



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



# **USDA Drought Toolkit**

**for Elected Officials,  
Public Officials,  
and Community Leaders**

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

# Introduction

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We are pleased to provide you with the USDA Drought Tool Kit for Elected Officials, Public Officials, and Community Leaders<sup>1</sup>. The USDA Drought Tool Kit is specifically designed to assist you and mitigate the impact of an ongoing drought. The Drought Tool Kit will help you access valuable resources to share with your constituents as your area recovers from drought. Thank you for allowing the USDA to support your agricultural community needs through the resources below.

## USDA Office of External & Intergovernmental Affairs Contacts

We seek to continue updating and growing the number of resources that can benefit your communities. In order to do so, we rely on your feedback. Please send us your input at [eia@usda.gov](mailto:eia@usda.gov).

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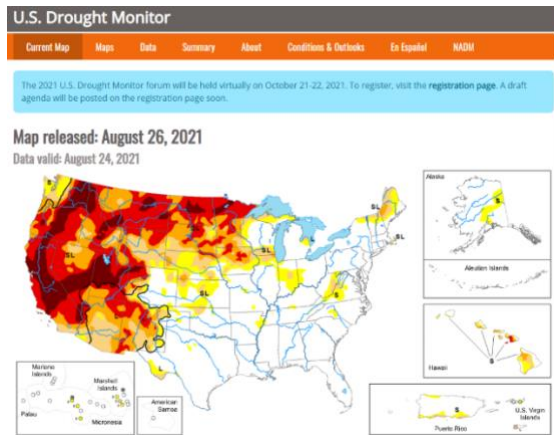
<sup>1</sup> The USDA Drought Tool Kit for Elected Officials, Public Officials, and Community Leaders is published by the USDA Office of External & Intergovernmental Affairs, and will be updated as new information becomes available.

Date of Drought Tool Kit issuance: December 7, 2021.

# USDA Regional Climate Hubs Drought Information

The ten regional USDA Climate Hubs connect USDA research and program agencies in their delivery of timely, authoritative tools and information to agricultural producers and professionals. The [Climate Hubs website](#) is an interactive tool to help you search for information on drought, specifically filtered by various regions across the country.

## U.S. Drought Monitor (Updated every Thursday)



U.S. Drought Monitor map (August 26, 2021)

Drought affects nearly every facet of USDA: reducing water quality and quantity, devastating the communities, farmers and ranchers we serve and the resources we protect. USDA works across government, non-profit, and private sectors to track drought conditions and deliver science-based solutions and technical expertise to help elected and public officials, farmers, ranchers, private landowners, and other land managers respond to these challenges. The U.S. Drought Monitor provides an interactive map and drought summary for each region across the country to keep you updated with the most current information.

Access the U.S. Drought Monitor here:

<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

## USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Drought Resources

The Cooperative Extension System (CES), a part of NIFA, provides non-formal education and learning activities to people throughout the country — to farmers and other residents of rural communities as well as to people living in urban areas. It emphasizes taking knowledge gained through research and education and bringing it directly to the people to create positive changes. All universities engage in research and teaching, but the nation's more than 100 land-grant colleges and universities have a third, critical mission — extension. Through extension, land-grant colleges and universities bring vital, practical information to agricultural producers, small business owners, consumers, families, and young people. NIFA supports both universities and local offices of the Cooperative Extension System (CES) to provide research-based information to its range of audiences. As the CES federal partner, NIFA plays a key role in the mission by distributing annual congressionally-appropriated formula grants to supplement state and county funds.

State cooperative extension services have developed website clearinghouses for drought-related information. Citizens can find their state's page, USDA information, and other resources at the [Extension Disaster Education Network](#) website. In addition, every state across the country has an Extension office located within its land-grant university and a network of [county or regional offices](#). These offices are staffed by experts who provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.

# Secretarial Disaster Designations for Severe Drought

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An expedited Secretarial Disaster Designation process for drought was introduced in 2012. The streamlined process reduced paperwork and documentation requirements at the local FSA level, making the process more efficient and timely for agricultural producers. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) Fast Track [Secretarial Disaster Designations for severe drought](#), provide for a nearly automatic designation when, during the growing season, any portion of a county meets the D2 (Severe Drought) drought intensity value for eight consecutive weeks or a higher drought intensity value for any length of time as reported in the U.S. Drought Monitor.

