



## USDA Declares Parishes Disaster Areas

For most of the disaster assistance programs administered by the Farm Service Agency, the basic requirement for producers to participate is that the parish in which the farm is located must be declared a disaster area. As you know, shortly following Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the President declared most of the parishes in the state a disaster area (See Figure 1). While this declaration makes certain assistance available to residents in those parishes, it does not automatically make agricultural disaster assistance available.

For the disaster assistance outlined in the 2008 Farm Bill, the basic requirement for participation is that the parish be declared a primary or contiguous disaster area by the Secretary of Agriculture. As a result, shortly after the two storms made landfall, a formal request was made by the state officials to USDA to have all parishes declared a disaster area. Recently, the USDA responded to this request and named 52 parishes in the state as primary disaster areas. The remaining 12 parishes, while not declared primary disaster areas, will also be eligible to participate in disaster assistance programs as contiguous disaster areas (See Figure 2).

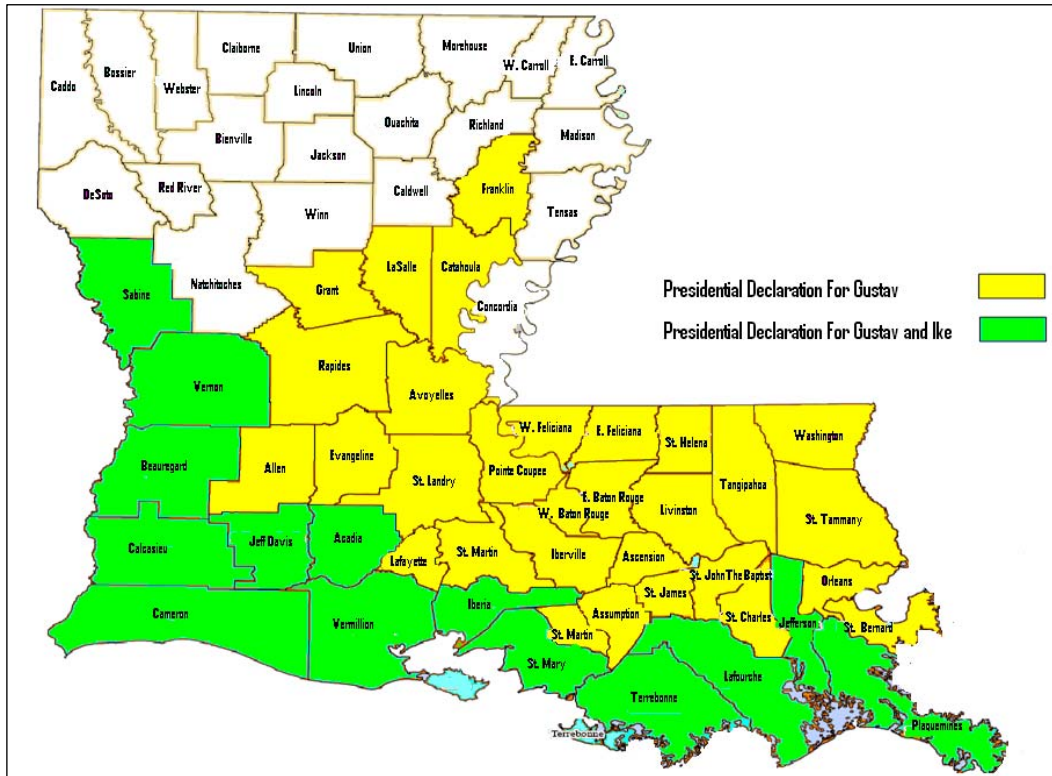
With this disaster declaration, producers in all 64 parishes (either primary or contiguous) will be eligible to participate in disaster related programs administered by the Farm Service Agency. The first program that should become available to producers is the Emergency Loan Program. Based on information obtained from the Farm Service Agency website, low interest (3.75%) emergency loans are available to producers who suffered at least 30 percent production loss or had damage/loss to infrastructure. The amount of these loans can reach up to 100 percent of the estimated losses with a limit of \$500,000. These loans have a repayment length that commonly ranges from 1 to 7 years but can be extended to as long as 20 to 30 years, under specific circumstances.

