

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.

Last Updated: Oct. 15, 2024

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.

The Farm Service Agency is able to provide support through all of our key disaster programs including 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), 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.

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?

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers 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.

Conservation Programs for Land Rehabilitation

Emergency Conservation Program and Emergency Forest Restoration Program

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 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.

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.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

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. 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.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program

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.

Livestock and Poultry

Livestock Indemnity Program

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 interest in the livestock, 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.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Can NRCS help with disposal of dead poultry and livestock?

NRCS can provide technical and financial assistance to poultry and livestock producers, through it's 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.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program

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.

Risk Management

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program

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.

Federal Crop Insurance Program

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 Helene and Debby 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 and Helene. The information can be found on rma.usda.gov. Information for Milton will be coming soon.