



Hurricane Helene

What USDA is Doing

Visit the USDA [Disaster Resource Center](#) for information on how to prepare, recover and build long-term resilience during disasters and emergencies.

2024 Hurricane Season Press Releases

Overall USDA Response

- Staff from USDA are deployed to the affected states supporting FEMA and other response and recovery efforts.
- USDA staff are assisting the FEMA Geographic Information System (GIS) to obtain a flood and structural damage assessment for the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to validate impacts for the approval of nutrition assistance programs, waivers, and flexibilities.

Food Safety and Nutrition Assistance

- FNS has already issued flexibilities and waivers at the request of the states of Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia and is ready to issue additional flexibilities upon request. More information on those recovery and assistance efforts can be found on the [FNS Disaster Assistance webpage](#).
- The Food Safety and Inspection Service continues sharing [food safety information](#) for those experiencing power outages or returning home after flooding. FSIS encourages anyone with question about meat, poultry, or egg

products to call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Send email questions to MPHotline@usda.gov.

Assistance for Agricultural Producers

- USDA is standing by to assist producers as they work to recover their operations in the wake of Hurricane Helene through a suite of programs:
 - Once you are able to evaluate the impact on your operation, be sure to contact your [local Farm Service Agency \(FSA\) county office](#) or your crop insurance agent to report all crop, livestock and farm infrastructure damages and losses. To expedite USDA disaster assistance or federal crop insurance, you will likely need to provide documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses.
 - FSA state and county office staff will amplify all available recovery assistance and ensure local FSA employees have full support in exercising flexibility and discretion in their program delivery efforts, through policy enhancements, administrative guidance, policy waivers, exception authority, and other means necessary, including streamlined requirements for documentation and record-keeping to better meet the needs of disaster-impacted agricultural producers. States and counties will be regularly informed as the agency implements these efficiency measures. Producers should check in with their local FSA office frequently for updated information.
 - The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can be a valuable partner to help landowners with their recovery and resiliency efforts. NRCS staff will work one-on-one with landowners to assess damages and assist with recovery of the land.
 - Through the [Emergency Watershed Protection](#) program, NRCS assists local government sponsors with the cost of addressing watershed impairments or hazards such as debris removal and streambank stabilization. Sponsors must submit a formal request (by mail or email) to the [NRCS state conservationist](#) for assistance within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence, or 60 days from the date when access to the sites become available.

National Forests

- National forests across the path of Hurricane Helene have been severely impacted. Many Forest Service offices remain closed, and forests may also be closed for visitors and recreation activities, depending on local conditions. Check with your local forest before visiting.

Long-term Recovery of Rural Communities

- [Rural Development's Disaster Assistance](#) is crucial for rural communities affected by crises and disasters. It offers essential support to homeowners, businesses, and communities to aid in their recovery and rebuilding process. If you are facing immediate needs due to a disaster and live in a President-declared disaster area, we recommend first seeking assistance from the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#).
- The [resource guide](#) provides information on programs and services offered by RD and other government agencies. It aims to support rural residents, businesses, and communities impacted by disasters by helping them with long-term recovery and planning efforts.
- [We Care Letters](#) are generated for RD Home loan borrowers when a major disaster occurs in a state. We want you to know that USDA Rural Development is here to help you when a disaster happens and causes damage to your property or affects your income. Our aim is to make sure you are aware of the assistance we can provide during these difficult times.

Support Networks and Technical Assistance

- USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is also rendering assistance through flexibilities in programs, leveraging support networks and technical assistance.
 - NIFA has extended the deadlines for pending grant Requests for Applications for institutions within the impacted area to ensure they have equitable opportunities to compete for grant funds in all programs.
 - NIFA supports the Cooperative Extension System nationwide and county extension agents in all impacted communities are helping producers assess

crop, livestock and infrastructure damage and losses across Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia.

- The national [Extension Disaster Education Network](#), a NIFA supported program, is distributing much needed disaster recovery information from how to document damage and loss for insurance claims to assessing food and home safety issues after power outages.
- Cooperative Extension is also elevating services and connections available through the NIFA-funded Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network to help farmers, families and communities access mental health resources.

What DHS and FEMA are Doing

Visit [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov) for the latest information from DHS and FEMA, including response and recovery information. This resource is also available in [Spanish](#).

What the U.S. Government is Doing

Visit [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov) for government-wide information related to Hurricane Helene. This resource is also available in [Spanish](#).