



# News Release

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## **USDA Prepares for Hurricane Harvey USDA Reminds Individuals and Small Businesses that USDA Offers Disaster Assistance Programs to Help**

WASHINGTON, Aug. 25, 2017 – The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](http://www.usda.gov) (USDA) reminds rural communities, farmers and ranchers, families and small businesses in the path of Hurricane Harvey that USDA has programs that provide assistance before, during and after disasters. USDA staff in the regional, state, and county offices in Texas and Louisiana are ready to help.

“American farmers and ranchers can handle adversity, and USDA is here with resources so they don’t have to go it alone. Our thoughts and prayers are with those preparing for Hurricane Harvey to make landfall, and USDA stands with them and is ready to assist in any way we can. We have USDA employees in every county in this nation, and our people can help with a variety of services that may be useful in natural disasters like this one,” said Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue.

USDA’s Operations Center is activated 24/7 keeping the Secretary and USDA’s leadership team informed. An Incident Management Team stood up today and will remain in effect through the incident. USDA has important roles in both response and recovery to hurricanes and stands ready to support the American people who rely on it each day.

In a continuing effort to better serve the public, USDA partnered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other disaster-focused organizations and created the [Disaster Resource Center](https://www.usda.gov/topics/disaster) (<https://www.usda.gov/topics/disaster>) website. This central source of information utilizes a searchable knowledgebase of disaster-related resources that are powered by agents with subject-matter expertise. The new Disaster Resource Center website and web tool now provide an easy access point to find USDA disaster information and assistance.

USDA also encourages residents and small businesses in the potential impact zones to contact the following offices to meet their individual needs:

### **Property and Shelter**

When floods destroy or severely damage residential property, USDA Rural Development can assist with providing priority hardship application processing for single family housing. Under a disaster designation, USDA Rural Development can issue a priority letter for next available multi-family housing units. While these programs do not normally have disaster assistance authority, many of USDA Rural Development programs can help provide financial relief to small businesses hit by natural disasters, including low-interest loans to community facilities, water

environmental programs, businesses and cooperatives and to rural utilities. More information can be found on the [Rural Development website](#) or by contacting the [State Offices](#).

## **Food Safety and Food Assistance**

Severe weather forecasts often present the possibility of power outages that could compromise the safety of stored food. The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) recommends that consumers take the necessary steps before, during, and after a power outage to reduce food waste and minimize the risk of foodborne illness. FSIS offers tips for keeping frozen and refrigerated food safe and a [brochure](#) that can be downloaded and printed for reference at home. If you have questions about the safety of food in your home, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET or visit [AskKaren.gov](#) to chat live with a food safety specialist, available in English and Spanish.

Owners of meat and poultry producing businesses who have questions or concerns may contact the FSIS Small Plant Help Desk by phone at 1-877-FSIS-HELP (1-877-374-7435), by email at [infosource@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:infosource@fsis.usda.gov), or 24/7 online at: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulatory-compliance/svsp/sphelpdesk>.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) coordinates with state, local, and voluntary organizations to provide food for shelters and other mass feeding sites. Under certain circumstances, states also may request to operate a disaster household distribution program to distribute USDA Foods directly to households in need. In addition, FNS may approve a state's request to implement a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when the President declares a major disaster for individual assistance under the Stafford Act in areas affected by a disaster. State agencies may also request a number of disaster-related SNAP waivers to help provide temporary assistance to impacted households already receiving SNAP benefits at the time of the disaster. Resources for disaster feeding partners as well as available FNS disaster nutrition assistance can be found on the [FNS Disaster Assistance website](#).

## **Crop and Livestock Loss**

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers many safety-net programs to help producers recover from eligible losses, including the [Livestock Indemnity Program](#), the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#), [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP) and the [Tree Assistance Program](#). The FSA [Emergency Conservation Program](#) provides funding and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. Producers located in counties that received a primary or contiguous disaster designation are eligible for low-interest [emergency loans](#) to help them recover from production and physical losses. Compensation also is available to producers who purchased coverage through the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#), which protects non-insurable crops against natural disasters that result in lower yields, crop losses or prevented planting. USDA encourages farmers and ranchers to contact their local FSA office to learn what documents can help the local office expedite assistance, such as farm records, receipts and pictures of damages or losses.

Producers with coverage through the RMA administered federal crop insurance program should

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contact their crop insurance agent. 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.

## **Community Recovery Resources**

For declared natural disasters that lead to imminent threats to life and property, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can assist local government sponsors with the cost of implementing recovery efforts like debris removal and streambank stabilization to address natural resource concerns and hazards through the [Emergency Watershed Protection Program](#). NRCS staff is coordinating with state partners to complete damage assessments in preparation for sponsor assistance requests. NRCS also can help producers with damaged agricultural lands caused by natural disasters such as floods. The NRCS [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) provides financial assistance to repair and prevent excessive soil erosion that can result from high rainfall events and flooding. Conservation practices supported through EQIP protect the land and aid in recovery, can build the natural resource base, and might help mitigate loss in future events.

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides support for disaster education through the Extension Disaster Education Network ([EDEN](#)). EDEN is a collaborative multi-state effort with land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension Services across the country, using research-based education and resources to improve the delivery of services to citizens affected by disasters. EDEN's goal is to improve the nation's ability to mitigate, prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from disasters. EDEN equips county-based Extension educators to share research-based resources in local disaster management and recovery efforts. The EDEN website offers a searchable database of Extension professionals, resources, member universities and disaster agency websites, education materials to help people deal with a wide range of hazards, and food and agricultural defense educational resources.

For complete details and eligibility requirements regarding USDA's disaster assistance programs, contact a local [USDA Service Center](#) (<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>). More information about [USDA disaster assistance](#) (PDF, 118 KB) (<http://www.usda.gov/documents/fact-sheet-usda-programs-assist-individuals-small-businesses.pdf>) (PDF, 118 KB) as well as other disaster resources is available on the USDA Disaster Resource Center website.

West Texas Service Center map can be found at:

<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?service=page/CountyMap&state=TX1&stateName=Western%20Texas&stateCode=48>

East Texas Service Center map can be found at:

<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?service=page/CountyMap&state=TX2&stateName=Eastern%20Texas&stateCode=48>

Louisiana Service Center map can be found at:

<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?service=page/CountyMap&state=LA&stateName=Louisiana&stateCode=22>