
USDA Announces Assistance for On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for Specialty Crop Growers?

News Release | Wisconsin | June 23, 2022

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JUNE 23, 2022— Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to provide up to \$200 million in assistance for specialty crop producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 or 2023. USDA's new [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops \(FSCSC\)](#) program will help to offset costs for specialty crop producers to comply with regulatory requirements and market-driven food safety certification requirements, which is part of USDA's broader effort to transform the food system to create a more level playing field for small and medium producers and a more balanced, equitable economy for everyone working in food and agriculture.

Specialty crop operations can apply for assistance for eligible expenses related to a 2022 food safety certificate issued on or after June 21, 2022, beginning June 27, 2022. USDA is delivering FSCSC to provide critical assistance for specialty crop operations, with an emphasis on equity in program delivery while building on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain disruptions. Vilsack made the announcement from Hollis, N.H., where he toured a local, family-owned farm and highlighted USDA's efforts to help reduce costs for farmers and support local economies by providing significant funding to cut regulatory costs and increase market opportunities for farmers in New Hampshire and across the nation.

"The ongoing economic challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic have created substantial financial challenges for small and very small producers to meet regulatory requirements and access additional markets," Vilsack said. "These challenges were particularly acute for specialty crop producers, many of whom needed to quickly and completely pivot their operations as demand shifted away from traditional markets, like restaurants and food service. As we build back better, our food systems must be both more inclusive and more competitive. By helping mitigate the costs of on-farm food safety

certification, the FSCSC program will support fair, transparent food systems rooted in local and regional production and provide small-scale producers a real opportunity to bring home a greater share of the food dollar and help create jobs.”

Program Details

FSCSC will assist specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023. For each year, FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation’s cost of obtaining or renewing their certification, as well as a portion of their related expenses.

To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation; meet the definition of a small business or very small business; and have paid eligible expenses related to the 2022 (issued on or after June 21, 2022) or 2023 certification.

Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:

- 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 category of eligible costs. A higher payment rate has been set for socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. Details about the payment rates and limitations can be found at farmers.gov/food-safety.

Applying for Assistance

The FSCSC application period for 2022 is June 27, 2022, through January 31, 2023, and the application period for 2023 will be announced at a later date. FSA will issue payments at the time of application approval for 2022 and after the application period ends for 2023. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application. The application, along with other required documents, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. Producers can visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find their local FSA office. Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist.

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

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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