## Overview of USDA Programs

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USDA has several options to provide disaster assistance as a result of drought. These programs are provided through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

### Risk Management Agency (RMA)

[Crop and Livestock Insurance](#) provides indemnity payments to growers who purchased crop insurance for production and quality losses related to drought and other weather hazards, including losses from an inability to plant caused by an insured cause of loss. [Contact an Insurance Agent to obtain](#) coverage.

### National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

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[Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements on the land, including financial assistance to repair and prevent the excessive soil erosion caused or impacted by natural disasters. These practices include activities like stream bank restoration, grassed waterways, and buffers. NRCS-funded conservation practices protect land from erosion, support disaster recovery and repair, and can help mitigate loss from future natural disasters. Assistance may also be available for emergency animal mortality disposal from natural disasters and other causes. Contact your local NRCS office for more information.

[Emergency Watershed Program \(EWP-Recovery\)](#) offers vital recovery options for local communities to help people reduce hazards to life and property caused by floodwaters, droughts, wildfires, earthquakes, windstorms, and other natural disasters.

- Project funds address erosion-related watershed impairments by supporting activities such as removing debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded banks; correcting damaged drainage facilities; repairing levees and structures; and reseeding damaged areas.
- EWP Floodplain Easements – provide an alternative to recovery efforts described above. NRCS has the authority to purchase floodplain easements (FPE) as an alternative measure to traditional Recovery where sites meet EWP-FPE eligibility criteria and it is determined that acquiring an easement in lieu of recovery is the more economical and prudent approach to reducing the threat to life or property.

## Farm Service Agency (FSA)

[Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Haying and Grazing](#) provides for emergency haying and grazing on certain CRP practices in a county designated as D2 or higher on the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), or in a county where there is at least 40 percent loss in forage production. Emergency use of CRP acres is available in eligible counties if the stand is in condition to support such activity and is subject to a modified conservation plan. For producers not in an eligible county, there are options available under non-emergency haying and grazing provisions [outside of the primary nesting season](#). Producers should check with their local USDA Service Center to discuss available assistance before initiating haying or grazing on CRP acres.

[Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees, and farm-raised fish for losses not covered by the Livestock Forage Disaster or Livestock Indemnity Programs. In relation to drought, this program specifically covers water transportation to livestock physically located in a county designated as D-2 for eight consecutive weeks according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) now covers feed transportation costs where grazing and hay resources have been depleted, this includes in D2-Severe Drought for eight consecutive weeks, a D3 or greater drought intensity rating, or where USDA has determined a shortage of local or regional feed availability. An [online producer tool](#) is now available to assist ranchers in determining above normal feed transportation costs and estimated ELAP payments. Assistance is also available to honeybee producers for additional feed losses in counties rated as D2-Severe on the drought monitor.

[Emergency Conservation Program \(ECP\)](#) and [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore fencing, damaged farmland, or forests. ECP also supports emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought (ex. for grazing and confined livestock or existing irrigation systems for orchards and vineyards).

[USDA Farm Loans](#) provide a variety of direct and guaranteed farm loans, including operating and direct emergency farm loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. 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 has a variety of loan servicing options available for borrowers who are unable to make scheduled payments on their farm loan debt to FSA because of reasons beyond their control.

[Livestock Forage Disaster Program \(LFP\)](#) provides compensation to eligible livestock producers who have suffered grazing losses due to drought on land that is native or improved pastureland with permanent vegetative cover or that is planted specifically for grazing. LFP benefits may be available for loss of grazing acres due to wildfires on federally managed lands on which a producer is prohibited, by a federal agency, from grazing normally permitted livestock. FSA maintains a list of [counties eligible for LFP](#) and makes updates each Thursday.

[Livestock Indemnity Program \(LIP\)](#) provides benefits to livestock owners and some contract growers who experience livestock deaths due to wildfires and extreme weather (in this case, extreme heat; based on an actual temperature threshold set by each FSA State Committee), and in the event of death losses caused by anthrax brought on by drought conditions.

[Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#) provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops to protect against natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses, or prevents crop planting. Producers must have obtained NAP coverage for the crop year in which the loss occurs.

