

THE ADVANCER

Winter 2024

East Arkansas Delta Farmer Delta's Dirt Distillery in Helena



From left: Thomas, Harvey Jr., Donna, and Donovan Williams.

The Williams Family Has Maintained Its Black-owned Farming Operation for Four Generations.

The Williams family farm, a fourth-generation operation, has been able to beat the odds and find inspiration in an unlikely place: its own fields.

Sharecropper Joe Williams raised his family on a cotton and corn farm before passing it on to his son, UD, who was able to purchase the farm in 1949 thanks to the money he earned from cotton and homemade moonshine. The family still runs it today, now growing one hundred acres of mostly sweet potatoes, the warm-climate vegetable that is an important staple in African American foodways.

“Many farmers, especially Black farmers, got out of farming at that time or diversified ... “My dad chose to diversify and change over to more vegetable farming,” says Harvey Williams, the fourth-generation farmer who currently manages the farm with his brothers Andre and Kennard.

“I’m really grateful and proud that my dad was able to find a way to make a living with our small acres and his limited resources,” says Williams. “At the same time, I am saddened that so many other Black farmers in the Delta were not as fortunate. Their reasons and conditions may vary, but the result ended the same thousands of acres and hundreds of Black families are no longer living on nor farming their ancestral land.”

Williams took time away from the farm, taking a corporate job and moving across the country, then returned to Arkansas in 2016 to work for a company approximately two hours from Helena. But he still felt connected to the family business. “I wanted to do something tied to the farm, and I did not know what that was going to look like. I just did not want to do traditional... I did know that I did not want to do just crop farming and driving tractors every day.”

His brother and late father, Harvey Sr., continued to farm sweet potatoes and, while at a 2016 farming conference, they learned about a farm in North Carolina producing sweet potato vodka.

“I was really intrigued and said, we should do that!” My brother was trying to get me to go into sweet potato pies and other things, but I really thought it would be a unique opportunity to produce a sweet potato vodka,” says Williams. “There’s not many on the market.”

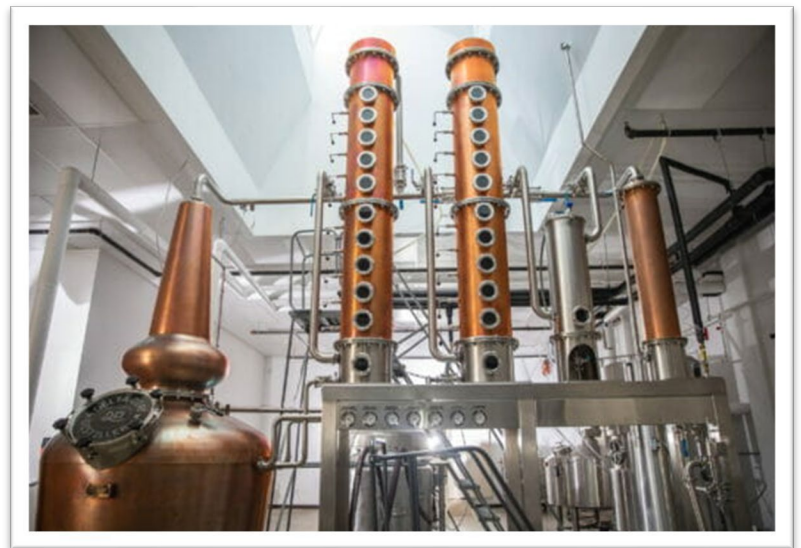
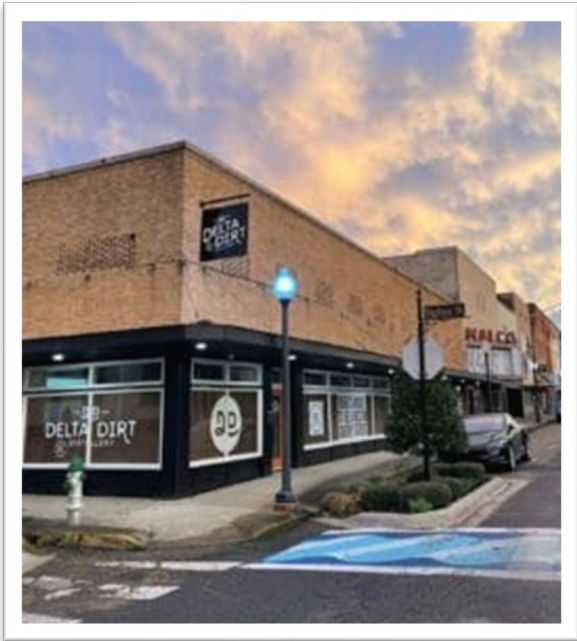
He soon found out why that was the case when launching Delta Dirt Distillery, the first Black-owned distillery in the state.

“The process of extracting the fermentable sugars out of sweet potatoes is not an easy one. So, we put a lot of effort into figuring that out,” says Williams, noting that it is not as straightforward as producing vodka. “With sweet potatoes, the nuances really reside in the cook and mash processes. Sweet potatoes are known to be a hearty and nutritious vegetable, and the sugars extracted from them lend a unique and delightful hint of earthy sweetness to our vodka.”

One thing working in the company’s favor is the fact that they grow their own sweet potatoes, allowing them to control the costs and quality. “With enough research and effort, we figured out a way to create this product out of sweet potatoes and our corn. We grow both of those raw ingredients, which makes it even better,” he says. “We enlisted the help of industry consultants and a university professor. I still admit that sweet potatoes are not the easiest source for producing alcohol, but, over time, we were able to develop a process that met our expectations of delivering decent yields and exceptional taste.”



The Williams family bought a building in the quiet stretch of downtown Helena in 2017 and set about converting it into a distillery. The pandemic threw a wrench in their plans, but it gave them time to perfect their recipe, testing various methods until they produced a bottle that met their expectations in December of 2020. The tasting room followed, opening in April of 2021.



