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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Service Agency | **Natural Resources Conservation Service** | **Risk Management Agency**

Virginia May Newsletter Articles and Updates - May 2025

In This Issue:

USDA to Issue $1.3 Billion to Specialty Crop Producers Through Second Marketing Assistance Program Payment

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced a second round of payments coming this week for specialty crop producers through the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program, providing up to $1.3 billion in additional program assistance. U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) already delivered just under $900 million in first round payments to eligible producers.

About MASC

First announced in December 2024, MASC authorized $2 billion in Commodity Credit Corporation funds to assist specialty crop growers with rising input costs and aid in the expansion of domestic markets. In January 2025, in response to stakeholder feedback and program demand, funding for MASC was increased to $2.65 billion. The MASC application period closed on Jan. 10, 2025.

MASC is designed to help 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 covers the following commercially marketed specialty crops:

- fruits (fresh, dried);
- vegetables (including dry edible beans and peas, mushrooms, and vegetable seed);
- tree nuts;

- and other specialty crops.

Specialty Crop Growers can Apply for 2025 On-Farm Food Safety Certification Expenses

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds specialty crop producers that the application period for the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program for program year 2025 opened Jan. 1, 2025, and runs through Jan. 31, 2026. The program has been expanded to include medium-sized businesses in addition to small businesses. Eligible specialty crop growers can apply for assistance for expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification.

Program Details

FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing its on-farm food safety certification, as well as a portion of related expenses.

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.

Applying for Assistance

For program year 2025, the application period began Jan. 1, 2025, and runs through Jan. 31, 2026. FSA will issue 50% of the calculated payment for program year 2025 following application approval, with the remaining amount to be paid after the application deadline. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888-1, *Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) for Program Years 2024 and 2025* application. The application, along with the AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet* and SF-3881, *ACH Vendor/Miscellaneous Payment Enrollment Form*, if not already on file with FSA, can be submitted to the FSA county office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. Producers with an eAuthentication account can apply for FSCSC online. Producers interested in creating an eAuthentication account should visit farmers.gov/sign-in.

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.

Signature Policy

Using the correct signature when doing business with FSA can save time and prevent a delay in program benefits.

The following are FSA signature guidelines:

- Married individuals must sign their given name.

- Example—Mary Doe and John Doe are married. When signing FSA forms, each must use their given name, and may not sign with the name of their spouse. Mrs. Mary Doe may not sign documents as Mrs. John Doe. For Farm Loan Purposes, spouses may not sign on behalf of the other as an authorized signatory, a signature will be needed for each. For a minor, FSA requires the minor's signature and one from the minor’s parent. There are certain exceptions where a minor’s signature may be accepted without obtaining the signature of one of the parents. Despite minority status, a youth executing a promissory note for a Youth Loan will incur full personal liability for the debt and will sign individually.

Note: By signing a document with a minor, the parent is liable for actions of the minor and may be liable for refunds, liquidated damages, or other penalties, etc.

When signing on one’s behalf the signature must agree with the name typed or printed on the form or be a variation that does not cause the name and signature to be in disagreement. Example - John W. Smith is on the form. The signature may be John W. Smith or J.W. Smith or J. Smith. Or Mary J. Smith may be signed as Mrs. Mary Joe Smith, M.J. Smith, Mary Smith, etc.

FAXED signatures will be accepted for certain forms and other documents provided the acceptable program forms are approved for FAXED signatures. Producers are responsible for the successful transmission and receipt of FAXED information.

Examples of documents not approved for FAXED signatures include:

- Promissory note
- Assignment of payment
- Joint payment authorization
- Acknowledgement of commodity certificate purchase

Spouses may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and CCC programs in which either spouse has an interest, unless written notification denying a spouse this authority has been provided to the county office.

Spouses cannot sign on behalf of each other as an authorized signatory for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations or other similar entities. Likewise, a spouse cannot sign a document on behalf of the other in order to affirm the eligibility of oneself.

Any member of a general partnership can sign on behalf of the general partnership and bind all members unless the Articles of Partnership are more restrictive. Spouses may sign on behalf of each other's individual interest in a partnership, unless notification denying a spouse that authority is provided to the county office. Acceptable signatures for general partnerships, joint ventures, corporations, estates, and trusts must consist of an indicator "by" or "for" the individual's name, individual's name and capacity, or individual's name, capacity, and name of entity.

Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, the request will be denied. Although there are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies, it's important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions.