[Tree Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#) provides financial cost-share assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or, where applicable, rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes, and vines lost by natural disasters. A qualifying mortality loss in excess of 15 percent



(in excess of normal mortality) must be sustained to trigger assistance. TAP complements NAP or federal crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases.

## Tools and Resources

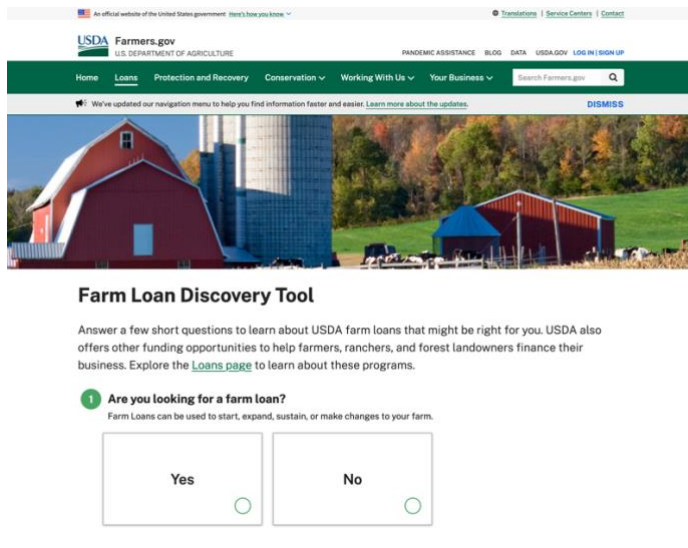
If you know an individual who may want additional information on drought resources throughout USDA, please see the website links below. The Farm Loan Discovery Tool and the Disaster Assistance Discovery are interactive tools which can be utilized to learn more about what specific loans and program assistance might be available.

### USDA Drought Resource Center

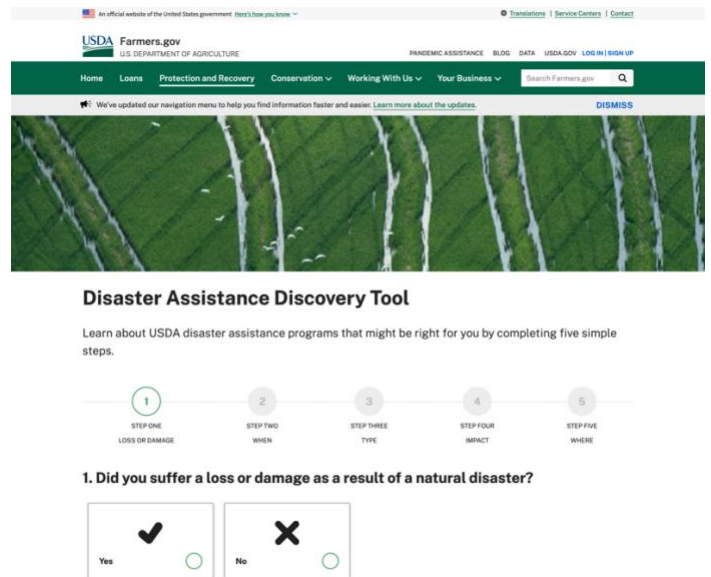
We encourage producers to visit [this website](#) to find USDA programs that can help farmers recover from drought, manage risk, and build resilience in their operation.

- Information on the disaster assistance program information Non-English-Speaking Producers can be found here: [Language Interpretation Available at USDA Service Centers](#)
- Call the USDA Information Hotline at (202) 720-2791 for self-directed options for language interpretation.
- [The Farm Loan Discovery Tool](#) allows individuals to answer a few short questions to learn about USDA farm loans that might be right for them. Farm Loans can be used to start, expand, sustain, or make changes to a farm.

Similarly, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#) teaches about disaster assistance programs that might be right for individuals seeking assistance. These tools are quick and easy to use, as you will see illustrated below:



The screenshot shows the top portion of the Farmers.gov website. The navigation bar includes Home, Loans, Protection and Recovery, Conservation, Working With Us, and Your Business. Below the navigation bar is a banner image of a red barn and a blue silo. The main heading is "Farm Loan Discovery Tool". The introductory text states: "Answer a few short questions to learn about USDA farm loans that might be right for you. USDA also offers other funding opportunities to help farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners finance their business. Explore the [Loans page](#) to learn about these programs." The first question is "1 Are you looking for a farm loan?" with the subtext "Farm Loans can be used to start, expand, sustain, or make changes to your farm." Below the question are two radio button options: "Yes" and "No".