“People that come in will say, ‘Man, this doesn’t feel like Helena’ or, ‘This is something that could be in downtown New York,’” says Williams.

Delta Dirt’s tasting room opened in downtown Helena in 2021.

The distillery has also benefited from community support as the pandemic allowed locals to see progress and interest grew through word of mouth.

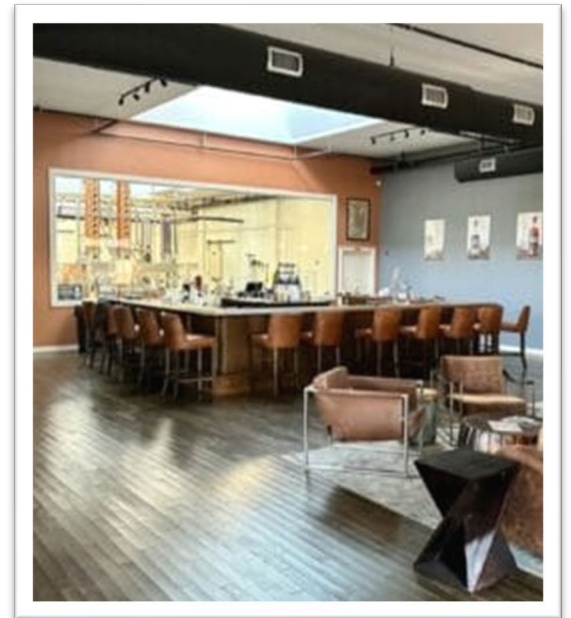
“They have really embraced the business. Not initially, especially the locals, they did not know what it was,” he says. “Now we have a regular crowd that comes in, mostly on Friday evenings,

and then the rest of the weekend, Saturday, and Sunday, we have people from all over the state, and in some cases, all over the country, come and check us out.”

In addition to the original sweet potato vodka, which won Double Gold in the 2022 San Francisco World Spirits Competition, Delta Dirt also has gin and bourbon, all of which are available in Arkansas and parts of Texas, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

The distillery is now a family operation, with Harvey’s wife Donna and sons Thomas and Donovan as head distiller and operations manager, respectively. Not only was the family able to diversify its agricultural offerings, but it has also continued the legacy started by Joe Williams to be passed onto the next generation.

“It was originally 86 acres, and we’ve kept that land,” says Williams.



Story Originally Written by Modern Farmer- Jun 30, 2023



Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) Urban Summit

City of Osceola, AR “City Hall”

November 9, 2023 - 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

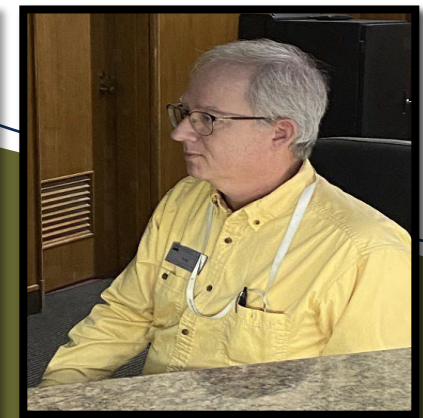
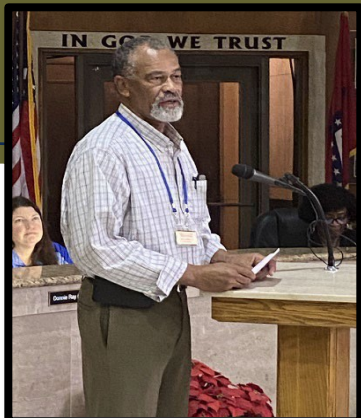
We want to thank you for joining us at the ALCDC Tri-State Rural and Urban Community Economic Development Summit One USDA in Osceola, Arkansas. The home of Cortez Kennedy defensive quarter back with the Seahawks and Albert King American blues guitarist and singer.

The meeting started off with an introduction from the mayor’s secretary Harbans Mangat who welcomed the guest.

The event engaged participants in a round table discussion with ALCDC President Dr. Calvin R. King Sr and staff, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Julie Bennett, and USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Erik Deatherage and Saundra Sovick.

The agencies partnered to provide individuals, landowners, rural and urban farmers, ranchers, small businesses, agriculture enterprises, and community residents, resourceful information tools, and an opportunity that engaged with interactive discussions focusing on challenges, shared best practices, and innovative solutions for Equity and Equality Program Resource Opportunities.

Agriculture production plays a key role in our rural and urban economies. As we build back better, we must create new and better markets for all producers’ communities and consumers. As always, ALCDC program service delivery is supporting historically underserved and underrepresented farmers who are seeking participation in this essential part of our economy. We want to thank the City of Osceola and all those who attended the in-person/hybrid summit in Osceola, AR. We are looking forward to a continued partnership and collaborating with you as a catalyst in Urban and Rural Community Economic Development.



USDA Now Accepting Applications for the 1890 National Scholars Program

WASHINGTON, December 15, 2023 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting applications for the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program, which aims to encourage students in 1890 land-grant universities to pursue food and agriculture career paths. The application deadline is March 1, 2024.

Young people around the country are invited to complete and [submit their applications online](#) through an e-application. Administered through USDA’s Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE), the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program is available to eligible high school seniors entering their freshman year of college as well as rising college sophomores and juniors.

“The USDA 1890 National Scholars Program helps to create a pipeline of skilled employees for USDA and the United States agriculture sector,” said Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement Director Lisa Ramirez. “By introducing young people to the array of needs and priorities in food, agriculture and natural resources, the program supports USDA’s efforts to provide career opportunities for the next generation of leaders in food and agriculture.”

The USDA 1890 National Scholars Program is a partnership between USDA and the 19 historically Black land-grant universities that were established in the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890. USDA partners with these 1890 universities to provide scholarship recipients with full tuition, fees, books, and room and board. Scholarship recipients attend one of the 1890 universities and pursue degrees in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines. The scholarship also includes work experience at USDA through summer internships. Scholars accepted into the program are eligible for noncompetitive conversion to a permanent appointment with USDA upon successful completion of their degree requirements by the end of the agreement period. The USDA 1890 National Scholars Program awarded 100 scholarships in the 2023 cohort of 1890 Scholars.

