

[USDA Reminds Specialty Crop Growers of Deadline to Apply for Assistance for 2023](#)

News Release | Illinois | December 21, 2023

[View PDF](#)

Apply by January 31, 2024

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois, December 19, 2023 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds specialty crop growers that assistance is available for producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification through the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program. Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2023 expenses through January 31, 2024.

“The Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops program is just one of the many ways USDA is helping support local and regional food systems and opportunities for small-scale producers,” said Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Zach Ducheneaux. “I’m encouraging specialty crop growers to discover how this program can help mitigate the costs of on-farm food safety certification and meeting regulatory requirements and apply by the January deadline.”

Program Details

FSCSC assists specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses pertaining to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar year 2023. FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation’s cost of obtaining or renewing its certification, as well as a portion of 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 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 2023 closes January 31, 2024. FSA will issue payments after the application period closes. 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.

Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist. Visit farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

Recently, USDA announced a new effort to [further support the U.S. specialty crops sector and increase the competitiveness of its products](#). Additional information can be found on a new specialty crops-dedicated webpage at usda.gov/specialty-crops.

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by [logging into their farmers.gov account](#). Producers without an account can [sign up today](#).

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://www.usda.gov).

Farm Service Agency:

1400 Independence Ave.
SW Washington, DC 20250

Contact:

FPAC Press Desk
FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov