

USDA expands farmers.gov to help manage conservation activities

New self-service features on farmers.gov offsite link image will help farmers and ranchers manage their conservation activities online and request assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

"These conservation features join a number of others already available through farmers.gov, including the ability to view farm loan information," said Bill Northey, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. "As more content and capabilities are added, farmers.gov is quickly becoming the online hub for producers to find resources, submit applications and assistance requests and make connections. Now, amid this pandemic, we recognize the importance of online options for producers to manage their USDA business."

Producers can access these conservation features by desktop computer, tablet or phone. They can now:

- View, download and e-sign documents;
- Request conservation assistance;
- Reference technical terms and submit questions;
- Access information on current and past conservation practices; and
- View detailed information on all previous and ongoing contracts, including the amount of planned and received cost-share assistance.

The new conservation features enhance the request process with a customer-friendly unified mapping tool that allows farmers to locate areas of interest in minutes, with high-resolution aerial imagery and multi-layered display functionality.

The new features include the most popular functionalities from NRCS's Conservation Client Gateway (CCG) while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. CCG is the NRCS portal for producers, but now these functionalities are being moved to farmers.gov to give producers one place to do business with NRCS, Farm Service Agency and other USDA agencies.

Managing Conservation Online

To access their information, producers will need a USDA eAuth account to login into farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit farmers.gov offsite link image and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the "Sign In/Sign Up" link offsite link image at the top right of the website. Current CCG users can use their existing login and password to access the conservation features on farmers.gov. CCG will continue to be actively maintained and supported until

all core components have been migrated to farmers.gov later this year.

Currently, only producers doing business as individuals can view information. Entities, such as an LLC or Trust, or producers doing business on behalf of another customer cannot access the portal at this time, but access is being planned.

Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access the feature.

More Information

USDA is building farmers.gov for farmers, by farmers. Future self-service features available through the farmers.gov portal include: authority for FSA and NRCS customers to work in the portal and act on behalf of their active power-of-attorney entitlements and their current authorities for business entities, updated e-sign capabilities to enhance the single and multi-signer functionalities and a robust document management system that enables customers to download, upload and interact with their important conservation practice and contract documents.

...Container Gardens

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Place your container garden where it will get the optimal amount of sunlight - between six and eight hours a day. The beauty of container gardens is their movability. You can even follow the sun as exposure changes throughout the seasons. Always refer to the care tags on the specific plant to determine a prime location.

Gardens planted in a container are entirely dependent on you to provide nutrients. Start out with an organic, rich potting soil formulated for container gardens. Then, going forward, fertilize your container every two to four weeks by pouring a nutrient-rich liquid solution directly into the soil.

Don't forget to reap what you sow. Harvesting will generally help increase yields and prevent plants from outgrowing their containers. For best results, use this five-step method: water plants before harvesting, make clean cuts, keep them clean, dry your harvest quickly and store them away from sunlight and moisture.

More expert advice is available online. Scott has partnered with Exmark, a leading manufacturer of commercial mowers and

equipment on a video series for DIY homeowners called "Done in a Weekend." Among the free videos is "Contain Your Enthusiasm," offering tips to help you successfully plant, grow and care for herbs and vegetable container gardens. To view the video, as well as access other

videos in the series covering a range of home and garden topics, visit Exmark.com/DIY.

There are a few important considerations that every container gardener should know. Be sure you're equipped with the proper tools and knowledge before getting started.

Modern rainwater harvesting efforts evolve beyond backyard barrels

It's not uncommon to see plastic rain barrels sitting next to homes waiting for the next rainfall to send water flowing into a downspout. Collecting and storing rainwater can provide water for a variety of residential uses, lower your water bill, and reduce demand on both surface and groundwater supplies. As a general rule of thumb, for every inch of rain that falls on a 2,000-square-foot roof, about 1,000 gallons of water can be collected.

Much of the growth in rainwater harvesting in Texas over the last few decades has been in small-scale, residential rainwater harvesting systems. For large-scale water supply needs, Texas businesses and institutions have traditionally relied primarily on centralized water distribution systems that haven't included large-scale rainwater catchment techniques.

But as the state continues to grow at a rapid pace and demand on our surface and groundwater supplies increases, the role that rainwater harvesting can play in commercial- and community-scale projects and facilities is evolving statewide. Across Texas, schools, libraries, businesses, and utilities are implementing innovative rainwater harvesting methods to divert and store water from the sky on a big scale.

Commercial-scale innovation

From Austin to Amarillo, building planners are taking into account water conservation when designing new facilities. The Austin Central Library garnered national attention for its rainwater capture, condensate reuse, and reclaimed water strategies.

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