Learn more and apply online at [USDA 1890 National Scholars Program](#). For more information, contact partnerships@usda.gov.

USDA has a long history of investing in and supporting historically Black universities, especially the 19 members of the 1890 universities system: Alabama A&M, Alcorn State University, Central State University, Delaware State University, Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Kentucky State University, Langston University, Lincoln University, North Carolina A&T State University, Prairie View A&M University, South Carolina State University, Southern University and A&M College, Tennessee State University, Tuskegee University, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Virginia State University, and West Virginia State University.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

USDA to Begin Issuing Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program Payments



Contact:

FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov

WASHINGTON, Dec. 13, 2023 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that it will begin issuing more than \$223 million in Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP) payments. These payments help producers who suffered a decrease in allowable gross revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the 2020 calendar year.

Eligible PARP applicants must have been in the business of farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a 15% or greater decrease in allowable gross revenue for the 2020 calendar year, as compared to a baseline year. PARP benefits help address gaps in previous pandemic assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses. PARP was designed to help deliver financial assistance to a broader set of producers, including underserved communities, small and medium sized producers, and farmers and producers of livestock and less traditional crops.

“USDA realizes the importance of PARP payments, especially since they are benefitting producers who may not have received assistance through other USDA pandemic assistance programs,” said Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. “PARP implementation marks the delivery of the final program in the suite of pandemic assistance programs provided by FSA and is also one of the first times that FSA has delivered a program focused on decreases in revenue. The number of applications we received for PARP assistance shows there is producer need for and interest in programs that consider other indicators of disaster impacts on their business, like decreases in revenue.”

The PARP application period closed July 14, 2023. More than 38,500 PARP applications triggered payments totaling \$7 billion, meaning PARP program participation exceeds available funding. Therefore, consistent with PARP regulations, to ensure equitable funding distribution to all eligible producers, a 9.5% payment factor has been applied to all payments. These PARP payments are in addition to the \$31.9 billion in pandemic assistance that USDA has already provided to eligible producers through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 1 and 2 as well as the FSA programs in the Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative.

“It is important to remember that, as part of filling gaps in equitable service to all pandemic- impacted producers, we were able to increase the number of specialty crops and underserved producers benefiting from pandemic assistance and bring new producers to FSA through our Service Center doors,” said Ducheneaux. “The demand for PARP assistance greatly exceeds available funding resources. We left no stone unturned in our efforts to find additional funding. We worked to assist as many producers in need of help as possible in designing PARP, which requires the current decision to heavily factor payments consistent with program regulations.”

More Information

For more information on available FSA programs, contact your [local USDA Service Center](#).



ACT NOW

NRCS Arkansas



Overview

ACT NOW allows NRCS to immediately approve and obligate ranked applications in a designated ranking pool when an eligible application meets or exceeds the state-determined minimum ranking score. ACT NOW will utilize minimum ranking score thresholds for each ranking pool. This means no longer having to wait for all applications to be reviewed and preapproved in a ranking pool.

Arkansas FY 2024 ACT NOW Opportunities

- AR Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative
 - Conservation Practices available for funding: 325-Seasonal High Tunnel
 - Minimum Ranking Score Threshold: 100 points
- AR Soil Health Initiative
 - Conservation Practices available for funding: 340 Cover Crop, 328 Crop Rotation, 590 Nutrient Management, 329 Residue and Tillage Management (No-Till), 345 Residue and Tillage Management (Reduced Till), 336 Soil Carbon Amendment
 - Minimum Ranking Score Threshold: 150 points
- AR Energy Initiative:
 - Conservation Practices available: 374 Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation, 670 Energy Efficient Lighting System, and 672 Energy Efficient Building Envelope
 - Minimum Ranking Score Threshold: 50 points

How to Apply

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but to be included in this ACT NOW funding opportunity, interested producers should contact their local USDA Service Center. Arkansas NRCS will use the ACT NOW process for some EQIP funding pools and projects beginning January 22, 2024, through February 22, 2024.

Scan the QR code below to get connected with your local NRCS office now.





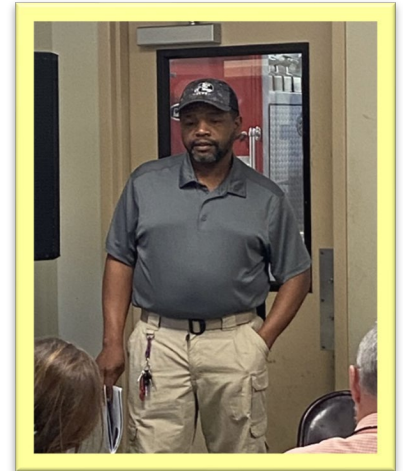
Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) Summit City of Dermott, AR “Dermott Fire Department” November 15, 2023 - 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

ALCDC conducted a Tri-State Rural and Urban Community Economic Development Summit One USDA in Dermott at the Fire Department where guests and partners were introduced by Fire Chief Dermond Coffey.

ALCDC, partner with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Rural Development.

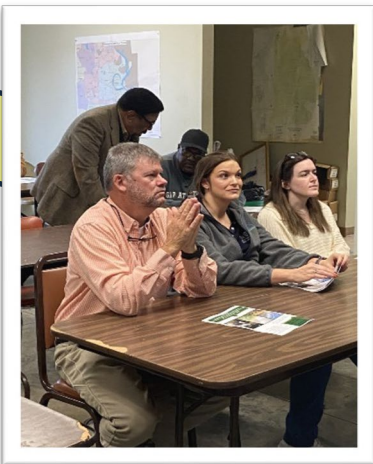
The event engaged participants in round table discussions with ALCDC President Dr. Calvin R King Sr., and Staff members Larry Lofton, and Janie Williams. Agriculture production plays a key role in our rural and urban economies.

