest management, disaster assistance, conservation practices, agricultural educational courses, loans, grants and other financial assistance that can start, grow or benefit farming and ranching operations.

For more information about Bridges to Opportunity, please contact your local FSA county office. To locate your FSA county office, please see <https://offices.usda.gov>.

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## Crop Insurance Deadline Nears in Florida

*Fresh Market Tomato and Pecan Growers Need to Make Insurance Decisions Soon*

VALDOSTA, Ga., Jan. 12, 2017 - USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminds Florida fresh market tomato and pecan growers the final date to apply for crop insurance coverage is January 31. Current policyholders who wish to make changes to their existing coverage also have until the January 31 sales closing date to do so.

Crop insurance provides protection against a loss in production due to natural perils, such as drought or excessive moisture. Coverage is available for fresh market tomatoes in Gadsden, Holmes, and Jackson counties. Coverage is available for pecans in Jefferson County.

Growers are encouraged to visit their crop insurance agent soon to learn specific details for the 2017 crop year. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers and online at the RMA Agent Locator. Growers can use the RMA Cost Estimator to get a premium amount estimate of their insurance needs online. Learn more about crop insurance and the modern farm safety net at [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov).

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## 2nd Annual Florida Agricultural Policy Outlook Conference

The second annual Florida Agricultural Policy Outlook Conference sponsored by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences comes to Hillsborough County this year. The UF/IFAS Food and Resource Economics Department held last year's in Apopka, so it's a bit of a road show coming to your area.

**Thursday, February 9, 2017**

**9:00 am - 4:00 pm**

**UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center**

Balm, Florida

Register at <http://fred.ifas.ufl.edu/flagpolicyoutlookconference/>

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## **USDA Makes it Easier to Transfer Land to the Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers**

*Allows for Transfer of Certain Conservation Reserve Program Land to New Farmers; Provides Priority Enrollment in Working Lands Conservation Programs*

Beginning Jan. 9, 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will offer an early termination opportunity for certain Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, making it easier to transfer property to the next generation of farmers and ranchers, including family members. The land that is eligible for the early termination is among the least environmentally sensitive land enrolled in CRP.

This change to the CRP program is just one of many that USDA has implemented based on recommendations from the Land Tenure Advisory Subcommittee formed by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in 2015.

Normally if a landowner terminates a CRP contract early, they are required to repay all previous payments plus interest. The new policy waives this repayment if the land is transferred to a beginning farmer or rancher through a sale or lease with an option to buy. With CRP enrollment close to the Congressionally-mandated cap of 24 million acres, the early termination will also allow USDA to enroll other land with higher conservation value elsewhere.

Acres terminated early from CRP under these land tenure provisions will be eligible for priority enrollment consideration into the CRP Grasslands, if eligible; or the Conservation Stewardship Program or Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

According to the Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land survey, conducted by USDA in 2014, U.S. farmland owners expect to transfer 93 million acres to new ownership during 2015-2019. This represents 10 percent of all farmland across the nation. Details on the early termination opportunity will be available starting on Jan. 9, 2017, at local USDA service centers. For more information about CRP and to find out if your acreage is eligible for early contract termination, contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office or go online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp). To locate your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## **Organic Producers and Handlers May Apply for Certification Cost Share Reimbursements; Expanded Eligibility for Transition and State Certification Cost**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that starting March 20, 2017, organic producers and handlers will be able to visit over 2,100 USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices to apply for federal reimbursement to assist with the cost of receiving and maintaining organic or transitional certification.

USDA reimburses organic producers up to 75 percent of the cost of organic certification, but only about half of the nation's organic operations currently participate in the program. Starting March 20, USDA will provide a uniform, streamlined process for organic producers and handlers to apply for organic cost share assistance either by mail or in person.

USDA is making changes to increase participation in the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance Organic Certification Cost Share Program, and at the same time provide more opportunities for organic producers to access other USDA programs, such as disaster protection and loans for farms, facilities and marketing. Producers can also access information on nonfederal agricultural resources, and get referrals to local experts, including organic agriculture, through USDA's Bridges to Opportunity service at the local FSA office.

