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Georgia State FSA Newsletter

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USDA Issues Farm Safety Net and Conservation Payments

USDA Farm Service Agency announced that over $9.6 billion in payments will be made to producers through the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC), Price Loss Coverage (PLC), and Conservation Reserve (CRP) programs. The USDA is issuing approximately $8 billion in payments under the ARC and PLC programs for the 2016 crop year, and $1.6 billion under CRP for 2017.

The ARC and PLC programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in revenue or prices for covered commodities. Over half a million producers will receive ARC payments and over a quarter million producers will receive PLC payments for 2016 crops, starting the first week of October and continuing over the next several months.

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Payments are being made to producers who enrolled base acres of barley, corn, grain sorghum, lentils, oats, peanuts, dry peas, soybeans, wheat, and canola. In the upcoming months, payments will be announced after marketing year average prices are published by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service for the remaining covered commodities. Those include long and medium grain rice (except for temperate Japonica rice), which will be announced in November; remaining oilseeds and chickpeas, which will be announced in December; and temperate Japonica rice, which will be announced in early February 2018. The estimated payments are before application of sequestration and other reductions and limits, including adjusted gross income limits and payment limitations.

Also, as part of an ongoing effort to protect sensitive lands and improve water quality and wildlife habitat, USDA will begin issuing 2017 CRP payments in October to over 375,000 Americans.

Signed into law by President Reagan in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the United States. Thanks to voluntary participation by farmers and landowners, CRP has improved water quality, reduced soil erosion, and increased habitat for endangered and threatened species. In return for enrolling in CRP, USDA, through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation, provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Participants enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP payments are made to participants who remove sensitive lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and increase wildlife habitat.

For more details regarding ARC and PLC programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc. For more information about CRP, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Farmers and Ranchers Affected by Hurricane Irma Granted Extra Time, Procedures, to Document and Claim Disaster Losses

USDA announced special procedures to assist producers who lost crops or livestock or had other damage to their farms or ranches as a result of Hurricane Irma. Also, because of the severe and widespread damage caused by the hurricane, USDA will provide additional flexibility to assist farm loan borrowers.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), is authorizing emergency procedures on a case-by-case basis to assist impacted borrowers, livestock owners, contract growers, and other producers. The measures announced apply only to counties impacted by a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-determined tropical storm, typhoon, or hurricane, including Irma that have received a primary Presidential Disaster Declaration and those counties contiguous to such designated counties.

Financially stressed FSA farm loan borrowers affected by the hurricane who have received primary loan servicing applications may be eligible for 60 day extensions. Full details are available at https://go.usa.gov/xRe8V.

A more complete listing of all of the special farm program provisions is posted at https://go.usa.gov/xRe8p.

Among the actions announced are lengthened deadlines for certain provisions under the Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) Program, the Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFL), and the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). Emergency grazing may also be authorized under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for up to 60 days.

In addition, the deadlines to file a loss for the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) are extended, and special provisions are provided for “acceptable proof of livestock death and inventory for livestock losses.”

Farmers and ranchers affected by the hurricane are urged to keep thorough records of all losses, including livestock death losses, as well as expenses for such things as feed purchases and other extraordinary costs because of lost supplies and or increased transportation costs.

Producers with coverage through USDA’s Risk Management Agency's (RMA) administered federal crop insurance program should contact their crop insurance agent for issues regarding filing claims. Those who purchased crop insurance will be paid for covered losses. Producers should report crop damage within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days. The Approved Insurance Providers (AIP), loss adjusters and agents are experienced and well trained in handling these types of events. For more information see https://www.rma.usda.gov/news/stormdisaster.html.

As part of its commitment to delivering excellent customer service, RMA is working closely with AIPs that sell and service crop insurance policies to ensure enough loss adjusters will be available to process claims in the effected areas as quickly as possible.

USDA encourages all farmers and ranchers to contact their crop insurance agents and their local FSA office, as applicable, to report damages to crops or livestock loss. To find the FSA office nearest you, please visit https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app. Additional resources to help farmers and ranchers deal with flooding and other damage may be found at www.usda.gov/disaster.

Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally-funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFL) and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, this will result in a denial of the request. There are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies. It is important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions, including, but not limited to, vegetation clearing, site preparation or ground disturbance.