Individuals, landowners, rural and urban farmers, ranchers, small businesses, agriculture enterprises, and community residents, were provided resourceful information tools, and an opportunity to engage with interactive discussions to achieve Urban and Rural Agricultural Economic Development.



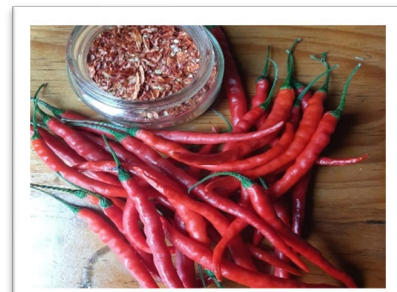
Discussion area included:

- Micro- Urban Farming and Conservation Program Opportunities with Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) NRCS Resource Opportunities for New Beginning Farmers & Ranchers and Underserved Farmers and Landowners
- Heir's Property – Equity Holding
- Farm Financing and USDA – Direct Farm Operating Plans, Micro Loan Program, and Loan Guarantees for purchasing land.
- USDA Rural Development and Program Resource Opportunities in Housing, Business, Community Facilities, Water- Sewer Systems, internet access and other grant opportunities.
- Discussion on Section 22007 application for discrimination financial assistance.



Tips on How to Start a Farm Operation For 2024

U.S. Department of Agriculture



Plan Your Farm Operation
Think about your operation from the ground up and start planning for your business.

PLAN YOUR FARM

Visit Your Service Center
Get in touch with your local Service Center to find programs to support your operation.

VISIT SERVICE CENTER

Fund Your Farm Operation
USDA has spent decades helping new producers find land and money for their

FUND YOUR FARM

Build Your Business
Lean on USDA to help you build your operation with sound business and financial knowledge.

BUILD YOUR BUSINESS

Sell Your Farm Products
Explore everything about producing, marketing, and selling your final product.

SELL YOUR PRODUCTS

Maintain Your Farm
Take care of you farm operation, and it will take care of you. USDA can help.

MAINTAIN YOUR FARM

Coordinators and Service Centers

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinators are USDA team members in each state that can help you understand the USDA process and find the right assistance as you are starting out. Reach out to your state's coordinator for one-on-one technical assistance and guidance. They can also connect you with organizations that specifically serve beginning farmers and ranchers.

Your local USDA Service Center has staff who can meet with you one-on-one to help you identify USDA programs that meet the needs of your operation, including farm loans and conservation assistance. Service center staff can guide you through the process of preparing and submitting required paperwork, with no need to hire a paid preparer.

Self-service Options

After you've registered your farm and set up an individual customer record with your local USDA Service Center, you can sign up for a secure farmers.gov account to access a number of self-service features. For example, you can:

- View loan information, history, and payments.
- Get help requesting financial assistance.
- View, upload, download and e-sign conservation documents.
- Request conservation assistance.
- View, print and export detailed farm records and farm/tract maps.

Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs Receive

2018 Farm Bill One Year Extension, Farmers Can Now Enroll for the 2024 Crop Year

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18, 2023 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting Dec. 18, 2023. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

“Having the Farm Bill extension in place means business as usual for Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage program implementation for the 2024 crop year— nothing has changed from previous years,” said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. “These programs provide critical financial protections against commodity market volatilities for many American farmers so don’t delay enrollment. Avoid the rush and contact your local FSA office for an appointment because even if you are not changing your program election for 2024, you still need to sign a contract to enroll.”

2024 Elections and Enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made. If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a shared interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed, and wheat.

2022 Crop Year Payments

This fall, FSA issued payments totaling more than \$267 million to agricultural producers who enrolled in the 2022 ARC-CO option and the ARC ARC-IC option for covered commodities that triggered a payment. Payments through the PLC option did not trigger for the 2022 crop year.

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. These payments help mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. Payments for crops that may trigger for the 2023 crop year will be issued in the fall of 2024.



Crop Insurance Considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

Web-Based Decision Tools

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

More Information

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.





Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) Summit in Blytheville, AR “Ritz Civic Center”

December 13, 2023 -11:00 am – 1:00 PM

We were excited that the City of Blytheville allowed us the opportunity to have our Rural and Urban Community Economic Development Summit One USDA at the Ritz Civic Center.

Dorothy Erby stepped in for the Mayor of Blytheville to greet our panelist as we explored opportunities to foster economic growth and success in this unique community.

Dr. Calvin R. King Sr. discussed the challenges, strategies, and initiatives to greet our panelist and participants faced by small rural communities proven effective at promoting prosperity. By sharing best practices, success stories and innovative ideas, we were able to inspire and empower participants to take part in building a brighter future for their communities.

Partnering in the event were ALCDC staff Larry Lofton, Janie Williams, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Julie Bennett, and USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Erik Deatherage and Saundra Sovick, Rural Development Christy Riley, Tammy Mosher, Trisha Davis, and Mallory Brown.

Individuals, landowners, rural and urban farmers, ranchers, small businesses, agriculture enterprises, and community residents, were provided resourceful information tools, and an opportunity to engage with interactive discussions to achieve Urban and Rural Agricultural Economic Development.

We want to thank the City of Blytheville and all those who attended the in- person/hybrid summit. We are looking forward to a continued partnership and identifying and implementing sustainable pathways to ensure long-term prosperity and wellbeing, collaborating as a catalyst in Urban and Rural Community Economic Development.



USDA Partners with Arkansas to Award Over \$4.2 Million to Strengthen Food Supply Chain Infrastructure

WASHINGTON, January 9, 2024 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) today announced it has a cooperative agreement with Arkansas under the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI). Through this agreement, USDA and Arkansas are working together to offer over \$4.2 million in competitive grant funding for projects designed to build resilience across the middle of the supply chain. Arkansas is accepting proposals for this Infrastructure Grant funding through February 16, 2024.