Historically, many state departments of agriculture have obtained grants to disburse reimbursements to those producers and handlers qualifying for cost share assistance. FSA will continue to partner with states to administer the programs. For states that want to continue to directly administer the programs, applications will be due Feb. 17, 2017.

Eligible producers include any certified producers or handlers who have paid organic or transitional certification

fees to a [USDA-accredited certifying](#) agent. Application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/ arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage are all eligible for a cost share reimbursement from USDA.

Once certified, producers and handlers are eligible to receive reimbursement for up to 75 percent of certification costs each year up to a maximum of \$750 per certification scope—crops, livestock, wild crops and handling. Today's announcement also adds transitional certification and state organic program fees as additional scopes.

To learn more about organic certification cost share, please visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/organic](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/organic) or contact a local FSA office by visiting <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## **USDA Announces Additional Financial Incentives for Conservation Reserve Program Participants to Improve Forest Health and Enhance Wildlife Habitat**

In an effort to improve wildlife habitat and the health of private forest lands, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced additional incentives available for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants to actively manage forest lands enrolled in the program.

Under the provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill, \$10 million is available nationwide to eligible CRP participants. Those selected will be encouraged to thin, prescribe burn or otherwise manage their forests in order to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. This will encourage the development of grasses, forbs and legumes, benefitting numerous species including pollinators and grassland-dependent birds such as the northern bobwhite.

Eligibility is limited to landowners and agricultural producers already enrolled in CRP with conservation covers primarily containing trees. Incentive payments, not to exceed 150 percent of the cost to implement a particular customary forestry activity as described, have been established. CRP participants meeting eligibility requirements and interested in making offers to participate should visit their local FSA county office.

For more information about FSA conservation programs, visit the FSA office at the local USDA service center or go to [www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation). To locate the nearest FSA office, go to <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## **USDA Announces Streamlined Guaranteed Loans and Additional Lender Category for Small-Scale Operators**

*Options Help More Beginning, Small and Urban Producers Gain Access to Credit*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the availability of a streamlined version of USDA guaranteed loans, which are tailored for smaller scale farms and urban producers. The program, called EZ Guarantee Loans, uses a simplified application process to help beginning, small, underserved and family farmers and ranchers apply for loans of up to \$100,000 from USDA-approved lenders to purchase farmland or finance agricultural operations.

USDA today also unveiled a new category of lenders that will join traditional lenders, such as banks and credit unions, in offering USDA EZ Guarantee Loans. Microlenders, which include Community Development Financial Institutions and Rural Rehabilitation Corporations, will be able to offer their customers up to \$50,000 of EZ Guaranteed Loans, helping to reach urban areas and underserved producers. Banks, credit unions and other traditional USDA-approved lenders, can offer customers up to \$100,000 to help with agricultural operation costs.

EZ Guarantee Loans offer low interest rates and terms up to seven years for financing operating expenses and 40 years for financing the purchase of farm real estate. USDA-approved lenders can issue these loans with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteeing the loan up to 95 percent.

USDA is providing a 90-day period for the public to review and comment on program improvements. To review program details, visit [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), reference RIN 0560-A134 and follow the instructions to submit

comments.

More than half of all FSA loans go to new farmers and more than a quarter to underserved borrowers. FSA also offers loans of up to \$5,000 to young farmers and ranchers through the Youth Loan Program. Loans are made to eligible youth to finance agricultural projects, with almost 9,000 young people now participating. More information about the available types of FSA farm loans can be found at [www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans) or by contacting your local FSA office. To find your nearest office location, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>

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## **Selected Interest Rates for January 2017**

90-Day Treasury Bill - .375

Farm Operating Loans — Direct - 2.375

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct - 3.625

Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher - 1.50

Emergency Loans - 3.375

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## **Dates to Remember**

February 20 - Federal Holiday. Offices Closed.

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USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).