The screenshot shows the top portion of the Farmers.gov website. The navigation bar is the same as in the previous screenshot. Below the navigation bar is a banner image of a green field with white irrigation lines. The main heading is "Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool". The introductory text states: "Learn about USDA disaster assistance programs that might be right for you by completing five simple steps." Below this is a progress indicator with five steps: "STEP ONE LOSS OR DAMAGE", "STEP TWO WHEN", "STEP THREE TYPE", "STEP FOUR IMPACT", and "STEP FIVE WHERE". The first question is "1. Did you suffer a loss or damage as a result of a natural disaster?" Below the question are two radio button options: "Yes" (with a checkmark icon) and "No" (with an X icon).

## USDA Forest Service Drought Resources

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Use [the US Forest Service Sustainability and Climate Drought website](#) to learn information about Forests and Rangelands management best practices during a drought.

Use these resources to learn more about drought characterization, impacts on forest and range processes and disturbances, such as insect outbreaks, and wildfire, and consequences for forest and rangeland values:

- [Effects of Drought on Forests and Rangelands in the United States: A Comprehensive Science Synthesis](#)
- [Effects of Drought on Forests and Rangelands in the United States: Translating Science into Management Responses](#)

## Soil Moisture Monitoring

USDA agencies are working with partners to improve the ability to measure and track soil moisture across the nation through the [National Coordinated Soil Moisture Monitoring Network](#). In addition, NRCS maintains and makes available on the internet near real-time soil moisture monitoring through the [Soil Climate Analysis Network \(SCAN\)](#).

## Encourage constituent engagement in drought monitoring efforts by directing them to one of the two websites below:

- [Become a CoCoRaHS Observer](#) and join a grassroots network of thousands of trained volunteers of all ages and backgrounds working together to improve meteorological science by measuring and reporting precipitation of all kinds. Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, or CoCoRaHS, is the largest provider of daily precipitation observations in the United States. The data from these observations are used by USDA and the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA) for tools like the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#).
- [Submit a report to the Drought Impact Reporter](#) to describe how drought is affecting you, your communities and your livelihood. The Drought Impact Reporter is the nation's first comprehensive database of drought impacts, providing researchers and other users detail of on the ground drought impacts nationwide.

# Recent USDA and Biden-Harris Administration Drought Press Releases

The current USDA and Biden-Harris Administration press releases related to drought can be found here: [Drought – Farmers.gov](#).

A few press releases are below for your reference:

- [USDA Expands Assistance to Cover Feed Transportation Costs for Drought-Impacted Ranchers](#)
- [Statement from Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on the Passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#)
- [Remarks by President Biden on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#)

## Social Media

Local leaders are encouraged to share information and links contained in the Drought Tool Kit with social media followers on your social media.

Follow the social media accounts below to stay up-to-date on the latest drought information:

- [Secretary Tom Vilsack Twitter](#) - @SecVilsack
- [Deputy Secretary Bronaugh Twitter](#) - @DepSecBronaugh
- [USDA Twitter](#) - @USDA
- [USDA Farm Service Agency Twitter](#) - @USDAFSA
- [USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Twitter](#) - @USDA\_NRCS
- [USDA Risk Management Agency Twitter](#) - @USDARMA
- [USDA Farmers Twitter](#) - @FarmersGov
- [FarmersGov Facebook](#)
- [FarmersGov Instagram](#)



Secretary Vilsack August 17, 2021 Tweet

## National Briefing on Drought Presented by USDA Chief Meteorologist Mark Brusberg

On September 2, 2021, USDA Chief Meteorologist Mark Brusberg, presented a National Briefing on Drought for elected officials and public officials. The briefing covered information on the current status of drought across the country, the latest information on the overall national drought outlook, details on the drought monitor, and an analysis of the causes of drought.

A link to the National Briefing on Drought recording can be found here: [National Briefing on Drought](#)  
When prompted for a passcode, use "SXW=sFh5"