Remember to contact your local FSA county office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

Applications cannot be approved contingent upon the completion of an environmental review. FSA must have copies of all permits and plans before an application can be approved.

USDA Reminds Producers of Nov. 1 ELAP Application Deadline

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybee, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to adverse weather or other conditions, such as hurricanes, tornados, and wildfires, not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible livestock losses include grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), or the loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

Eligible honeybee losses include loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, cost of additional feed purchased above normal quantities due to an eligible adverse weather condition, colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.

Eligible farm-raised fish losses include death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

Producers who suffer eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017 must file:

- A notice of loss **the earlier of** 30 calendar days of when the loss occurs or by November 1, 2017
- An application for payment by November 1, 2017

The Farm Bill caps ELAP disaster funding at $20 million per federal fiscal year.

The following ELAP Fact Sheets (by topic) are available online:

- ELAP for Farm-Raised Fish Fact Sheet
- ELAP for Livestock Fact Sheet
- ELAP for Honeybees Fact Sheet

To view these and other FSA program fact sheets, visit the FSA fact sheet web page at www.fsa.usda.gov/factsheets

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Upcoming Acreage Reporting Dates

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA County office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable for the entire state of Georgia:

November 15, 2017	Apiculture, PRF and Perennial Forage (Grass) with intended use of forage or grazing. **NOTE:** This is deadline **for 2018** acreage reporting purposes**.**
	Onions (Planted 9/20-10/20)

The following exceptions apply to the above acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendars days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the County Office.
- If a perennial forage crop is reported with the intended use of “cover only,” “green manure,” “left standing,” or “seed,” then the acreage must be reported by July 15. Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policyholders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins. For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact your local FSA office.

Dairy Producers Can Enroll for 2018 Coverage

Secretary Allows Producers to Opt Out

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced that starting Sept. 1, 2017, dairy producers can enroll for 2018 coverage in the Margin Protection Program (MPP-Dairy). Secretary Sonny Perdue has utilized additional flexibility this year by providing dairy producers the option of opting out of the program for 2018.

To opt out, a producer should not sign up during the annual registration period. By opting out, a producer would not receive any MPP-Dairy benefits if payments are triggered for 2018. Full details will be included in a subsequent Federal Register Notice. The decision would be for 2018 only and is not retroactive.

The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating dairy producers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the producer.

MPP-Dairy gives participating dairy producers the flexibility to select coverage levels best suited for their operation. Enrollment ends on Dec. 15, 2017, for coverage in calendar year 2018. Participating farmers will remain in the program through Dec. 31, 2018, and pay a minimum $100 administrative fee for 2018 coverage. Producers have the option of selecting a different coverage level from the previous coverage year during open enrollment.

Dairy operations enrolling in the program must meet conservation compliance provisions and cannot participate in the Livestock Gross Margin Dairy Insurance Program. Producers can mail the appropriate form to the producer's administrative county FSA office, along with applicable fees, without necessitating a trip to the local FSA office. If electing higher coverage for 2018, dairy producers can either pay the premium in full at the time of enrollment or pay 100 percent of the premium by Sept. 1, 2018. Premium fees may be paid directly to FSA or producers can work with their milk handlers to remit premiums on their behalf.

USDA has a web tool to help producers determine the level of coverage under the MPP-Dairy that will provide them with the strongest safety net under a variety of conditions. The online resource, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool, allows dairy farmers to quickly and easily combine unique operation data and other key variables to calculate their coverage needs based on price projections. Producers can also review historical data or estimate future coverage based on data projections. The secure site can be accessed via computer, Smartphone, tablet or any other platform, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For more information, visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy or stop by a local FSA County Office to learn more about the MPP-Dairy.

All Georgia Counties Eligible for Emergency Loans Following Presidential Disaster Declaration

All Georgia Counties were declared a primary disaster due to Hurricane Irma. Under this designation, producers with operations in any primary or contiguous county are eligible to apply for low interest emergency loans.

Emergency loans help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding, and other natural disasters or quarantine.

Producers have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for emergency loan assistance. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available, and repayment ability. Producers can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of $500,000.

For more information about emergency loans, please contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Beginning Farmer Loans

FSA assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training, and financial management program sponsored by FSA

- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm. Additional program information, loan applications, and other materials are available at your local USDA Service Center. You may also visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

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