

Michigan Food and Farming Systems

MIFFS is dedicated to supporting the many faces of farming, particularly our beginning and historically underserved farmers. These farmers grow diversified crops and raise animals, they live in rural and urban areas, and they farm individually, in groups, on incubator farms, and as cooperatives.

Mission: Connecting beginning and historically underserved farmers to each other and resource opportunities; ensuring social justice, environmental stewardship, and profitability.

Vision: MIFFS is playing a critical role in making smaller-scale farming an attractive and viable livelihood

This publication was funded through a partnership with USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program.

Contact Us

Visit us online: www.miffs.org

Find us on Facebook or join a Beginning Farmer Network today!

Main Page www.facebook.com/RiseUpDigIn/

Vets-in-Ag Network www.facebook.com/MIVetsInAg/

Women-In -Ag Network www.facebook.com/groups/miffswomeninag/

Tilian Farm Development Center www.facebook.com/tilianfarm/



A Farmer's Guide: Getting Started with USDA



MICHIGAN FOOD AND FARMING SYSTEMS

Supporting the Many Faces of Farming!



Michigan Food and Farming Systems

480 Wilson Rd, Rm 172
East Lansing, MI 48824
Ph: 517.709.8271

Table of Contents

Overview of USDA Agencies	1
Getting Started.....	2
What to Bring to FSA.....	2
What FSA Forms to Fill Out.....	3
Socially Disadvantaged Producers.....	4
Limited Resource Producers	5
Veterans.....	6
FSA Programs.....	7
NRCS Programs	8
Conservation Districts & MAEAP.....	9
About MIFFS	10

Conservation Districts Are Your Gateway to USDA!



Most counties in Michigan have a Conservation District that is located in a USDA Service Center, often times they will share the same office space as USDA NRCS. Many Conservation Districts offer additional support or programming to farmers and ranchers, connecting farmers with USDA agencies. One of these Programs is the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).

MAEAP Technicians are available to work one-on-one with producers, on their farms, to identify environmental risks, recommend lower impact farming practices, understand how environmental laws and Right to Farm applies to your operation and connect you with additional resources. Working with MAEAP can also help producers access cost-share through programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), offered by NRCS. MAEAP is available to farms of ALL types and sizes. It is a non-regulatory, confidential and voluntary program that is free of charge! To learn more about MAEAP visit: www.maeap.org. To find your local MAEAP Technician visit http://www.maeap.org/get_verified/find_a_technician_near_you



For more information about Conservation Districts visit: www.macd.org



Natural Resources Conservation Service Program



NRCS is the USDA Agency that provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers participating in conservation programs under the Farm Bill. They offer conservation planning services and also provide the technical assistance for conservation programs administered by other USDA agencies such as the Conservation Reserve Programs from FSA. Some of the NRCS programs to explore include:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): provides farmers and ranchers with financial and technical assistance to implement structural and land management conservation practices. In order to be eligible for this program you must be involved in production agriculture (selling farm products). Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pasture, and private non-industrial forestland.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG): competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands. You must be EQIP eligible to apply for a CIG.

Conservation Stewards Program (CSP): provides financial and technical assistance for eligible producers to improve their conservation practices by installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities on agricultural land and non-industrial private forest land. This is a great program to explore if you have already participated in EQIP or implemented a lot of conservation practices in your operation.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/mi/programs/>

USDA Agencies

USDA agencies are usually located within a USDA Service Center that serves a specific county in Michigan. Each USDA Service Center houses multiple, independent USDA Agencies. Each agency offers different programs but most programs require registering your farm and filling out paperwork with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) as a first step. All USDA services are free of charge to farmers!



Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides farm loans, crop insurance, conservation programs and disaster assistance compensation. You must register your farm with FSA and obtain a Farm Number in order to be eligible for many programs offered by other USDA Agencies.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with farms to develop Conservation Plans, administer farm bill cost share and conservation programs.

Rural Development (RD) provides multiple loan programs designed to help improve the economy and quality of life in rural America. Most RD loan programs are only available to farms that cannot obtain loans from other loan services or banks.

Getting Started

First Stop: FSA

Be prepared to fill out a lot of paperwork. FSA provides farm loans, crop insurance, and disaster assistance compensation. They also function as a gateway to additional programs offered by other USDA agencies. In order to apply for programs offered by other USDA agencies you must work with FSA to register your farm, obtain a Farm Number and fill out required paperwork.

Tell FSA staff what other USDA programs or Agencies you plan on working with to make sure you get the right paperwork.

The first thing you want to do at USDA is register your farm and get a **Farm Number**. If the property you are farming has been registered with FSA before they will reassign the existing Farm Number to your business. ***Call ahead and ask to schedule an appointment to obtain a Farm Number to make sure the right FSA staff are available!***

What to Bring to FSA When You Register Your Farm

These are the documents you should take on your first visit to properly register your farm and get a **Farm Number**:

1. A legal description of the property/fields that you plan to farm. This means tax documents with a parcel ID number, GPS coordinates or the Township, Section, Range and Quadrant. This can usually be found online through tax assessment information or at your county assessor's office.