In May 2023, USDA announced the availability of up to \$420 million through RFSI to strengthen local and regional food systems. Through this program, AMS has entered into cooperative agreements with state agencies, commissions, or departments responsible for agriculture, commercial food processing, seafood, or food system and distribution activities or commerce activities in states or U.S. territories. RFSI is authorized by the American Rescue Plan. Updates for each state's Request for Applications for the RFSI program are available on the AMS website.

“This partnership between USDA and Arkansas is allowing critical funding to reach areas of the supply chain that need it most,” said USDA Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Jenny Lester Moffitt. “The projects funded through this program will create new opportunities for the region's small and midsize producers to thrive, expand access to nutritious food options, and increase supply chain resiliency.”

Using RFSI funding, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture will expand capacity for the processing, aggregation, and distribution of agricultural products. Funded projects will also include the construction of new facilities or the updating of existing facilities or equipment as well as improving capacity to comply with food safety regulations. The state's priorities are informed by stakeholder engagement and outreach to underserved producers to better understand their needs.

“The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is pleased to help administer the RFSI grant program and looks forward to seeing its positive impacts on our state's largest industry,” said Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward. “These funds will strengthen Arkansas agriculture by supporting investments to enhance supply chain operations and equipping producers with tools to expand the local food system.”

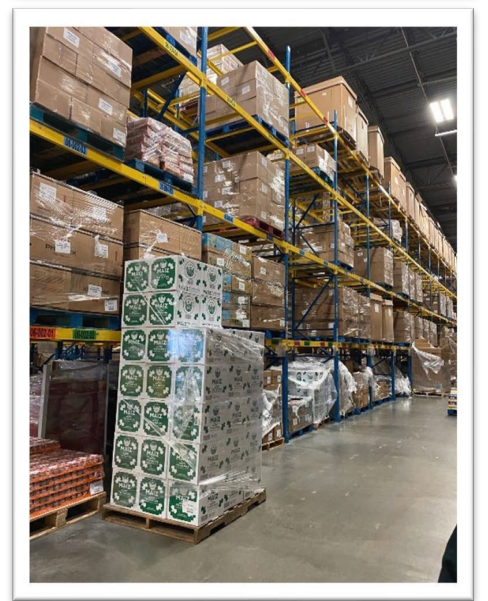
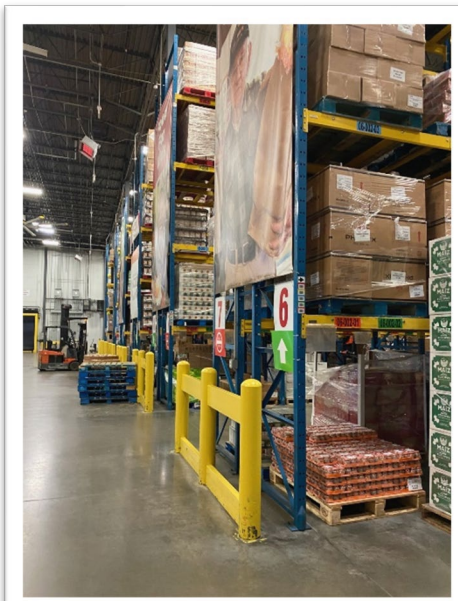
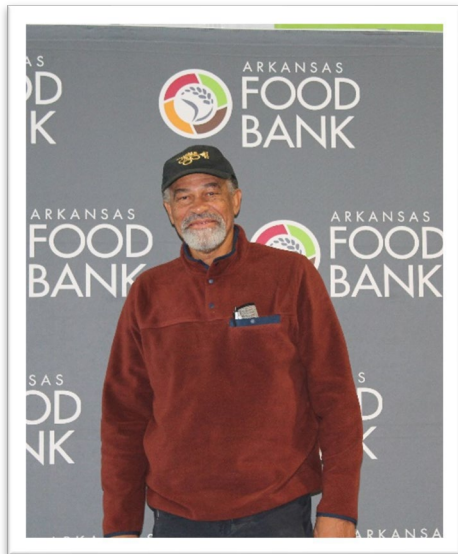
Those interested in receiving a subaward should apply directly through the Arkansas Department of Agriculture by February 16, 2024. AMS encourages applications that serve smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and underserved communities. Through the program and in addition to the Infrastructure Grant funding, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture will support supply chain coordination and technical assistance to farmers and food businesses operating in processing, aggregation, and distribution—all critical activities to support access to more and better markets for farmers.



Food Bank Tour in Little Rock



During a visit to the Arkansas Food Bank in Little Rock on Tuesday, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt announced \$5.6 million in competitive grant funds for Arkansas. The program is designed to improve food supply chain operations and strengthen local food systems. Through the federal Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program, the state Department of Agriculture will fund projects designed to build resilience across the middle of the supply chain. The program aims to provide more and better markets for small farms and food businesses, to support the development of value-added products for consumers, fair prices, fair wages, and to support new and safe job opportunities.



How to Close Heirs' Property Loopholes

Intake practices that will avoid losing land that has been passed down through generations without a will and is shared among heirs.

Growing up on farmland that your great-grandparents bought one generation after slavery where your family has lived there for more than a century, but because it was passed down without a will, it becomes heirs' property, a form of ownership in which descendants inherit an interest, like holding stock in a company. Without a clear title, these landowners are vulnerable to predators' practices that allow speculators and developers to acquire their property. According to an article in ProPublica, one attorney called heirs' property "the worst problem you never heard of." The U.S. Department of Agriculture has recognized it as "the leading cause of Black involuntary land loss."

What can heirs' property owners do to protect their land?

Plan. Write a Will or prepare a transfer on death deed to help pass a clear title to the next generation.

Pay your property taxes. Visit your tax assessor's office and make sure that your taxes are paid and that the address of the person responsible for coordinating bills is up to date.

