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# California

## USDA programs aid producers impacted by wildfires

DAVIS, Calif. — The USDA has set aside \$4 million to help California farmers and ranchers with their wildfire recovery efforts while also offering food assistance to residents in seven fire-ravaged counties.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is issuing waivers for those interested in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program so that recovery work can begin immediately, according to a news release.

The NRCS is accepting applications through Nov. 6 for its EQIP Catastrophic Fire Recovery fund pool to help with such projects as creating check dams in drainages, using damaged trees to slow runoff, repairing culverts and planting tree seedlings.

The funding is one of numerous disaster assistance programs the USDA offers, including compensation for livestock death and feed losses, risk coverage for specialty crops and repair of damage to agricultural and private forest land.

Among the other programs:

- The Farm Service

Agency's Emergency Conservation Program provides funding and technical help for fence restoration and other rehabilitation efforts on farmland damaged by natural disasters.

• Compensation is available to producers who purchased coverage through the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which protects non-insurable crops including native grass for grazing.

• The NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program works with local governments and tribes to remove debris, stabilize streambanks and fix water control structures.

For more information, contact a local field office or visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

Meanwhile, fire-affected households in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Sonoma and Yuba counties can receive help buying food through the USDA's Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Approved households will receive one month of benefits.

For more information, visit [www.fns.usda.gov/disaster](http://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster).

## UC expert: Fires expose need for better planning, equipment

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

LAKEPORT, Calif. — The need for better fire planning and equipment that can traverse narrow rural roads are among the lessons that can be learned from the wine country's devastating fires, a University of California expert asserts.

Thick stands of vegetation, homes built on steep terrain and old roads too small to accommodate modern firefighting equipment make it virtually impossible to stop a fire driven by wind, said Greg Giusti, a UC Cooperative Extension emeritus adviser who specializes in forest and wildland ecology.

Communities should better incorporate "fire resilience" efforts into planning to give firefighters a better chance of controlling blazes before they get out of hand, Giusti said in an essay on the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources website.

For instance, UCCE advisers have obtained grants and helped communities in Plumas, Butte and Yuba counties modify homes to improve fire resistance, adopt fuel reduction programs, clear fuel breaks and map out evacuation plans, according to a recent UC report.

While the fires that started in Napa and Sonoma counties



UCANR

Smoke from one of the wine country fires looms ominously over a residential area in Sonoma County, Calif. A University of California expert says there are many lessons to be learned from the fires, including the need for fire equipment that can more easily traverse old, rural roads.

were "extraordinary," they were the exception to the rule, and many other fires could be quickly controlled and extinguished if the right precautions are taken, Giusti argued.

"There are hundreds of fire starts a year in California that never grow beyond a few acres," Giusti told the Capital Press in an email. "These are the fires that should be considered as fuel management options."

Giusti's report comes as fires in Northern California have killed at least 42 people and caused at least \$1 billion in damage to insured property, officials say. The fires burned several wineries and farms and threatened thousands of acres of vineyards just as the harvest of wine grapes was drawing to a close.

As Gov. Jerry Brown issued an order suspending some fees

and rules to speed up recovery, bills in Congress would loosen environmental regulations for forest-thinning projects on federal lands, devote more than \$100 million for community fire prevention efforts and create a pilot program to cut down trees in the most fire-prone areas, The Associated Press reported. In September, a Public Policy Institute of California report advocated more use of prescribed fire and mechanical thinning to help build resilience in the state's headwater forests.

While the cause of this year's fires is yet to be determined, Giusti said most were likely ignited by 50-mph winds, which can break power lines and cause transformers to explode.

But thick vegetation that resulted from mid-20th century land management practices and years of fire suppression

had a role in how quickly the fires spread, as did homes built in rural areas on steep terrain and "legacy" roads too small for fire engines to navigate, he argues.

"Small rural roads hamper both evacuations and ingress for firefighting equipment," he said in the email.

To make areas more resilient, Giusti suggests scaling down firefighting equipment to use rural roads and finding resources to widen the roads. He said rural areas with poor or no internet service should re-establish fire sirens to alert residents of impending danger.

Local statutes should impose vegetation management standards for land, and communities should fashion land-use planning so that landowners take actions to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, he contends.

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