USDA Increases Funding for New Specialty Crop Program; Reminds Producers of Upcoming Deadlines

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Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops deadline extended to Jan. 10; Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops deadline is Jan. 31

En Espanol -

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6, 2025 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds specialty crop producers to apply for assistance for marketing and food safety certification expenses. Specifically, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is providing an additional $650 million in funding for the new Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program and extending the MASC application deadline to Friday, Jan. 10, 2025. Meanwhile, FSA also reminds specialty crop producers of the Jan. 31, 2025, deadline to apply for the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program for 2024 expenses.

With a total of $2.65 billion available, MASC helps specialty crop producers expand markets and manage higher costs. FSA is also increasing the MASC payment limit from $125,000 to $900,000. FSCSC covers a percentage of a specialty crop operation's cost to obtain or renew its on-farm food safety certification, as well as a portion of related expenses.

"Specialty crop producers should act quickly to make an appointment to apply for both marketing and food safety certification assistance," said FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. "Specialty crop producers have been impacted by higher marketing and handling costs due to the perishability of fruits, vegetables, floriculture, nursery crops and herbs as well as increased costs to meet regulatory requirements. These programs will help producers overcome the financial challenges they're facing when it comes to maintaining and expanding markets."

Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops

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.
- Higher labor costs.

Producers can find more information on eligibility, how payments work and how to apply on the MASC program webpage. Interested producers should apply by Jan. 10 at their local USDA Service Center or online. Although Federal government offices, including FSA, will be closed on Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025, for a National Day of Mourning for President James Earl Carter, Jr., producers can still apply online and will also be able to submit applications in their local FSA office on Friday, Jan. 10.

Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops

Eligible FSCSC applicants must be a specialty crop operation, meet the definition of a small or medium-size business and have paid eligible expenses related to certification.

- A small business has an average annual monetary value of specialty crops sold by the applicant during the three-year period preceding the program year of no more than $500,000.
- A medium size business has an average annual monetary value of specialty crops the applicant sold during the three-year period preceding the program year of at least $500,001 but no more than $1,000,000.

Specialty crop operations can receive the following cost assistance:

- Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification.
- Maintaining or updating an existing food safety plan.
- Food safety certification.

- Certification upload fees.
- Microbiological testing for products, soil amendments and water.
- Training.

FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each eligible cost category. Details about payment rates and limitations are available at farmers.gov/food-safety.

Producers can visit farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and application forms.

More Information

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local USDA Service Center.

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.

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.

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