Write a family tree. Find out the names on the deed for your land and lay out each generation of heirs that has followed. You can use legal documents from the county, like birth certificates and marriage licenses, as well as family letters and Bible, obituaries, information from genealogy websites and records from family reunions.

Create a paper trail to prove your ownership. If you inherited your property without a will or formal estate proceedings, many states allow for a sworn statement of heirship to be filed in the property records to establish your ownership. The rules of when and how a sworn statement can be filed vary by state.

Consolidate the ownership. Consider asking other heirs if they would be willing to transfer their interest in the property to those with the closest ties to the land. In many states, this can be done through a gift deed.

Manage the co-ownership. Talk to a lawyer you trust about your options, like creating a family LLC or land trust.

Track your expenses. If you pay for expenses on the property, like improvements to the homes or taxes, keep track of them. If a partition sale is started, you may be able to receive a larger share of the proceeds.

What laws affect heirs' property owners?

Twenty-two states have passed the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, which expands heirs' rights in partition actions and can help heirs' property owners gain access to Department of Agriculture programs.

The 2018 Farm Bill created an Heir's Property Relending program. This program can help resolve Heir's land ownership issues and to protect family farm heritage and promote economic development.

About half of the states have Transfer on Death Deed statutes, which allow families to file a simple deed that automatically transfers title to real property upon the owner's death, without having to go through probate court. The Uniform Real Property Transfer on Death Act has been presented as a model for how such statutes can be written.

What do ALCDC see as the next steps in helping heirs' property owners?

ALCDC has supported several possible legislative initiatives, including:

- Funding to support an increase in the number of legal aid lawyers who help families' clear titles and make estate plans, and to support local legal education on maintaining clear title.
- Legislation that creates an easier route for heirs' property owners to access FEMA and home repair programs by allowing for heirship sworn statements, a simpler, less costly process than clearing a title through the courts.
- Legislation that creates alternatives to the formal administration of estates when a homeowner dies without a will.
- Legislation that allows heirs' property owners to access exemptions from property taxes that are available to other homeowners.



GAP/GHP

Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices

Food safety and the prevention of food borne illness is a priority across the food supply chain in the United States. With the development of better notification systems and increased consumer awareness of food safety, there is a need for greater accountability and for consistent standards and practices across the board.

The produce industry is no exception, when a food borne illness outbreak does occur, the impact on the health and well-being of the consumers can be devastating, and result in the loss of public trust and confidence for an entire industry. While the USDA is not the regulatory authority for the safety of fruits and vegetables, it does support the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) mission to protect consumers by assuring the safety, efficacy, and security of the nation's food supply.

To help farms and businesses verify their food safety processes, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) offers voluntary, audit-based programs for operations throughout the produce supply chain.

The largest of these is the Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP) audit verification program.

Food safety programs at the farm level are covered by GAP auditing and certification, while GHP concentrates on packing facilities, storage facilities and wholesale distribution centers. The GAP/GHP program utilizes federal and state department of agriculture auditors to verify that a participant has implemented a documented food safety program that meets the FDA's guidelines.

Growers are increasingly being required to undergo food safety audits by the retail and foodservice sector as a condition of sale. GAP and GHP help build trust between farmers and consumers, distributors, and retail chains. Today's informed consumers note food safety as a top decision factor when selecting their food and will often choose products and produce that are backed by verified and certified processes they can trust, like GAP and GHP.

“Consumers expect that the produce they consume is safe to eat. That process starts in the fields and groves no matter what country the product is produced in,” said Ross Wileman from Mission Produce, Inc. “It starts with good agricultural practices, good manufacturing processes and verifies performance through third party certified audits. Food safety is only as good as the weakest link in the chain, and it is our responsibility to ensure the consumer that we have taken all the steps necessary to deliver on that trust.”

As the science and practices surrounding food safety in the produce industry shift, adopting a comprehensive plan—no matter the size of your operation or your place within the food supply chain—will be a key to long-term success. Carefully consider the benefits to third-party verification and find out more about our GAP and GHP programs.



Armondo and Andrea White Farmers in Marvell, AR



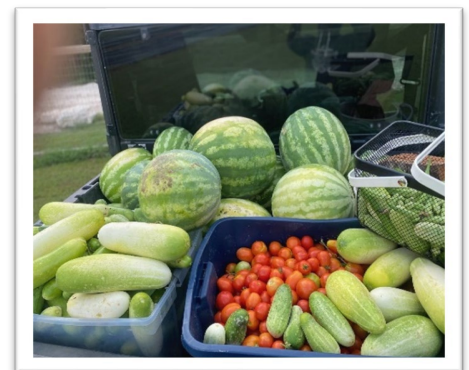
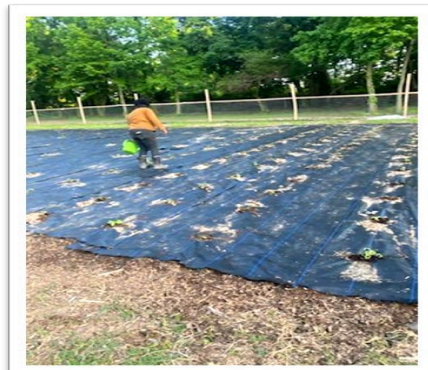
Armondo and Andrea spend long days operating their farm they started four years ago. They own seven acres of land. On their land they utilize five acres, where they have a fishpond, a high tunnel, layers, and broilers (chickens), grass raise sheep, and a large garden where they grow their melons and cantaloupe. Five minutes down the road they raise cattle that sit on seven acres owned by his dad Ronald White Sr., who was a sharecropper who raised soybeans and wheat with his father and brother on eighty acres of land in Marvell.



At the end of last year, Armondo and his wife signed a lease agreement to use one hundred acres of their property to expand their farm. Eighty acres will be used to raise soybeans that would produce enough revenue to expand his cattle and vegetable production and raise his own hay. They also became GAP Certified that will help them increase the value of their products.