Applications cannot be approved until FSA has copies of all permits and plans. Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

USDA Expediting $10 Billion in Direct Economic Assistance to Agricultural Producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing up to $10 billion directly to agricultural producers through the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program

(ECAP) for the 2024 crop year. Administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), ECAP will help agricultural producers mitigate the impacts of increased input costs and falling commodity prices.

Authorized by the American Relief Act, 2025, these economic relief payments are based on planted and prevented planted crop acres for eligible commodities for the 2024 crop year. To streamline and simplify the delivery of ECAP, FSA will begin sending pre-filled applications to producers who submitted acreage reports to FSA for 2024 eligible ECAP commodities soon after the signup period opens on March 19, 2025. Producers do not have to wait for their pre-filled ECAP application to apply. They can visit fsa.usda.gov/ecap to apply using a login.gov account or contact their local FSA office to request an application once the signup period opens.

Eligible Commodities and Payment Rates

The commodities below are eligible for these per-acre payment rates:

· Wheat - $30.69	**Eligible oilseeds:**
· Corn - $42.91	· Canola – $31.83
· Sorghum - $42.52	· Crambe – $19.08
· Barley - $21.67	· Flax - $20.97
· Oats - $77.66	· Mustard - $11.36
· Upland cotton & Extra-long staple cotton - $84.74	· Rapeseed -$23.63
· Long & medium grain rice - $76.94	· Safflower - $26.32
· Peanuts - $75.51	· Sesame - $16.83
· Soybeans - $29.76	· Sunflower – $27.23
· Dry peas - $16.02	
· Lentils - $19.30	
· Small Chickpeas - $31.45	
· Large Chickpeas - $24.02	

Producer Eligibility

Eligible producers must report 2024 crop year planted and prevented planted acres to FSA on an FSA-578, *Report of Acreage* form. Producers who have not previously reported 2024 crop year acreage or filed a notice of loss for prevented planted crops must submit an acreage report by the Aug. 15, 2025, deadline. Eligible producers can visit fsa.usda.gov/ecap for eligibility and payment details.

Applying for ECAP

Producers must submit ECAP applications to their local FSA county office by Aug. 15, 2025. Only one application is required for all ECAP eligible commodities nationwide. ECAP applications can be submitted to FSA in-person, electronically using Box and One-Span, by fax or by applying online at fsa.usda.gov/ecap utilizing a secure login.gov account.

If not already on file for the 2024 crop year, producers must have the following forms on file with FSA:

- Form AD-2047, *Customer Data Worksheet*.
- Form CCC-901, *Member Information for Legal Entities* (if applicable).
- Form CCC-902, *Farm Operating Plan* for an individual or legal entity.
- Form CCC 943, *75 percent of Average Gross Income from Farming, Ranching, or Forestry Certification* (if applicable).
- AD-1026, *Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification*.
- SF-3881, *Direct Deposit*.

Except for the new CCC-943, most producers, especially those who have previously participated in FSA programs, likely have these forms on file. However, those who are uncertain and want to confirm the status of their forms or need to submit the new CCC-943, can contact their local FSA county office.

If a producer does not receive a pre-filled ECAP application, and they planted or were prevented from planting ECAP eligible commodities in 2024, they should contact their local FSA office.

ECAP Payments and Calculator

ECAP payments will be issued as applications are approved. Initial ECAP payments will be factored by 85% to ensure that total program payments do not exceed available funding. If additional funds remain, FSA may issue a second payment.

ECAP assistance will be calculated using a flat payment rate for the eligible commodity multiplied by the eligible reported acres. Payments are based on acreage and not production. For acres reported as prevented plant, ECAP assistance will be calculated at 50%.

For ECAP payment estimates, producers are encouraged to visit fsa.usda.gov/ecap to use the ECAP online calculator.

Foreign Investors Must Report U.S. Agricultural Land Holdings

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds foreign investors with an interest in agricultural land in the United States that they are required to report their land holdings and transactions to USDA.

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires foreign investors who buy, sell or hold an interest in U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings and transactions to the USDA. Foreign investors must file AFIDA Report Form FSA-153 with the FSA county office in the county where the land is located. Large or complex filings may be handled by AFIDA headquarters staff in Washington, D.C.

According to CFR Title 7 Part 781, any foreign person who holds an interest in U.S. agricultural land is required to report their holdings no later than 90 days after the date of the transaction.