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) is another disaster related program that has been requested for the state. The ECP is a cost share program that helps offset the costs of removing debris and other cleanup on farmland that is required as a result of the hurricanes. This program will also help offset the costs of fence repair/replacement and for supplying water to livestock. The reimbursement level typically established for this program is 75 percent of the estimated costs associated with the cleanup. If you will remember, however, a special waiver was provided in 2005 that allowed the reimbursement level to be raised to 100 percent of estimated cleanup costs.

Finally, the disaster declaration will make producers eligible to participate in the disaster assistance programs included in the 2008 Farm Bill. While there is still uncertainty on exactly how and when these programs will be implemented, this declaration at least establishes that producers in the state will meet the first requirement of these programs. Also, this declaration should make producers eligible to participate in any additional assistance that Congress would provide the state.

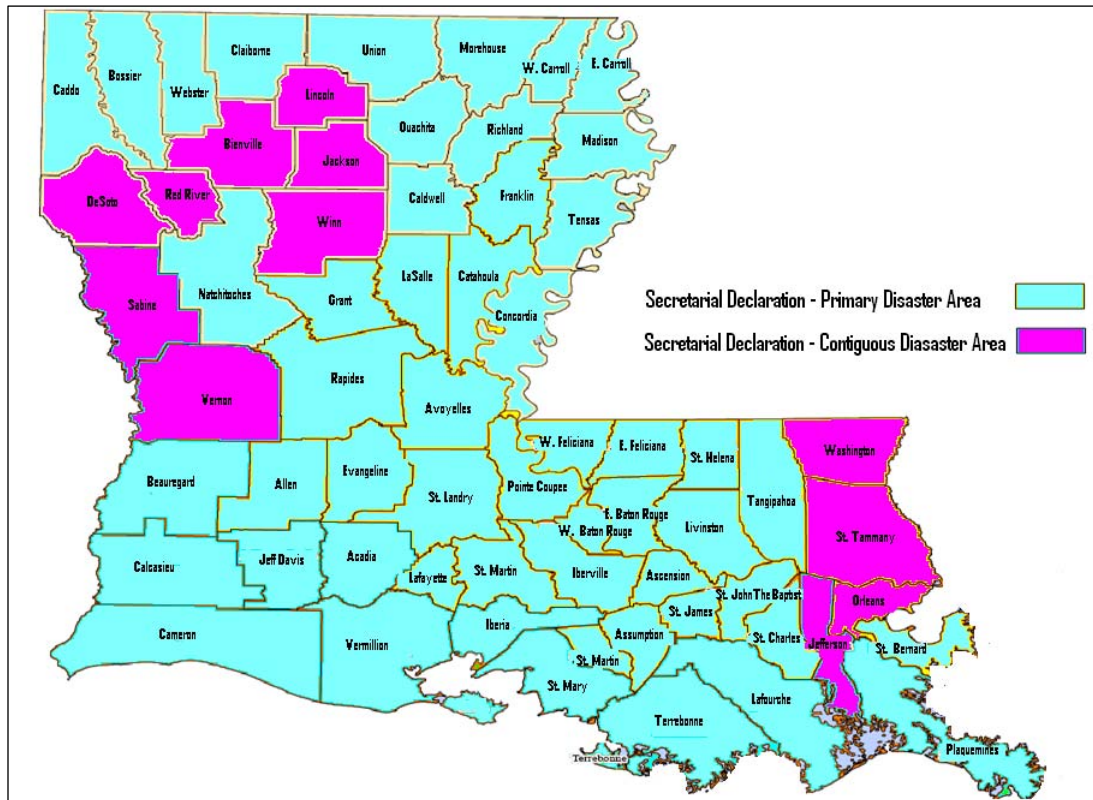
Producers are encouraged to stay in contact with their local FSA office to remain informed about the availability of these and any other potential assistance programs.

**Figure 1. Presidential Disaster Declaration Following Hurricanes Gustav and Ike**



Source: FEMA

**Figure 2. Secretarial Disaster Declaration In Response To Hurricanes Gustav and Ike**



Source:

USDA