Armondo served four years in the military and was deployed to Iraq during part of that time. Through this experience it was always a motivation for him to grow his own food to provide for his family. Unlike other young farmers who might work for already-established family businesses, Armondo knew he would have to start from the ground up to get back to his family roots. He started out with ALCDC as a resource center to get started. Then he went to USDA where he received funding as a beginning farmer, where he gained more knowledge and information about the EQIP Cost Share Program offered by NRCS. This allowed them to expand their production. They started raising watermelon, okra, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, and cantaloupe as well as cattle.

As the couple raises their family to enjoy and appreciate the important work done on the farm, Armondo and Andrea also have a dumpster business called Sunlight Service, where they provide dumpster services for people in need. They do the loading and properly dispose of your waste, making a cleaner environment for all.



USDA Signs Agreement with Agriculture Future of America to Prepare Young People for Careers in Agriculture

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12, 2023 – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Agriculture Future of America (AFA), formalizing a partnership to promote the common goals of strengthening the future competitiveness and sustainability of the U.S. agriculture industry by preparing more young people for careers in agriculture.

“This partnership will enhance USDA’s involvement with AFA and its leadership development and education mission,” said Secretary Vilsack. “This agreement reinforces USDA’s commitment to preparing students for future careers in agriculture with an emphasis on federal sector employment.”

USDA and AFA will continue to collaborate on leadership development efforts and link these young leaders with career opportunities in food, agricultural science, natural resources, and related fields. Under the MOU, USDA commits to advancing opportunities for AFA delegates to participate in USDA programs, including internships. AFA will provide occasions for USDA to meet with AFA delegates to share information about these opportunities.

The MOU will be administered by USDA’s Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE), which develops and maintains partnerships focused on solutions to challenges facing rural and underserved communities and connects those communities to the education, tools, and resources available to them through USDA programs and initiatives.

“Our collaboration with USDA signifies a shared vision for the future of American agriculture,” said Mark Stewart, President, and CEO of AFA. “This MOU is not just a document; it’s a commitment to bridging the gap between talent and opportunity. This agreement reinforces our belief that connecting young leaders with USDA initiatives will enrich their careers and contribute to a more resilient and competitive agriculture industry.”

AFA builds bridges for young leaders to foster engagement and innovation in food and agriculture through premier leader and career development experiences. With program participation increasing 28% in the last five years, AFA has provided 26,000 leader development experiences to college leaders and young professionals from more than 200 colleges and universities throughout 43 states since its inception in 1996. AFA has awarded more than \$11 million in academic and leader development scholarships. For more information about AFA, visit www.agfuture.org.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, promoting competition and fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.



USDA to Reopen Signup for Continuous Conservation Reserve Program

WASHINGTON,

Jan. 11, 2024 – The U.S.

Department of Agriculture (USDA) will begin accepting applications for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP) signup on Jan. 12, 2024. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) encourages agricultural producers and landowners interested in conservation opportunities for their land in exchange for yearly rental payments to consider the enrollment options available through Continuous CRP, which also includes the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offered by FSA partners. Additionally, producers participating in CRP can apply to re-enroll beginning Jan. 12, 2024, if their contracts will expire this year.

“We are pleased to announce we are now accepting Continuous CRP offers,” said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux.

“Continuous CRP is one of the best conservation tools we can provide producers and landowners. Whether a producer wants to focus on water quality benefits or work with one of our partners to address a natural resource concern in their area, the program offers many options to help you meet your resource conservation goals.”

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through Sept. 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including CRP, to continue operating.

To submit an offer, producers should contact the FSA at their local [USDA Service](#)

[Center](#) by July 31, 2024, in order to have an offer effective by Oct. 1, 2024. To ensure enrollment acreages do not exceed the statutory cap, FSA will accept offers from producers on a first-come, first-served basis and will return offers for approval in batches throughout the year.

Additionally, producers with acres enrolled in Continuous CRP set to expire Sept. 30, 2024, can offer acres for re-enrollment beginning Jan. 12, 2024. A producer can both enroll new acres into Continuous CRP and re-enroll any acres expiring Sept. 30, 2024. FSA water quality practices, such as riparian buffers, prairie strips, grassed waterways, and wetlands, will receive an additional 20% incentive. Buffer practices have a positive impact on water quality. Additionally, the Climate-Smart Practice Incentive launched in 2021 is also available in the Continuous signup.

There are several enrollment options within [Continuous CRP](#), including: **CREP**: Working with conservation partners, CREP leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific state, regional, tribal, or nationally significant conservation concerns.

[State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement \(SAFE\)](#): The initiative restores vital habitat in order to meet high-priority state wildlife conservation goals.

[Highly Erodible Lands Initiative \(HELI\)](#): Producers and landowners can enroll in CRP to establish long-term cover on highly erodible cropland that has a weighted erodibility index (EI) greater than or equal to 20.

[Farmable Wetlands Program](#): Producers and landowners can enroll land in CRP to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, improving both vegetation and water flow.

Clean Lake Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative and CLEAR30:

This initiative prioritizes and offers additional incentives for water quality practices on the land that, if enrolled, will help reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms.

Through CLEAR30, a component of this initiative, these additional incentives for adoption of water quality practices can be accessed in 30-year contracts.

More Information

The water quality practice incentive builds on other improvements to Continuous CRP that were made in 2021, including expanding CLEAR30 from two pilot areas to nationwide availability and repositioning SAFE within Continuous CRP to give producers and landowners more opportunities to participate.

Additionally, FSA has improved CREP by creating flexibilities within CREP for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, adding staff to work directly with partners, and expanding opportunities for Tribal Nations to participate, beginning with three Tribal

Nations in the Great Plains, the Cheyenne River, Oglala, and Rosebud Sioux Tribes, for the first time ever, to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity while reducing soil erosion and enhancing wildlife habitat.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America.