Foreign investors should report holdings of agricultural land totaling 10 acres or more used for farming, ranching or timber production, and leaseholds on agricultural land of 10 or more years. Tracts totaling 10 acres or less in the aggregate, and which produce annual gross receipts in excess of $1,000 from the sale of farm, ranch, forestry or timber products, must also be reported. AFIDA reports are also required when there are changes in land use, such as from agricultural to nonagricultural use. Foreign investors must also file a report when there is a change in the status of ownership.

The information from AFIDA reports is used to prepare an annual report to Congress. These annual reports to Congress, as well as more information, are available on the FSA AFIDA webpage.

Assistance in completing the FSA-153 report may be obtained from the local FSA office. For more information regarding AFIDA or FSA programs, contact your County FSA office or visit farmers.gov.

Annual Review of Payment Eligibility for New Crop Year

FSA and NRCS program applicants for benefits are required to submit a completed CCC-902 Farming Operation Plan and CCC-941 Average Gross Income (AGI) Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information for FSA to determine the applicant's payment eligibility and establish the maximum payment limitation applicable to the program applicant.

Participants are not required to annually submit new CCC-902s for payment eligibility and payment limitation purposes unless a change in the farming operation occurs that may affect the previous determination of record. A valid CCC-902 filed by the participant is considered to be a continuous certification used for all payment eligibility and payment limitation determinations applicable for the program benefits requested.

Participants are responsible for ensuring that all CCC-902 and CCC-941 and related forms on file in the county office are updated, current, and correct. Participants are required to timely notify the county office of any changes in the farming operation that may affect the previous determination of record by filing a new or updated CCC-902 as applicable.

Changes that may require a new determination include, but are not limited to, a change of:

- Shares of a contract, which may reflect:
- A land lease from cash rent to share rent

- A land lease from share rent to cash rent (subject to the cash rent tenant rule
- A modification of a variable/fixed bushel-rent arrangement
- The size of the producer's farming operation by the addition or reduction of cropland that may affect the application of a cropland factor
- The structure of the farming operation, including any change to a member's share
- The contribution of farm inputs of capital, land, equipment, active personal labor, and/or active personal management
- Farming interests not previously disclosed on CCC-902 including the farming interests of a spouse or minor child
- Certifications of average AGI are required to be filed annually for participation in an annual USDA program. For multi-year conservation contracts and NRCS easements, a certification of AGI must be filed prior to approval of the contract or easement and is applicable for the duration of the contract period.

Participants are encouraged to file or review these forms within the deadlines established for each applicable program for which program benefits are being requested.

Obtaining Payments Due to Deceased Producers

In order to claim a Farm Service Agency (FSA) payment on behalf of a deceased producer, all program conditions for the payment must have been met before the applicable producer's date of death.

If a producer earned an FSA payment prior to his or her death, the following is the order of precedence for the representatives of the producer:

- administrator or executor of the estate
- the surviving spouse

- surviving sons and daughters, including adopted children
- surviving father and mother
- surviving brothers and sisters
- heirs of the deceased person who would be entitled to payment according to the State law

For FSA to release the payment, the legal representative of the deceased producer must file a form FSA-325 to claim the payment for themselves or an estate. The county office will verify that the application, contract, loan agreement, or other similar form requesting payment issuance, was signed by the applicable deadline by the deceased or a person legally authorized to act on their behalf at that time of application.

If the application, contract or loan agreement form was signed by someone other than the deceased participant, FSA will determine whether the person submitting the form has the legal authority to submit the form.

Payments will be issued to the respective representative's name using the deceased program participant's tax identification number. Payments made to representatives are subject to offset regulations for debts owed by the deceased.

FSA is not responsible for advising persons in obtaining legal advice on how to obtain program benefits that may be due to a participant who has died, disappeared or who has been declared incompetent.

USDA Farm Loan Program Changes Now in Effect

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) updates to the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Farm Loan Programs are officially in effect. These changes, part of the Enhancing Program Access and Delivery for Farm Loans rule, are designed to increase financial flexibility for agricultural producers, allowing them to grow their operations, boost profitability, and build long-term savings.

These program updates reflect USDA's ongoing commitment to supporting the financial success and resilience of farmers and ranchers nationwide, offering critical tools to help borrowers manage their finances more effectively.

