# Disaster Assistance Available to Crawfish Producers Through ELAP

(Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, & Farm-raised Fish Program)

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## Background

On May 10, 2024, the Farm Service Agency announced the authorization of additional flexibility for the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) that would allow for assistance to crawfish producers through the program. ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible producers who suffer losses because of qualifying disease, adverse weather, or other conditions. While crawfish was already an eligible commodity under ELAP, the drought and extreme heat in 2023 that has had devastating impacts on 2024 production was not one of the qualifying adverse weather conditions for crawfish. Given efforts made by the Louisiana Farm Bureau, the LSU AgCenter, the Louisiana Congressional Delegation, and others, extreme heat was officially added as a qualifying adverse weather condition for crawfish. This change to the program now allows crawfish producers who have been impacted by the adverse weather conditions in 2023 to obtain needed financial assistance.

## Who is Eligible?

To be eligible for assistance through ELAP, a producer would need to meet the following conditions:

- Must be a person or legal entity who is an owner, operator, landlord, tenant, or sharecropper, who shares in the risk of producing an eligible aquatic species that is propagated and reared in a controlled environment that is being maintained for **commercial use** as part of the producer's farming operation,
- Must be able to show a production loss in 2024, and,
- Must meet Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) requirements. AGI requirements specify that the person or legal entity with an AGI that exceeds $900,000 will NOT be eligible to receive ELAP payments.

It should be noted that ELAP programs are NOT subject to payment limits.

## How will the program work?

Producers will need to sign up for the program with their local FSA office. When doing so, the producer will need to provide supporting documentation proving at least their 2024 production and preferably for their 2021 through 2024 production years. Supporting documentation would include sales and purchase receipts or any other records that could be verified through an independent source.

With that information, the FSA will calculate eligible payments for the producer. Based on information received from FSA, the equation for determining assistance through ELAP will be:

Assistance = (Beginning Inventory – 2024 Production) * Payment Rate * Payment Factor

While termed beginning inventory, this value is really a historic average production value. This historic average production value will be established for the producer in one of three ways:

- For producers that can and choose to provide supporting documentation and data of their actual production (sales volume) for 2021, 2022, and 2023, the beginning inventory will be set at **the higher of the average of the producer's 3-year production history or the County Expected Yield.**

- For producers that are only able to or only choose to provide supporting documentation for only one or two of the years in that three-year period (2021 – 2023), the beginning inventory will be **the higher of the average of the producer's 3-year production history or 100% of the FSA's County Expected Yield. It should be noted, however, that for any year of the 3-year period that the producer cannot provide supporting documentation, production will be set to zero when calculating the average of the producer's 3-year production history.**

- For producers that cannot or choose not to provide supporting documentation and data of their actual production (sales volume) for any of those 3 years (2021 – 2023), the beginning inventory will **be 80% of the FSA's County Expected Yield.** Again, in this scenario, the beginning inventory will NOT be based on the producer's actual production history but on an average parish production level. In addition, if producers are not able to provide documentation for any of those 3 years, the beginning inventory value will be based on only 80% of FSA's County Expected Yield.

Once the beginning inventory level is established, it will be compared to the production level the producer was able to verify with documentation for 2024. If the actual production value in 2024 is less than the beginning inventory value, the producer has experienced a production loss and is eligible for an assistance payment. If the actual production value for 2024 is greater than the beginning inventory, there has been no production loss, and no payment is available.

If a production loss has been experienced, a payment is determined by multiplying the loss value times a payment rate and a payment factor. The payment rate has been reported by the FSA at $1.44 per pound. The payment factor has been reported at 90 percent for producers that qualify as socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning or veteran farmers and at 75 percent for all other producers.

## Additional considerations:

- Producers who did not certify their acres with FSA in 2021, 2022, or 2023 will not be able to retroactively certify their acres. Producers will, however, be able to certify their acres for 2024 if they have not done so yet. Producers will not be required to pay a late filing fee for certification of their 2024 acres for ELAP. The acres certified in 2024 will be used by FSA as the producer's acres for 2021, 2022, and 2023 if they were not originally certified. So, for example, if a producer had not certified acres in 2021, 2022, or 2023 but certified 500 acres for 2024, those 500 acres would be used as the number of acres of production for each of those three years.

- While the equation provided above refers to total production values for both beginning inventory and the 2024 production year, FSA has indicated that the software performing the calculations will adjust for situations in which a producer increased acres in 2024 from the levels harvested in 2021 through 2023. In that situation, the producer's total production level in 2024 could be higher than the beginning inventory simply because it was over more acres. So, while the equation above refers to total production levels, it appears that the software will calculate per acre values so that the equation would be:

  Assistance = (Begin Inventory per Acre – 2024 Production per Acre) * 2024 Acres * Payment Rate * Payment Factor

  Producers will have to provide documentation of their total production (sales volume) and the FSA will combine that production with the acres certified by the producer. Again, if the producer did not certify acres in 2021, 2022, or 2023, the software will use the acres certified for 2024 as the acres in those years. The software will then calculate per-acre yield levels from that information and, in doing so, will be able to adjust for situations in which historic acreage is lower or higher than 2024 acres.

- Acres not put into production in 2024 due to drought or heat related issues will be included in the calculations as long as they were included in the acres certified to FSA. The ability to include these acres in the calculations will effectively reduce production values for 2024 and will ultimately help to maximize producer payments under the program.

- While the program is currently available, producers should only apply for the program and certify their production once their 2023/2024 harvest season is complete.

- While all producers are encouraged to provide documentation of their production for all years, high yielding producers will likely need to provide their own production information for the years 2021 through 2023 to get the full benefit of the program. High yielding producers are likely to have production levels higher or much higher than the County Expected Yield. So, even if the producer is confident that production was lower in 2024, comparing 2024 actual production to that County Expected Yield or 80 percent of that County Expected Yield will likely not show any production loss.

- Given the program will set the beginning inventory value at the higher of the producer's average production history or based on the County Expected Yield, there is no penalty for a producer providing supporting documentation of actual production. Even if the producer's actual production is below the County Expected Yield, the ability to use the County Expected Yield will allow for maximum assistance to the producer.

- Fortunately for the crawfish industry, disaster assistance has been expanded to cover excessive heat. Crawfish production being an eligible commodity for ELAP was originally made available in the 2014 Farm Bill. The addition of this new eligible cause of loss shows how the program has continued to develop to provide a greater safety net to crawfish producers. However, for crawfish producers and the crawfish industry to fully benefit from these programs in the future, it is important that a more reliable and accurate database of crawfish production statistics is available. This program provides an excellent opportunity to build more reliable production information and, as such, producers are encouraged to provide accurate documentation of their production. This will increase the likelihood of ELAP being a sustained safety net for future disasters.

## Program Timeline and Additional Information

The signup for assistance through ELAP has begun and will run through January 30, 2025. **All interested producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to get more details about the program, including information on their County Expected Yield.** Contact information to parish FSA offices can be found at:

https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=la&agency=fsa.