

Sign-up Starts for Tree Assistance Program

Sign-up began Feb. 7, 2005, for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP), which provides financial relief to owners of eligible trees, bushes, vines and forest land damaged by natural disasters according to Michel Ruud, Farm Service Agency County Executive Director in Chelan and Douglas Counties.

Program applications for tree producers in will be accepted at U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency offices until March 18, 2005.

TAP is the first of several programs to be launched in 2005 to help producers recover from natural disasters that occurred in 2003 and 2004.

Owners of eligible trees, bushes and vines from which an annual crop is produced for commercial purposes and eligible forest land owners who produce crops of timber for commercial purposes may receive assistance under TAP. Producers are ineligible for both Emergency Conservation Program and TAP assistance for the same losses.

Funding for TAP was authorized by the Military Construction and Emergency Hurricane Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2005 (2005 Appropriations Act), and signed into law by President Bush last October.

The program will provide more than \$3 billion in relief nationwide to farmers, ranchers and foresters who suffered losses due to severe weather. Producers in became potentially eligible for the TAP as a result of a federal Secretarial disaster designation for the county.

Funding, as necessary, has been authorized for benefits under the 2005 Appropriations Act for losses which occurred during the period beginning Dec. 1, 2003, and ending Dec. 31, 2004. The funding is for eligible orchardists to replant trees, bushes and vines that were grown to produce an annual crop. Benefits will not be prorated.

In addition, the 2005 Appropriations Act authorized \$15 million for assistance to eligible producers who meet all requirements and produce periodic crops of forest timber for commercial use, and who suffered timber losses or damage during the period beginning Dec. 1, 2003, and ending Dec. 31, 2004. If all eligible claims filed during the application period are greater than the available funds, benefits will be prorated.

For more information, or to apply for TAP assistance, tree owners should contact the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices, 664-0283 in Chelan County, 745-8561 in Douglas County. Additional TAP information is available on FSA's Web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov