

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE AVAILBALE TO CALIFORNIA RANCHERS

With little precipitation this winter, California is facing yet another year of drought. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, most of the state is experiencing severe drought (“D2”) to extreme drought (“D3”) conditions.

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency (USDA FSA) has several programs to provide assistance to livestock producers impacted by drought. The four primary programs, along with the relevant eligibility requirements and application deadlines, are summarized below.

Livestock Forage Disaster Program

The Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) provides payments to eligible livestock owners and contract growers who are also producers of a grazed forage crop, such as native or improved pastureland that has suffered grazing losses due to a qualifying drought during the normal grazing period for the county. These payments are only available for forage losses occurring on private land.

While drought related LFP payments are not available for public land, LFP does provide payments to eligible livestock owners or contract growers who are also producers of a grazed forage crop on rangeland managed by a federal agency if the eligible livestock producer is prohibited by the federal agency from grazing the normal permitted livestock on the managed rangeland due to a qualifying fire.

Eligibility for LFP payments depends in part on the county’s drought intensity designation rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor. Producers with eligible grazing lands located in counties experiencing D2 drought conditions for at least eight consecutive weeks during the normal grazing season may be eligible. Producers with eligible grazing lands physically located in a county experiencing D3 or worse drought conditions at any time may also be eligible to apply.

LFP payment rates are determined in April of each year. 2022 rates have recently been published and can be viewed in the FSA's 2022 LFP Fact Sheet available at <https://www.calcattlemen.org/drought>. FSA is now accepting 2022 LFP applications.

Producers must provide a completed application and the required supporting documentation to their FSA office within 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the grazing loss occurred. The application deadline for losses occurring in the 2022 calendar year will be January 30, 2023.

Producers should note that acreage reports must be submitted to their FSA office prior to applying for LFP. Acreage reports should be filed no later than July 15, 2022.

Emergency Livestock Relief Program

On March 31, FSA announced the availability of its Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP). ELRP provides additional aid to livestock producers who have been approved for assistance through the 2021 LFP.

Producers who were approved for 2021 LFP are also eligible for ELRP payments. Producers will not be required to apply to receive relief under ELRP, but must have several forms on file with the FSA to ensure that payment may be properly calculated and disbursed. A list of these forms can be found at <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/03/31/usda-provide-payments-livestock-producers-impacted-drought-or>.

ELRP payments will be equal to a producer's gross 2021 LFP payment multiplied by a payment percentage "to reach a reasonable approximation of increased supplemental feed costs for eligible livestock producers in 2021." For most producers, the applicable payment percentage will be 75%. According to the FSA, it has already begun sending ELRP payments.

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

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) covers losses due to eligible adverse weather conditions, including (but not limited to) water shortages and wildfires. ELAP provides coverage for losses not covered by other disaster assistance programs authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, such as LFP.

Relevant to drought, ELAP covers losses resulting from the additional cost of transporting water to livestock. Last year this coverage was expanded to include reimbursement for costs of hauling feed for livestock. On March 31, ELAP was once again expanded to provide payments to ranchers to help offset the cost of transporting livestock to available forage.

According to FSA, livestock and feed hauling compensation under ELAP "will not only be retroactive for 2021 but will also be available for losses in 2022 and subsequent years."

As with other programs, these payments are available for producers located in areas experiencing D2 drought conditions for at least eight consecutive weeks or D3 or worse drought conditions at any time.

ELAP applications are not due until January 30 of the year following the occurrence of the loss. However, producers must also submit a "Notice of Loss" to their FSA office within 30 days of the loss. Failure to submit this notice will make producers ineligible to apply for ELAP. As with LFP, acreage reports must be submitted prior to applying for ELAP and should be filed no later than July 15, 2022.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) helps producers to manage risk through coverage for both crop losses and crop planting that was prevented due to natural disasters. Eligible crops include agricultural commodities not covered by federal crop insurance. Producers must be enrolled in the program and have purchased coverage for the eligible crop in the crop year in which the loss was incurred to receive program benefits following a qualifying natural disaster.

Deadlines for obtaining coverage and providing information relevant to receiving NAP payments depends on the crop. Producers should contact their local county FSA office for details about coverage dates.

How to Apply

Contact your local FSA office (or offices, if you ranch in multiple counties) to start the process of applying for these assistance programs. Producers can find their local FSA offices using the USDA's online interactive map. According to FSA, offices are once again open for in-person visits and appointments. FSA has also created factsheets for each of these programs. Links to the interactive map for county FSA offices and the factsheets are available at <https://www.calcattlemen.org/drought>.

If you would like help contacting your local FSA office or understanding what questions to ask, please contact the Rancher Technical Assistance Program (RTAP). RTAP provides free regulatory assistance for

all California cattle producers and is available through funding from the California Cattle Council. RTAP can be contacted by emailing rtap@wrstrat.com or calling (916) 409-6902.

This article was written by the Rancher Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) for the April 2022 edition of the California Cattlemen's Association's "Hot Irons" publication. RTAP is provided by the California Cattlemen's Foundation and funded by the California Cattle Council.

