

## **USDA Reminds Individuals and Small Businesses Affected by Flooding in West Virginia that USDA Offers Disaster Assistance Programs to Help**

WASHINGTON, June 30, 2016 – The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) reminds farmers and ranchers, families and small businesses affected by [flooding in West Virginia](#) that USDA has several programs which provide assistance before, during and after disasters. USDA staff in regional, State and county offices are ready to help.

When floods destroy or severely damage residential property, USDA Rural Development (RD) can assist with providing priority hardship application processing for single family housing. Under a disaster designation, RD can issue a priority letter for next available multi-family housing units.

As of June 28<sup>th</sup> the USDA Rural Development office in West Virginia reported that there are 364 apartments in facilities that are part of the RD Multi-Family Housing program which are available to people who have lost their homes. There are 178 one bedroom apartments, 182 two bedroom apartments, and 4 three bedroom apartments. While RD does not "place" people in these properties, the state RD office can provide the information on how flood victims can contact the owners and operators of these facilities. If you or a loved one has lost a home due to the tragic weather of June, please contact West Virginia's USDA Rural Development State Office at (304) 284-4860 or email Housing Program Director David L. Cain at [David.Cain@wv.usda.gov](mailto:David.Cain@wv.usda.gov). Finally, while RD's 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.

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](#).

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](#). In the declared West Virginia counties, 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.

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. For additional questions, 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.

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 should use form FSA-576, Notice of Loss, to report prevented planting and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility. Prevented planting acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA). Producers must file a Notice of Loss for failed acres on all crops including grasses in a timely fashion, often within 15 days of the occurrence or when the losses become apparent. Producers of hand-harvested crops must notify FSA of damage or loss within 72 hours of when the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent.

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

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides support for disaster education through the Extension Disaster Education Network ([EDEN](#)). EDEN's goal is to improve the nation's ability to mitigate, prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from disasters. Through the land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension System across the nation, EDEN links Extension educators from various disciplines to share research-based resources to reduce the impact of disasters.

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](#) (<http://www.usda.gov/documents/fact-sheet-usda-programs-assist-individuals-small-businesses.pdf>) as well as other disaster resources is available on the USDA Disaster Resource Center website. In a continuing effort to better serve the public, USDA has developed a new and improved central resource for disaster related materials. In partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other disaster-focused organizations, USDA created a [Disaster Resource Center](#) (<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=disaster-help>) website, utilizing a new online searchable knowledgebase. This knowledgebase is a collection 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.

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