FSA Programs to Explore

Farm Loans Program: By providing access to credit, FSA's Farm Loan Programs offer opportunities to:

- Start, improve, expand, transition, market, and strengthen family farming and ranching operations
 - Provide viable farming opportunities for beginning farmers, racial and ethnic minority farmers and women producers
 - Value-added, direct sale, organic, and specialty crop operations
 - Young people actively involved in agricultural youth organizations
 - Urban producers
- <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/index>

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pays a yearly rental payment in exchange for farmers removing environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and planting species that will improve environmental quality and enhance wildlife habitat. [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pr\)ograms-and-services/conservation-programs/prospective-participants/](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pr)ograms-and-services/conservation-programs/prospective-participants/)

Disaster Assistance Program: The Farm Service Agency provides assistance for natural disaster losses, resulting from drought, flood, fire, freeze, tornadoes, pest infestation, and other calamities. <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/>



Are You a Veteran?

Veteran Farmers or Ranchers may be eligible for higher costshare rates, advanced payments and waived or reduced program fees. USDA defines a Veteran as:

- A person who served in United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable, and who has not operated a farm or ranch; or has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 years.



Join MIFFS Vets in Ag Network!

The MIFFS Veterans in Ag Network provides an opportunity for Veterans to connect with each other to provide support and share opportunities. The Veterans in Ag Facebook group will keep you posted about resource and education opportunities for vets in Michigan including land, equipment, and mentorship opportunities as well as events, workshops, and conferences. For more information visit <https://www.facebook.com/MIVetsInAg/> or contact the MIFFS office.

2. A map / aerial photograph showing the property boundaries of the property. Be sure the identification of the property is correct. Many counties in Michigan have online mapping programs that will allow you to pull up aerial photos with property borders identified. This is usually available through parcel viewers for tax assessment information or the Mapping and Equalization Department.
3. You must have a deed, lease or other legal document showing that you have control of the property you wish to register.

If FSA does not have the fields mapped out as tillable land then you will need to fill out a Wetlands and Highly Erodible Land Determination (Form AD 10-26). This form can take several months for USDA to process. FSA staff will usually have a good idea of what turn-around time to expect. FSA will use the results from the AD 10-26 to add in the field as tillable land. They will also use these results to identify wetlands or highly erodible ground that may be off limits for production if you participate in certain USDA programs.

What Forms to Fill Out When Registering Your Farm at FSA



Tell FSA staff what programs you are interested in signing up for or participating in and which USDA agencies you plan on working with to ensure you are given the correct forms.

1. Form AD1026 -Wetlands and Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Determination. This is required to participate in any NRCS programs.
2. AGI form (Adjusted Gross Income)
3. Direct Deposit form-You can bring in a voided check from your checking account or take the form to your bank to have them fill it out from your savings account.

Are You a Socially Disadvantaged Producer?

If you think you may qualify as a socially disadvantaged (SD) producer, you must self-identify yourself as such. USDA employees can't technically ask you if you qualify. If you qualify as an SD producer your applications for assistance are compared to other SD producers. You will be eligible for higher cost share payments or lower interest rates.

Don't forget to tell USDA staff if you are a Veteran! – Dylan Thomas, Two Pines Farm

USDA definition of SD Farmers, Ranchers:

- A farmer/rancher who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities.
- A socially disadvantaged group is a group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity of a group, without regard to their individual qualities (note: gender alone is not a covered group). Identified socially disadvantaged groups include: a.) Blacks or African Americans b.) American Indians or Alaska Natives c.) Hispanics d.) Asians e.) Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
- A socially disadvantaged applicant is an individual or entity who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. For an entity, at least 50% ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals.
- Veterans should also self-identify and may be eligible for special programs

Are You a Limited Resource Producer?

Limited Resource producers are also eligible for lower interest rates, higher costshare payments and their applications are compared to those of other Limited Resource Producers. Below is the USDA defines a Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher or Forest Owner:

- An applicant with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years, and
- Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years.
- An entity or joint operation can be a Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher if all individual members independently qualify.

Self-Certify Online!

<http://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/>

The screenshot shows the USDA Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher Self-Determination Tool interface. The top banner features the USDA logo and the text "Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher Self-Determination Tool". Below the banner is a navigation bar with "Home", "About LRFRT", and "Help" links. The main content area is titled "Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher FY 2016 Self-Determination Tool". It contains four steps: Step 1: Select your state from the list. Step 2: Select your county or area from the list. Step 3: Determine your Gross Farm and Income Levels. Step 4: Print your results. The "FY 2013 Historic Data" link in the left sidebar is highlighted with a red box.

Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher
FY 2016 Self-Determination Tool

Step 1: Select your state from the list.

State Information

Michigan

Step 2: Select your county or area from the list.

County/Area Information

SELECT COUNTY

Step 3: Determine your Gross Farm and Income Levels.

Limited Resource Determination Information

* Required

Step 4: Print your results.

Print Results