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Dates to Remember

<b>July 15, 2024</b>	<b>Acres Reporting Deadline for Annual Crops, Asparagus, Blueberries, Caneberries, Currents, Gooseberries, Pears, Rhubarb, Strawberries, and Some Stone Fruit, and All Grasses, Mixed Forage, and Alfalfa</b>
<b>August 1, 2024</b>	<b>Deadline for COC Nominations</b>

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Note from the State Executive Director

Originally, I was going to write a different newsletter, but events of the last 48 hours have changed that. At this time, we are all assessing the impact of the remnants of Hurricane Beryl, which has dealt another flooding event to Vermont, right on the anniversary date of last years event. So far this appears to be a one-and-done event, at least I hope so. Please contact your local FSA County office to report any damage. We need that information to trigger our program response. We are working on making the process as smooth as we can, but I'm sure you all realize that the details matter and that can be time consuming. We, at FSA, are ready to help, and get you the assistance you need.



July 15<sup>th</sup>, the deadline for crop reporting, is fast approaching. Producers should try to make sure that they report in time. This is an important step to starting a record of production for your farm. These records are vital in times of a disaster.

We are also at a time when nominating yourself for a chance to be elected to a county committee is important. It is important that our county committees reflect the broad array of products our farmers raise and sell. County committees have a role in managing how the county offices are run and approving payments to farmers in times of disaster. The deadline for nominations is August 1<sup>st</sup>.

I wish you all the best for the rest of the summer and I hope to meet you at the summer county shows and fairs, which will be starting soon.

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## File a Notice of Loss for Failed and Prevented Planted Acres

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds you to report prevented planted and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility for some programs.

You should report crop acreage you intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were prevented from planting. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and the Risk Management Agency (RMA).

Additionally, if you have failed acres, you should also use form CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, to report failed acres.

For hand-harvested crops and certain perishables, you must notify FSA of damage or loss through the administrative county office within 72 hours of the date of damage or loss first becomes apparent. This notification can be provided by filing a CCC-576, email, fax or phone. If you notify the County Office by any method other than by filing the CCC-576, you are still required to file a CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, within the required 15 calendar days.

For losses on crops covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), you must file a *Notice of Loss* within 15 days of the occurrence of the disaster or when losses become apparent. You must timely file a *Notice of Loss* for failed acres on all crops including grasses.

To file a *Notice of Loss*, contact your County USDA Service Center or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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## 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.

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## USDA Expands Funding Opportunities for Specialty Crop Growers to Help Offset On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for 2024 and 2025



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding the [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops \(FSCSC\) program](#) to now 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. The program has also been expanded to include assistance for 2024 and 2025 expenses. **Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2024**

**expenses beginning July 1, 2024, through Jan. 31, 2025.** For program year 2025, the application period will be Jan. 1, 2025, through Jan. 31, 2026.

### Program Details

FSCSC assists specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety. 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.

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](https://farmers.gov/food-safety).

### Applying for Assistance

Interested applicants have until Jan. 31, 2025, to apply for assistance for 2024 eligible expenses. FSA will issue payments as applications are processed and approved. For program year 2025, the application period will be January 1, 2025, through January 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 pro-rated.

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 office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. Alternatively, producers with an eAuthentication account can apply for FSCSC [online](#). Producers interested in creating an eAuthentication account should visit [farmers.gov/sign-in](https://farmers.gov/sign-in).

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

### More Information

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](#).

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## USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers that Farm Loan Programs can be used to support a variety of climate-smart agriculture practices, which build on many practices that farmers and ranchers already use, like cover cropping, nutrient management and conservation tillage.

Climate-smart agricultural practices generate significant environmental benefits by capturing and sequestering carbon, improving water management, restoring soil health and more. Farm loan funding complements other tools to help producers adopt climate-smart practices, such as FSA's [Conservation Reserve Program](#), [crop insurance options](#) that support conservation, and conservation programs offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

FSA offers [multiple types of loans](#) to help farmers and ranchers start, expand or maintain a family agricultural operation. These loans can provide the capital needed to invest in climate-smart practices and equipment including the establishment of rotational grazing systems, precision agriculture equipment or machinery for conversion to no-till residue management. Additionally, for programs like Conservation Reserve Program and NRCS conservation programs where USDA and the producer share the implementation cost, a farm loan could be used for the producer's share, if consistent with the authorized loan purpose.

Some additional ways farm loans can be leveraged to invest in climate-smart agriculture practices or equipment include:

- **Precision Agriculture Equipment** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment like GPS globes, monitors, or strip till fertilizer equipment.
- **Cover Crops** - Eligible producers could use an Annual Operating Loan for seed costs.
- **No/Reduced Till** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment.
- **Livestock Facility Air Scrubber or Waste Treatment** - Eligible producers could use a Farm Ownership Loan for capital improvements to livestock facilities.
- **Cross Fencing** - Eligible producers could use an Annual or Term Operating Loan to purchase fencing and installation equipment.

Visit the [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry webpage on farmers.gov](#) to learn more and see detailed examples of how an FSA farm loan can support climate-smart agriculture practices.

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## Receipt for Service - Improving Customer Service

Did you know that, as a customer in any USDA service center, employees are required, per federal law and USDA regulations, to provide you with a computer-generated receipt at the end of your visit? This [Receipt for Service](#) details the type of service you requested, the service and response provided by the staff, and the date and time of your visit.

The 2014 Farm Bill designated that FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD) employees are statutorily required to provide producers a receipt when a current or prospective producer or landowner interacts or engages with the Agency regarding a USDA benefit or service.

On behalf of our customers, FSA employees are required to enter receipts timely and create only one receipt per customer per visit, regardless of the number of employee interactions a customer may encounter in a single visit. A single receipt will be generated that provides a summary of the customer's visit on behalf of the other employees who also met with the customer on the same day. Employees must also ensure that all services rendered are properly reflected in that receipt.

Issuing a receipt is required by our offices. If you do not receive a receipt, please be sure to request one. For more information, FSA's [Receipt for Service handbook](#) is now available online.

Don't leave the office without your receipt!

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