What the new rules mean for you:

- Low-interest installment set-aside program: Financially distressed borrowers can now defer up to one annual loan payment at a reduced interest rate. This simplified option helps ease financial pressure while keeping farming operations running smoothly.
- Flexible repayment terms: New repayment options give borrowers the ability to increase their cash flow and build working capital reserves, allowing for long-term financial planning that includes saving for retirement, education, and other future needs.
- Reduced collateral requirements: FSA has lowered the amount of additional loan security needed for direct farm loans, making it easier for borrowers to leverage their existing equity without putting their personal residence at risk.

These new rules provide more financial freedom to borrowers. By giving farmers and ranchers better tools to manage their operations, we're helping them build long-term financial stability. It's all about making sure they can keep their land, grow their business, and invest in the future.

If you're an FSA borrower or considering applying for a loan, now is the time to take advantage of these new policies. We encourage you to reach out to your local FSA farm loan staff to ensure you fully understand the wide range of loan making and servicing options available to assist with starting, expanding, or maintaining your agricultural operation.

To conduct business with FSA, please contact your local USDA Service Center.

Submit Loan Requests for Financing Early

The Farm Loan team is already working on operating loans for spring 2025 and asks potential borrowers to submit their requests early so they can be timely processed. The farm loan team can help determine which loan programs are best for applicants.

FSA offers a wide range of low-interest loans that can meet the financial needs of any farm operation for just about any purpose. The traditional **farm operating and**

farm ownership loans can help large and small farm operations take advantage of early purchasing discounts for spring inputs as well expenses throughout the year.

Microloans are a simplified loan program that will provide up to $50,000 for both Farm Ownership and Operating Microloans to eligible applicants. These loans, targeted for smaller and non-traditional operations, can be used for operating expenses, starting a new operation, purchasing equipment, and other needs associated with a farming operation. Loans to beginning farmers and members of underserved groups are a priority.

Other types of loans available include:

Marketing Assistance Loans allow producers to use eligible commodities as loan collateral and obtain a 9-month loan while the crop is in storage. These loans provide cash flow to the producer and allow them to market the crop when prices may be more advantageous.

Farm Storage Facility Loans can be used to build permanent structures used to store eligible commodities, for storage and handling trucks, or portable or permanent handling equipment. A variety of structures are eligible under this loan, including bunker silos, grain bins, hay storage structures, and refrigerated structures for vegetables and fruit. A producer may borrow up to $500,000 per loan.

Disaster Set-Aside Program for Farm Loan Borrowers

Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrowers with farms located in designated primary or contiguous disaster areas who are unable to make their scheduled FSA loan payments should consider the Disaster Set-Aside (DSA) program.

DSA is available to producers who suffered losses as a result of a natural disaster and relieves immediate and temporary financial stress. FSA is authorized to consider setting aside the portion of a payment/s needed for the operation to continue on a viable scale.

Borrowers must have at least two years left on the term of their loan in order to qualify.

Borrowers have eight months from the date of the disaster designation to submit a complete application. The application must include a written request for DSA signed by all parties liable for the debt along with production records and financial history for the operating year in which the disaster occurred. FSA may request additional information from the borrower in order to determine eligibility.

All farm loans must be current or less than 90 days past due at the time the DSA application is complete. Borrowers may not set aside more than one installment on each loan.

The amount set-aside, including interest accrued on the principal portion of the set-aside, is due on or before the final due date of the loan.

For more information, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit fsa.usda.gov.

Managed Shallow Water Areas Create Wildlife Habitat

Migratory birds, waterfowl, reptiles, amphibians and aquatic mammals all depend on shallow water for habitat and food. Through controlled flooding in fields, ag producers can create habitat and still use the land for recreational purposes.

Typically, shallow water bodies vary in depth from 6 inches to 6 feet, with most of the water less than 18 inches deep. Although there is no minimum size for shallow water development, areas larger than a quarter of an acre will provide more diverse habitats and be more beneficial for many wildlife species.

These areas are capable of luring numerous species of birds and waterfowl and are also suited for viewing or hunting. In addition to creating habitat, holding water on these lands reduces the amount of water flowing into lakes and streams during the wet season, which provides flood protection. Shallow water retention also provides valuable groundwater recharge and opportunities for water quality improvement.

To learn more about managing your shallow water areas, contact an Natural Resources Conservation Service employee at your local USDA service center or visit nrcs.usda.gov.

Selected Interest Rates for May 2025

90-Day Treasury Bill	4.375%
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	5.125%
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	5.625%
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.625%
Emergency Loans	3.750%
Farm Storage Facility Loans - (7 years)	4.125%
Commodity Loans 1996-Present	5.000%

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