PRE-PLANNED SUMMITS/WORKSHOPS

	In-Person/Hybrid Summit
	Date: February 1, 2024
	Shorter College, North Little Rock, AR
	One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development
	11:00 am – 1:00 pm
In-Person/Hybrid Summit	In-Person/Hybrid Summit
Date: TBA	Date: February 15, 2024
Stuttgart, AR-Ashley County - TBA	Warren, AR-Bradley County - TBA
One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development	One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development
11:00 am – 1:00 pm	11:00 am – 1:00 pm
In-Person/Hybrid Summit	In-Person/Hybrid Summit
Date: February 29, 2024	Date: March 13, 2024
Forrest City, AR - St. Francis County – ALCDC Hub	Devall Bluff, AR- Prairie County – TBA
One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development	One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development
11:00 am – 1:00 pm	11:00 am – 1:00 pm
In-Person/Hybrid Summit	In-Person/Hybrid Summit
Date: March 27, 2024	Date: April 11, 2024
Crenshaw, Mississippi- Panola County – TBA	Greenville, Mississippi-Washington County – TBA
One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development	One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development
11:00 am – 1:00 pm	11:00 am – 1:00 pm
In-Person/Hybrid Summit	In-Person/Hybrid Summit
Date: April 25, 2024	Date: May 8, 2024
Memphis, TN- Shelby County – TBA	Tollette, AR- Howard County – TBA
One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development	One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development
11:00 am – 1:00 pm	11:00 am – 1:00 pm
In-Person/Hybrid Summit	In-Person/Hybrid Summit
Date: May 30, 2024	Date: June 13, 2024
Carthage, AR- Dallas County – TBA	Somerville, TN- Fayette County – TBA
One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development	One USDA NRCS/FSA/Rural Development
11:00 am – 1:00 pm	11:00 am – 1:00 pm



ALFDC/ALCDC Partnership Membership Renewal Form

October 1, 2023- September 30, 2024

_____ **Individual Membership \$25** _____ **Partnership Membership \$40**

_____ **Organizational Membership \$200**

Member Benefits

Advocacy and Public Relations -ALCDC/ALFDC participates in federal and state hearing sessions that focus on policy development for its members, farmers, youth, and rural residents.

Member Opportunities -ALCDC/ALFDC offers leadership opportunities within the organization for our youth, farmers, and rural residents. As a member you can select to serve on an advisory board at the federal, state, and local levels.

Marketing Opportunities -ALCDC/ALFDC offers cooperative marketing opportunities for farmers, rural businesses interested in enhancing the lives of rural Americans. We also offer the opportunity to present or set up an exhibit during our Annual Conference. We offer facility rentals at a discounted fee to all ALCDC members.

Access to housing, farming, and youth services -ALCDC/ALFDC offers rural residents the opportunity to affordable housing, homeownership education business development, help in accessing farm financing and federal resources, and training on conservation practices, youth leadership development, education enrichment, and workforce readiness.

Information and Communication -ALCDC/ALFDC members can communicate with an ALCDC representative via phone or website concerning their farming, housing, or youth service's needs. Members receive ALCDC updates and news through our quarterly newsletters and weekly e-letters.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

**Please return your application and tax-deductible contribution to:
ALCDC/ALFDC Membership Program • P.O. Box 743 • Brinkley, AR72021**

ALCDC/ALFDC programs and services are available without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or familial status. On your compatible Android phone, Smart phone, or tablet-open the built in camera app. Point the camera at the QR code. Tap the banner that appears on your Android phone, Smart phone, or tablet to join or renew membership.





P.O. Box 907
Brinkley, AR 72021

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ABOUT THE ADVANCER

The Advancer is a publication of the Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALFDC) printed quarterly and circulated as a public service and communication resource for our membership and constituents. The Advancer publication reaches a broad range of organizations and residents throughout the Delta and the United States

The Advancer reflects the nature of our work- supplying self-help opportunities and support services to our farmers and others of limited resources in our sixty-six (66) county service area. ALCDC is committed to helping people become more productive and self-sufficient. We appreciate your comments and suggestions. Direct all comments and inquiries about this publication by phone to (870) 734-3005 or e-mail us at alcdc1934@yahoo.com.

If your mailing address is not correct, you can correct the label above and fax back to (870) 734-4197 or call Mary Harris at (870) 734-3005.

ALCDC STAFF

Dr. Calvin R. King Sr. – President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Lashica Miller – Vice-President and Chief Financial Operation Officer (CFOO)
J. D. Davis – Vice-President of Programs and Policy
Barbara Erby – Director of Public Relations Marketing Administrative Service and Membership
Larry Lofton – Director of Ag. Farm Program Division
Janie Williams – Farm Advisor Specialist
Albert Jones – Farm Advisor Specialist
Michael Tucker – Farm Advisor
Dr. Talesha Dokes – Director of Ag. Technology and Youth
Ashley Crockett – Housing Director, Farm Advisor
Tatiana Payne – Accts. Receivable, Youth Field Coordinator
Mary Harris – Office Manager, Farm Admin Asst.
Diamond Smith – Accts Payable, Farm Financial Analyst
Tomyra Privett – Admin Assistant
Endia Rapier – Housing Site Manager
Nelson Hubbert – Environmental Engineer

Multi-Family Housing (Off-Site)

Ashley Crockett- McNeil Apartments Phase II, Crawfordsville, AR., Earle Duplex's, Pinewood Apartment Development, Brinkley, AR
Keisha Caffey (Resident Manager)- Meadowbrook, Marianna, Helena-West Helena
Jenifer Jones (Resident Manager) Forrest City and Wynne

ALCDC MISSION STATEMENT



The mission of ALCDC is to supply advocacy outreach, technical aid, and training to limited resources small farmers and all rural residents to alleviate poverty, enhance sustainable farming and strengthen communities' economic sustainability and workforce readiness.

ALCDC services and programs are available without regard to age, race, religion, gender, or physical handicap.

For Additional Information Phone:
(870) 734-3005
Visit Our Website
www.arlcddc.org

Website for
ALFDC: