

## [New Marketing Assistance Now Available for Specialty Crop Producers \(Illinois\)](#)

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### **USDA Makes \$2 Billion Available to Support Expansion of Current and Development of New Markets**

**SPRINGFIELD, Illinois December 10, 2024** – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) \$2 billion Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program, aimed at helping specialty crop producers expand markets and manage higher costs, is now accepting applications from December 10, 2024, through January 8, 2025. Funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation, MASC was [announced in November alongside the \\$140 million Commodity Storage Assistance Program](#) for facilities impacted by 2024 natural disasters.

“Specialty crop growers have typically faced higher marketing and handling costs relative to non-specialty crop producers due to the perishability of fruits, vegetables, floriculture, nursery crops and herbs,” said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. “Through this marketing assistance program, we can expand U.S. specialty crop consumption and markets by providing specialty crop producers the financial support needed to help them engage in activities that broaden and enhance strategies and opportunities for marketing their commodities.”

MASC helps specialty crop producers meet higher marketing costs related to:

- Perishability of specialty crops like fruits, vegetables, floriculture, nursery crops and herbs;
- Specialized handling and transport equipment with temperature and humidity control;
- Packaging to prevent damage;
- Moving perishables to market quickly; and
- Higher labor costs.

## **MASC Eligibility**

To be eligible for MASC, a producer must be in business at the time of application, maintain an ownership share and share in the risk of producing a specialty crop that will be sold in calendar year 2025.

MASC covers the following commercially marketed specialty crops:

- Fruits (fresh, dried);
- Vegetables (including dry edible beans and peas, mushrooms, and vegetable seed);
- Tree nuts;
- Nursery crops, Christmas trees, and floriculture;
- Culinary and medicinal herbs and spices; and
- Honey, hops, maple sap, tea, turfgrass and grass seed.

## **Applying for MASC**

Eligible established specialty crop producers can apply for MASC benefits by completing the FSA-1140, *Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) Program Application*, and submitting the form to any FSA county office by January 8, 2025. When applying, eligible specialty crop producers must certify their specialty crop sales for calendar year 2023 or 2024.

New specialty crop producers are required to certify 2025 expected sales, submit an FSA-1141 application and provide certain documentation to support reported sales i.e., receipts, contracts, acreage reports, input receipts, etc. New producers are those who began producing specialty crops in 2023 or 2024 but did not have sales due to the immaturity of the crop, began producing specialty crops in 2024 but did not have a complete year of sales or will begin growing specialty crops in 2025.

MASC applicants, established and new, must also submit the following information to FSA if not already on file at the time of application:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet*.
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC-941, *Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information*.

- Form FSA-942, *Certification of Income from Farming, Ranching and Forestry Operations*, if applicable, for the producer and members of entities.
- A highly erodible land conservation (sometimes referred to as HELC) and wetland conservation certification (Form AD-1026? *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*)?for the ERP producer and applicable affiliates.??
- Other Documentation if requested by FSA to support reported specialty crop sales.

Most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, will likely have these required forms on file. However, those who are uncertain or want to confirm the status of their forms or producers who may be new to conducting business with FSA, can contact their [local FSA county office](#).

For MASC program participation, eligible specialty crop sales only include sales of commercially marketed raw specialty crops grown in the United States by the producer. The portion of sales derived from adding value to a specialty crop (such as sorting, processing, or packaging) is not included when determining eligible sales. Further explanation of what is considered by FSA for specialty crop sales as well as an online MASC decision tool and applicable program forms, are available on the [MASC program webpage](#).

## **MASC Payments**

For established specialty crop growers, those who certify crop sales in 2023 or 2024, FSA will calculate MASC payments based on the producer's total specialty crop sales for the calendar year elected by the producer. Payments for new producers will be based on their expected 2025 calendar year sales. Payment calculation details and examples are available on the MASC webpage or related questions can be directed to local FSA county office staff.

FSA will issue MASC payments after the end of the application period. If demand for MASC payments exceeds available funding, MASC payments may be prorated, and the payment limitation of \$125,000 may be lowered. If additional funding is available after MASC payments are issued, FSA may issue an additional payment.

Specialty crop producers interested in applying for MASC benefits, are encouraged to review the program fact sheet for detailed information on program eligibility, required documentation, payment calculations and more.

## **More Information**

Additional information on MASC is available in the [Notice of Funding Availability](#), which went on public inspection in the *Federal Register* on December 9, 2024.

FSA helps America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners invest in, improve, protect and expand their agricultural operations through the delivery of agricultural programs for all Americans. FSA implements agricultural policy, administers credit and loan programs, and manages conservation, commodity, disaster recovery and marketing programs through a national network of state and county offices and locally elected county committees. For more information, visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://usda.gov).

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